



Google Analytics

A Beginner's Guide

From the author of "101 Tips For Improving Your Blog"

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quickblogtips.com

Chapter 1

Introduction

Google Analytics is a free tool that provides statistics for your blog or website. This guide looks at some of the basics to help you get started with this handy tool.

Before you start

You'll need to create a Google Analytics account. Refer to the [Google Analytics Installation Guide](#) for how to do this. Follow the instructions in step 1 and step 4. Make sure you follow through these steps within Google Analytics and copy the code that you are given – don't copy the code displayed in the Installation Guide.

If you want to track more than one site, there's a shorter guide for [adding the additional sites](#).

You may find that you cannot insert the Analytics code on your site, particularly if you have a hosted blog, e.g. yourname.blogprovider.com. In this case it's best to double-check with your blog provider if it's possible to use Google Analytics with them.

If you have been able to install the code on your site then it can take up to 24 hours before you have any statistics to look at. In that case, I'd suggest that you return to this ebook in a day or two. It's probably a good idea to try editing your template again to ensure that the code is in place – otherwise you won't have any statistics when you come back.

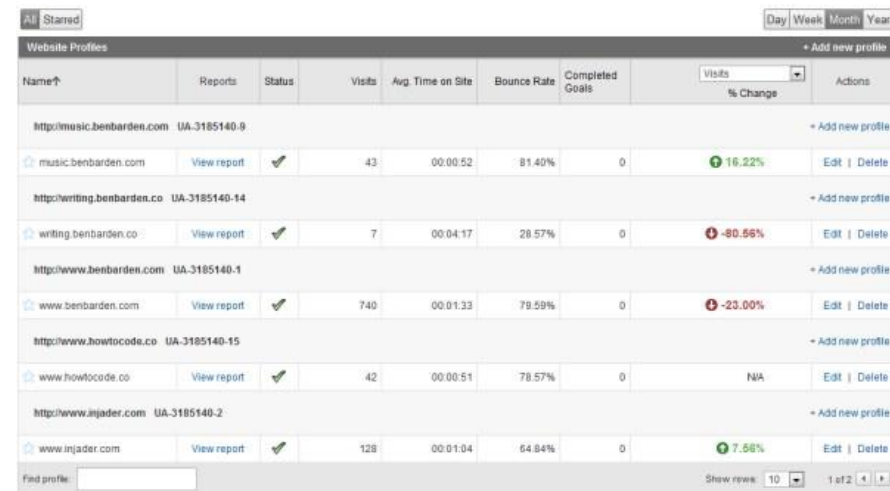
Orientation

To access Google Analytics, use the following link:

<http://www.google.com/analytics/home/>

Top Tip: Bookmark this link so you can access it easily in future. Ideally, create a folder in your Bookmarks (Firefox, Chrome, Safari) or Favourites (Internet Explorer) called "Website Admin" and bookmark the site there. If you do this, you can store other handy sites in this folder too.

You'll need to log in if you haven't done so already. Once you've logged in, you'll see the following screen:



Name	Reports	Status	Visits	Avg. Time on Site	Bounce Rate	Completed Goals	% Change	Actions
http://music.benbarden.com UA-3185140-9								+ Add new profile
music.benbarden.com	View report	✔	43	00:00:52	81.40%	0	16.22%	Edit Delete
http://writing.benbarden.co UA-3185140-14								+ Add new profile
writing.benbarden.co	View report	✔	7	00:04:17	28.57%	0	-80.56%	Edit Delete
http://www.benbarden.com UA-3185140-1								+ Add new profile
www.benbarden.com	View report	✔	740	00:01:33	79.59%	0	-23.00%	Edit Delete
http://www.howtocode.co UA-3185140-15								+ Add new profile
www.howtocode.co	View report	✔	42	00:00:51	78.57%	0	N/A	Edit Delete
http://www.injader.com UA-3185140-2								+ Add new profile
www.injader.com	View report	✔	128	00:01:04	64.84%	0	7.56%	Edit Delete

The Status column should display a green tick. The numbers are not important at this stage. If you don't see this, then either you still need to wait for the first statistics to be generated, or the code isn't working.

Once you have a green tick, click on "View Report" to start looking at your site statistics.

The Dashboard

After clicking on View Reports, you'll see the Dashboard. There's quite a bit of information on it, so I've split it into two screenshots. Let's have a quick look around.



