



Digital Communications

How to write great metadata

In this guide you can find out:

1. What is metadata
2. Why is metadata important for SEO?
3. Dos, Don'ts and tips for writing effective metadata descriptions
4. Tips for the metadata keyword field
5. An example of bad metadata and how to improve it

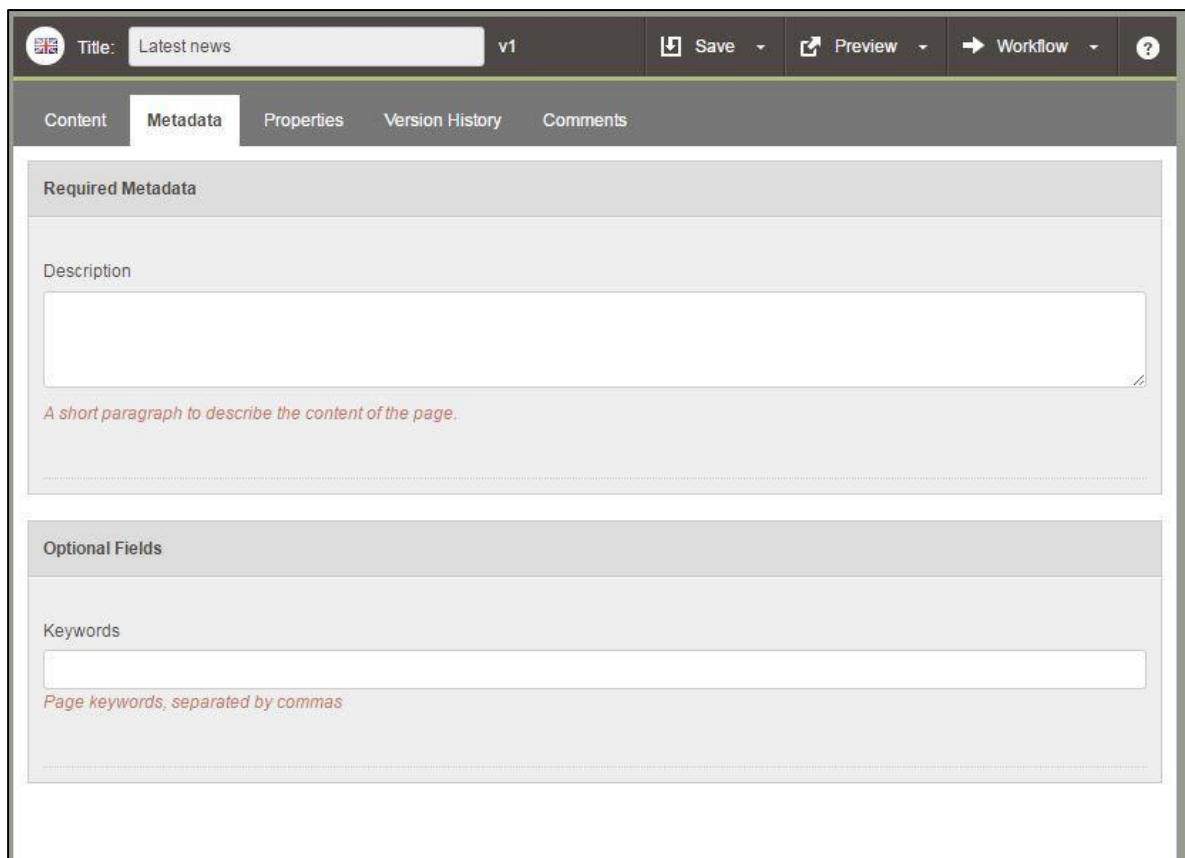
1. What is metadata?

Metadata is written information (aka 'data') about a web page that is specifically designed for search engines.

In Contensis, you will find the 'Required Metadata description' and 'Optional Fields keywords' boxes on all templates. On a standard content page, it has its own tab (like below). On other templates, it will be within the 'Content' tab.

Within the metadata tab there are two fields that need to be completed before a page is published:

- Metadata description
- Metadata keywords



The screenshot shows the 'Metadata' tab in the Contensis editor. At the top, there is a header bar with a title field containing 'Latest news' and version 'v1', along with 'Save', 'Preview', and 'Workflow' buttons. Below the header, the 'Metadata' tab is active, showing two sections: 'Required Metadata' and 'Optional Fields'. The 'Required Metadata' section contains a 'Description' field with a text area and a placeholder text: 'A short paragraph to describe the content of the page.' The 'Optional Fields' section contains a 'Keywords' field with a text area and a placeholder text: 'Page keywords, separated by commas'.

2. Why is metadata important for SEO?

- It's how your audience will find your content in search engines (e.g. Google) – think of your metadata description as advertising for your page.
- Think of search engines as spiders that 'crawl' through all the published pages on the internet. When they do this, they collect information (keywords) from the page giving priority to what you write in the metadata fields, the page titles and the sub-headings.
- The metadata description is usually pulled through on the Search Engine Results Page (aka SERP) so the description needs to be optimised with keywords, and around 150-160 characters. (See example at the end)
- Your metadata description is where you can be more specific about the page. Your audience is more likely to click on your page if there's a compelling description and if it contains keywords they were searching for.
- The metadata keywords you use in the 'keywords' field won't show up anywhere in Google, but it will provide Google with more information about the content/topics of your page.