The graph shown on the Dashboard represents the number of visits. A visit occurs when someone finds your site. Each time someone comes to your site, it counts as 1 visit. The same person can generate many visits if they come to your site many times.

We'll do some more with the graph a bit later. Until then, bear in mind that the current statistics are for a specific date range – in this case, September 8th to October 8th.

Beneath the graph you'll see a summary of your statistics, under "Site Usage". We've already covered visits – in the period shown, this site had 3,015 visits. You can also see the number of pageviews. Whenever someone views a page on your site, such as the home page or one blog entry, that counts as one page view. If the person then looks at another

page, that will count as an additional page view. In the period shown, this site had 7,554 pageviews.

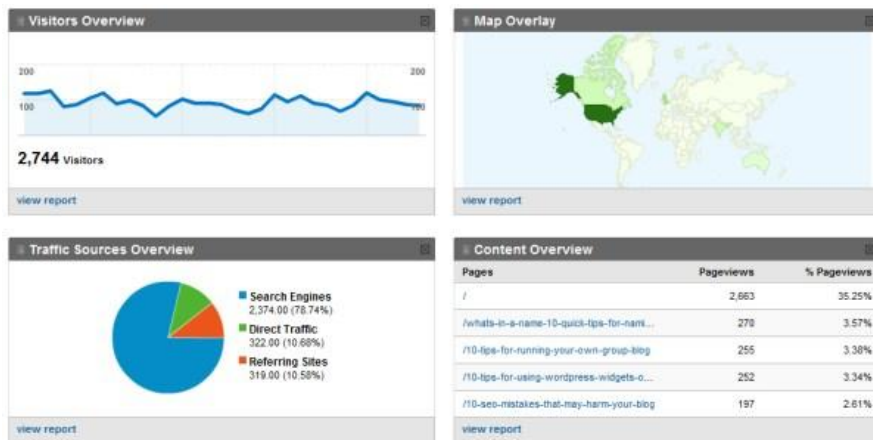
Next is a handy ratio – the average number of pages per visit, in this case 2.51. If you're not familiar with how this works, think of a simpler example. If a site has 5,000 visits and 10,000 pageviews, that's an average of 2 pages per visit. 5,000 visits and 5,000 pageviews would give an average of 1 page per visit. It's a good way of seeing how much people are looking at when they visit.

Over to the right you'll see a bounce rate figure. This refers to the percentage of people who visited your site and immediately moved on without looking at any other pages. A bounce rate of 100% would mean that everyone who found your site left without clicking anywhere else on your site. The lower the bounce rate, the better.

Average time on site is fairly self-explanatory – it shows the duration that people stayed on your site before moving on. In this case, the time is 2 minutes 17 seconds. Finally, the percentage of new visits refers to the number of people who found your site for the first time.

All of these statistics provide additional information – just click on the links.

Now onto the next part of the Dashboard:



The Visitors Overview graph shows you how many different people came to your site in the period shown. This is not the same as one person generating multiple visits. Each visitor is unique.

The Map Overlay shows the location of your visitors by country. Traffic Sources Overview show how people found your site, and Content Overview shows the most popular content on your site. A single forward slash "/" refers to your home page.

Working with the graphs

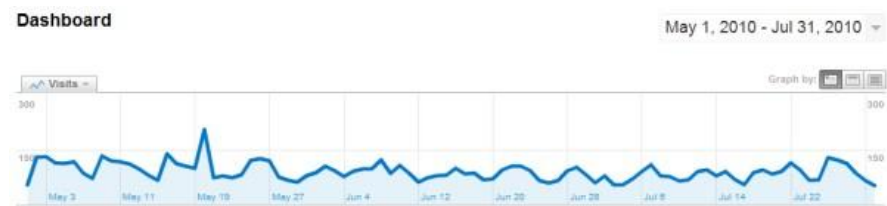
Hovering over one of the circles on a graph will display a box with the number for that day. The visits graph would show the number of visits for the day, the visitors graph would show the number of visitors, and so on.

In the top-right corner of the graph you'll see a date range. Click on the arrow on the right-hand side to expand the options. To change the date range, you can click on the calendar, type in the date range boxes, or use

the Timeline link. In the following screenshot, I've used the calendar to select a date range from May 1st to July 31st.



When you've selected the date range you wish to use, click on the Apply button and the graph will be updated. Or click on the Cancel link to go back to where you were before. See below for a screenshot of the graph I ended up with.



This is a really good way to analyse your statistics over many months. Also, you'll see that if you move to the other screens in Analytics, the date range will be remembered.

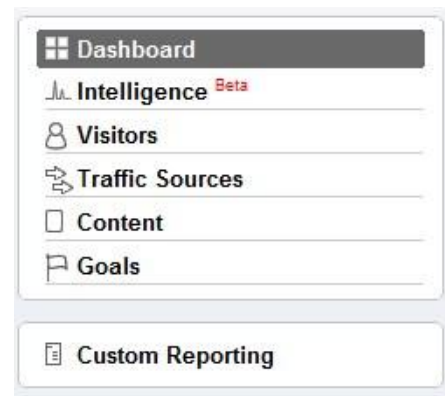
It's also possible to change the graph so it displays something other than Visits. To do this, click on the "Visits" button on the left-hand side of the graph. The following box will appear:



Choose the statistic you'd like to see on the graph, and it will show up instantly. You can even compare two metrics if you wish.

The navigation menu

The menu on the left-hand side of the screen will always be there, but it changes as you move around in Analytics. Use the Dashboard link at the top to come back here in future.



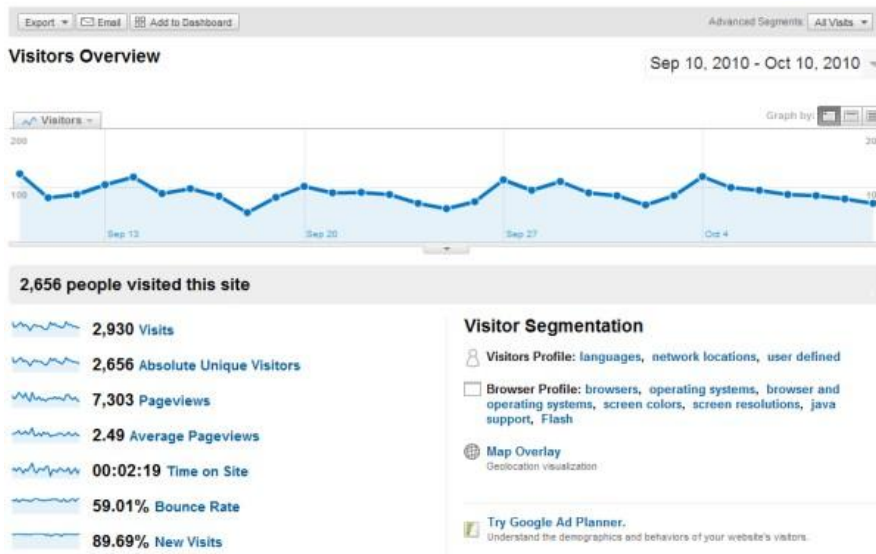
That's all for Chapter 1

In Chapter 2 we'll be looking at visitors, things to watch out for, and some tips and tricks.

Chapter 2

Visitors Overview

Go to the navigation menu on the left-hand side and click on Visitors. This will bring up the Visitors Overview.



The graph at the top shows the number of visitors (i.e. different people) who have seen your site in the given time period.

The total number of visitors is actually shown twice. “2,656 people visited this site” and “2,656 Absolute Unique Visitors”. These mean exactly the same thing. You’ll also see some of the other stats we looked at in part 1, such as Visits, Pageviews, Bounce Rate and New Visits.

At the bottom of the Visitors Overview page, you’ll see something we haven’t looked at yet: the Technical Profile.

The 'Technical Profile' section contains two tables. The first table, 'Browser', shows the distribution of visits by browser type. The second table, 'Connection Speed', shows the distribution of visits by connection type.

Browser	Visits	% visits
Firefox	1,113	37.96%
Internet Explorer	805	27.47%
Chrome	551	18.81%
Safari	383	13.07%
Mozilla Compatible Agent	31	1.06%

Connection Speed	Visits	% visits
Unknown	924	31.54%
Cable	882	30.10%
DSL	767	26.18%
T1	309	10.55%
Dialup	44	1.50%

On the left, you’ll see a breakdown of how many visits to your site used Firefox, Internet Explorer and so on. On the right, you’ll see the speed of the connection used (e.g. cable, DSL, dial-up).