3. Dos, Don'ts and tips for writing effective metadata descriptions

DO use up the character limit of your meta description (Contensis limits it to 160 characters, including spaces). Aim for 150-160 characters. If it's less, you'll be missing out on valuable promotional space.

TIP To check the character limit in Microsoft Word, select text and click on the 'Words: XX' button on the bottom left-hand corner of the document. It will tell you how many characters with spaces you have used.

TIP If you find you have spare space at the end of your metadata description, add a 'call to action' at the end. e.g. 'See more at LSE.ac.uk' or 'Find out more'.

DO use action words where applicable to begin your metadata description.

For example:

- **See** LSE's latest events
- **Discover** LSE's lunchtime lecture series
- **Download** the Spring Events Programme
- **Find out** how to build a page in Contensis
- **Get** latest news about Brexit
- **Watch** our new student video diaries
- **How to** contact the digital team

These active words will tell them about the type of content they are about to click on.

DO include strong keywords in your metadata description.

DO write your description in an inviting and compelling way to help entice your audience.

DO front-load keywords to the start of your metadata description if possible – the earlier your audience understands what the content is about, the better.

DON'T use the same metadata description for different pages. Duplication is bad for SEO, will confuse your audience, and Google may penalise a page for this.

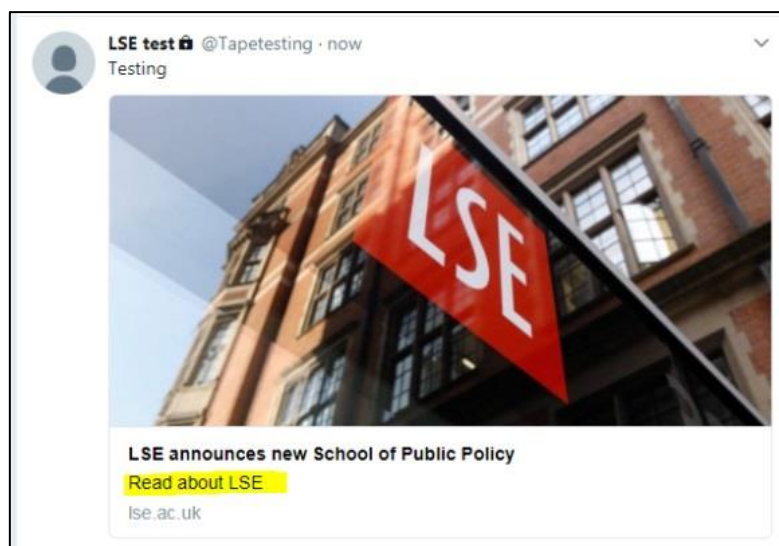
DON'T copy and paste your content page's introduction or first paragraph into the metadata description field because it is bad for SEO.

DON'T put false information in your metadata descriptions or include keywords that aren't representative of your content to try and sneakily get more clicks – Google will know if you're trying to trick it.

DON'T use apostrophes (where possible). The metadata description is pulled through when a page is shared on social media channels. If apostrophes are used, it will cut off any words beyond the apostrophe. The description in the social post therefore won't make sense.

For example:

Required Metadata
Description
Read about LSE's new School of Public Policy, set to launch in September 2018.
<i>A short paragraph to describe the content of the page.</i>



4. Tips for the metadata keyword field

- Aim for around 6-10
- Use the most relevant keywords first
- Separate keywords or keyphrases with commas only

Example 1 – the homepage for the LSE Library might include these keywords:

LSE Library, library opening hours, renewing books, archive catalogue, library collection, library books, student library, London School of Economics and Political Science

Example 2 - the undergraduate BA Geography page might include these keywords:

BA geography, undergraduate geography, bachelor's degree, human geography, Department of Geography and Environment, Study at LSE, London School of Economics.

5. An example of bad metadata and how to improve it

The Events team created a page [promoting a public lecture](#):

Here is the metadata description in CMS:

Required Metadata
Description
Human Cooperation a public lecture by Dr David Rand
<small>A short paragraph to describe the content of the page.</small>

Here is how it appears on a Google Search Engine Results Page (SERP):



What's wrong with the metadata?

- It only uses 52 characters (not 150-160)
- The sentence isn't grammatically correct.
- It doesn't give enough information about the event, speaker and host
- It's not particularly inviting or compelling for the user

Here is how the metadata description can be improved:

Attend a public lecture event at London School of Economics where Dr David Rand from Yale University will discuss why human cooperation is important to society.

OR:

See Dr David Rand speak in a public lecture event about why human cooperation is important to society. Dr Rand is visiting from Yale University. Find out more.