Beware of inconsistent wording

There are a few small inconsistencies between the Dashboard and the Visitors Overview. On the Dashboard we had “Pages/Visit”; here we have “Average Pageviews”. They are the same. Similarly “Average Time on Site” (Dashboard) and “Time on Site” (Visitors Overview) mean the same thing.

If you’re familiar with these terms and you’re wondering why I’m mentioning the inconsistencies, bear in mind that Visits and Visitors are also very similar terms but are quite different. This has a lot to do with why I try to avoid using jargon without explaining it – even if you know what it means, there are plenty of similar terms to really confuse you.

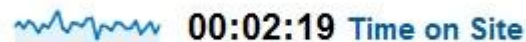
Finding out more

All over the page you'll see links that will take you to other pages. We're not going to look at every single page in great detail though. Once you understand the terms, such as visits and pageviews, it's a good idea just to try clicking on a link and look at the graphs. You can always return to the Dashboard using the navigation menu on the left.

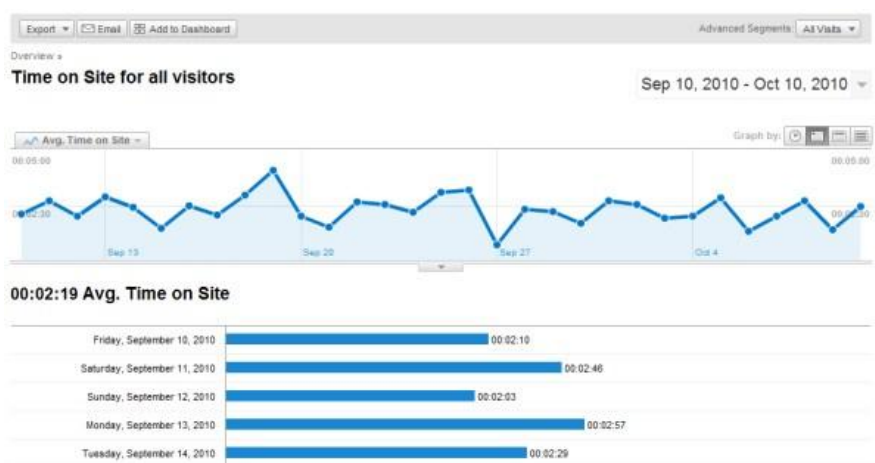
There are lots of other screens to look at. Let's start with one that might be very interesting to you.

Time on Site

From the Visitors Overview page, click on the Time on Site link – it's the fifth one down, next to the only statistic that looks like the numbers on a digital clock. In the above screenshot it's 00:02:19 – here's a bigger version so you know where to find it.

 00:02:19 Time on Site

There's also a graph:



A Beginner's Guide to Google Analytics

The graph at the top of the page shows how the time people spend on your site has changed over the last month (or whatever time period you choose). This is one of the statistics where you'll probably consider a high figure to be better than a low one.

The above screenshot shows that visitors are spending an average of 2 minutes 19 seconds on the site before moving on. That could be as long as it takes to read the latest post, or to look around the site and maybe skim a few posts, or read the About page and possibly even subscribe. You don't know exactly what people are doing just by looking at the time, but I'd say that 2 minutes 19 seconds is a pretty good figure.

One of the best things about these graphs is that you can hover over one of the circles and get an exact figure for that date. Here's an example:



You can also scroll down and look at the blue bars that go across the page. At the end of each bar you'll see the average time spent on the site for that day. Handy if you don't want to hover over every circle one by one.

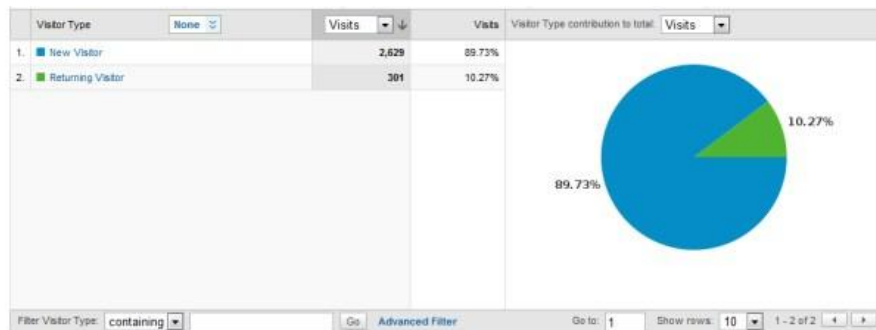
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Mysteriously disappearing statistics

One thing you may notice is that if you have a graph that ends on the current day, it can look like you have a lot less activity on that day than you actually do. My advice here is just to ignore the last point on the graph and instead look at the rest of the graph. You could change the graph so it doesn't show the last date, but it's not difficult just to ignore it.

New vs Returning

This is another screen you might be interested in. In the navigation menu under Visitors, click on New vs. Returning and you'll see this screen.



The basic idea behind this screen is that you can see what percentage of visits came from people who were visiting for the first time, and those who were coming back for more. From the above screenshot you can see that 10.27% of visitors were “returning”. This can go two ways – most of the people finding the site have found it for the first time, or most people aren't coming back in the future. This chart is much more useful if you extend the date range to cover a much longer time period.

How to use statistics to your advantage

One of the biggest issues with statistics is that it's all too easy to stress over whether your bounce rate is too high, or the fact you don't have enough returning visitors.

Where do you draw the line? That's very difficult to do. It varies a lot from one site to the next. And while it might be useful to be able to compare your statistics with other sites, many people won't show you all of this information. So how do you know whether you're doing well or not?

I think the best thing you can do is to **look at your own statistics over an extended period of time**. Compare recent stats with past stats. If you get more comments on a post than usual, wait for a day or two and then go to look at your stats. See what happens. Sometimes you may find that you get a sharp increase – a “spike” – and other times you won't.

Don't lose hope if you get a large spike then a sudden drop. This does happen. What you'll start to realise is how you can get a spike. Writing a really good post is the best way. But this is a topic for another day.

That's all for Chapter 2

In Chapter 3 we'll be looking at comparing statistics.

Chapter 3

Comparing statistics

This is an extremely handy feature, but it's a little more tricky to use as you have to do things in a very specific order. First, go to the Dashboard and find the date range in the top right corner. Click on the arrow to expand the date range.

The first thing you need to do is check whether the dates are already as you want them. We're going to look at the stats for September and compare them to August. The date range needs to start on September 1st and end on September 31st. If this isn't what you see, click on the 1st of September - this will highlight just that date. Now click on the 31st. You'll see that the entire month is highlighted and the date range is updated to reflect this. Here's a screenshot to show you what I mean.



Next, we need to select the second set of dates so we can get a comparison. Just above the Apply button, you'll see a "Compare to Past" checkbox. Tick this box.

The calendar should now have a second date range, highlighted in green instead of blue. If you're comparing two months with a different number of days in each, you may need to adjust the date range that is chosen for

you. It may be simplest to choose two date ranges that start and end on the same day, with the same amount of time in each. Something like this:



Click the Apply button and watch what happens.



Neat!

Just above the graph you'll see a legend – this tells you which line is which. So, the green line is August-September and the blue line is September-October.

Beneath the graph you'll see some percentages – a green percentage indicates something you've improved, while a red percentage means the stat isn't as good for the second month as the first. In this case, the site has improved in every area.



(Layout slightly edited to fit on the screen a bit better.)

You can even see comparison tooltips if you hover over any of the points on the graph:



A modest increase, but an improvement nonetheless.

Making a fair comparison

It's usually easier to analyse your stats if you think week to week and month to month. To compare statistics, you have to think about what you're comparing. Otherwise, it's like comparing two weeks' worth of comments when you wrote 3 posts one week and 7 posts the next. It's not a fair comparison. Level the playing field, and the comparison makes sense.

That's all for Chapter 3

In Chapter 4 we'll be looking at traffic sources.

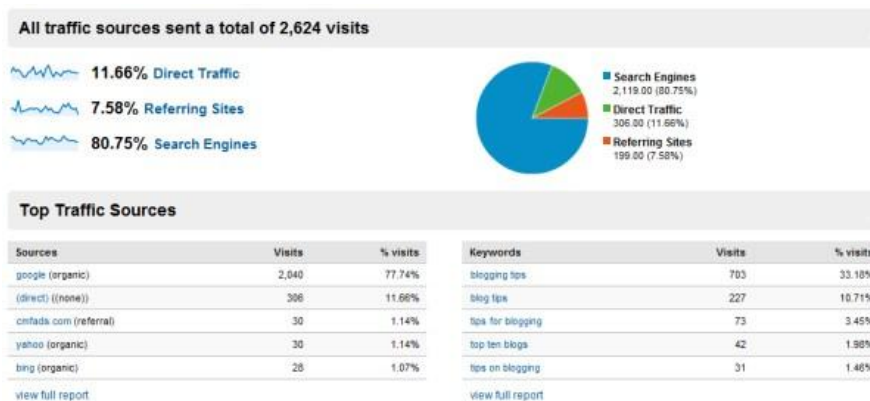
Chapter 4

Traffic Sources

Traffic Sources show you how people are finding your site. There are four traffic sources:

1. **Direct traffic:** This refers to the people who typed the address of your site manually, or clicked a link in their browser favourites.
2. **Referring sites:** If another website links to a page on your site and someone clicks the link, that site will be listed as a referring site.
3. **Search engines:** If someone searches for a particular type of content, your site comes up in the results and they click the link to your site, that will be listed here.
4. **Other:** This includes traffic from custom campaigns.

From the Traffic Sources Overview (click on Traffic Sources in the navigation menu to reach this page), you'll see how the traffic sources are split up for your site. A list of the top traffic sources is shown at the bottom:



Clicking on a link will take you to a page with more information, with the exception of Direct Traffic. That link will just restate some of your basic statistics from the Dashboard.

Referring Sites

Clicking on the Referring Sites link from the Traffic Sources Overview will show you a list of the sites that brought people to your site.

Source	Visits	Pages/Visit	Avg. Time on Site	% New Visits	Bounce Rate
1. cnfads.com	30	3.47	00:04:01	30.00%	46.67%
2. gadgetpage.com	19	1.68	00:01:58	89.47%	73.68%
3. google.com	18	1.50	00:02:42	88.89%	83.33%
4. twitter.com	9	1.11	00:02:11	44.44%	88.89%
5. bloggutebook.com	8	4.12	00:02:09	87.50%	50.00%
6. google.co.in	7	3.29	00:01:23	100.00%	0.00%
7. elizabethbushley.com	6	5.50	00:06:43	100.00%	66.67%
8. arwriter.com	5	1.20	00:00:10	100.00%	80.00%
9. katgalore.blogspot.com	5	1.20	00:00:04	80.00%	80.00%
10. google.ca	4	1.50	00:00:31	100.00%	75.00%

When you first load the page, the sites that generated the most visits are at the top. You can easily reorder the list by clicking on one of the column headers. For instance, you can click on "Avg Time on Site" to display the sites that generated visits where people stayed the longest. You can also display the sites that generated the highest bounce rate. To sort in reverse order (lowest to highest), click on the column heading twice (wait for it to load between the clicks – don't double-click it).

There are also some options at the bottom of the table where you can search, or move between pages.

Search engines

This page works just like the referring sites page, but it lists the search engines instead of the referring sites. As before you can choose how to sort the information in the table, or search if you wish.

Keywords

You can find this page by clicking on the Keywords link on the navigation menu. You must be viewing one of the Traffic Sources pages before the link will show up.

Keywords are individual words or phrases that you type into a search engine to find the sites you want to visit. In Google Analytics, the Keywords page shows you which words or phrases brought people to your site.

Visits: 2,119 (% of Site Total: 80.75%)
Pages/Visit: 2.57 (Site Avg: 2.49 (3.18%))
Avg. Time on Site: 00:02:20 (Site Avg: 00:02:19 (0.72%))
% New Visits: 90.75% (Site Avg: 89.56% (1.33%))
Bounce Rate: 57.62% (Site Avg: 58.99% (-2.33%))

Keyword	Visits	Pages/Visit	Avg. Time on Site	% New Visits	Bounce Rate
1. blogging tips	703	3.51	00:03:41	90.90%	35.42%
2. blog tips	227	3.26	00:03:08	84.58%	43.17%
3. tips for blogging	73	3.05	00:03:01	94.52%	49.32%
4. top ten blogs	42	2.21	00:01:59	59.52%	57.14%
5. tips on blogging	31	3.03	00:04:29	96.77%	22.58%
6. tips blog	28	1.89	00:01:51	96.43%	67.86%
7. top 10 blogs	28	2.75	00:04:27	96.43%	50.00%
8. blog categories	26	1.31	00:00:38	96.15%	84.62%
9. top ten blog	24	1.21	00:00:04	25.00%	91.67%
10. top 10 wordpress widgets	18	1.06	00:01:20	94.44%	94.44%

Filter Keyword: containing [] Go Advanced Filter Go to: 1 Show rows: 10 1 - 10 of 642

If you don't see the words or phrases you think people should be searching for to find your site, you may have to do a bit of search engine optimisation.

The thing to remember is that there will always be other sites for people to visit, and even the "best-optimised" sites cannot guarantee success by optimisation alone.

Start by writing great content. Optimisation is worth looking into, but there's not much point spending time on it if you aren't writing content that people would want to read. It's a case of getting your priorities straight.

Content Overview

Click on the Content link in the navigation menu and you'll see the Content Overview page.

Pages on this site were viewed a total of 6,536 times

- 6,536 Pageviews
- 5,394 Unique Views
- 58.99% Bounce Rate

Navigation Analysis

- Navigation Summary: How visitors found your content
- Entrance Paths: Paths visitors used to get to your content

Landing Page Optimization

- Entrance Sources: Top sources per page
- Entrance Keywords: Top keywords per page

Click Patterns

- Site Overlay: Click data on top of your website

Try Website Optimizer

Increase conversions by testing different content.

Top Content

Pages	Pageviews	% Pageviews
/	2,297	35.14%
/10-tips-for-using-wordpress-widgets-o...	235	3.60%
/whats-in-a-name-10-quick-tips-for-nam...	231	3.53%
/10-tips-for-running-your-own-group-blog	223	3.41%
/10-see-mistakes-that-may-harm-your-blog	184	2.82%

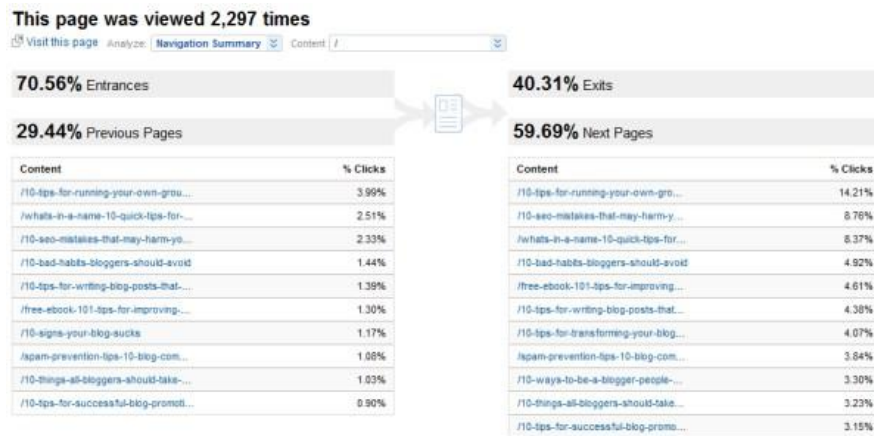
view full report

You'll see a list of the 5 most viewed pages on your site, with a link to view more ("view full report"). Click on this and you'll see another table that can be searched and sorted as with the previous ones. I won't include a screenshot this time as very similar to the ones included above.

One thing to note, however, is that a single forward slash “/” refers to your home page.

Navigation Analysis

Back on the Content Overview page, there are some links on the right-hand side of the page. Click on Navigation Summary to open the first of these pages.



Along the top you’ll see a drop down list called “Content” with the single forward slash “/” as the current page. This shows that we’re looking at the analysis for the home page.

Beneath that, we have some percentages. On the left, we can see how many people viewed the home page as their first page on the site (70.56% Entrances) and how many came from another page on the site (29.44% Previous Pages). If you add together the two percentages on the left, they should total 100%.

On the right, we can see how many people left after viewing the home page (40.31% Exits) and how many went to another page (59.69% Next Pages). Again, adding the two percentages should total 100%.

You can see which pages people moved from and to. Clicking on a page link will show the navigation analysis for that page. You can also choose other pages using the arrow at the end of the “Content” list, where the current page is shown.

There are some other links in the “Analyze” drop down list, but you’ve come this far – why not try a couple on your own?

Want More?

If you'd like to see more of Google Analytics in a future edition of this ebook, please [get in touch](#).

If you'd like more tips for your blog, please visit [Quick Blog Tips](#).

And if you enjoyed this ebook, please pass it around - it's free to distribute, so long as you don't edit it in any way. (That means you need to keep my name on it, along with a link to [quickblogtips.com](#).)

Thanks for reading!

Ben Barden

The cover image is a photo taken by Ben Barden.