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Search on a WordPress site: why the built-in one disappoints and how to improve it

WordPress & CMS

CODE

RLX-MZ-KB-2002

VERSION

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COUNTRY · LANGUAGE

Mozambique · English

Interweb Mozambique

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The short answer: WordPress search looks for the words you wrote in titles and texts, and **little else:** it does not forgive typos, does not understand synonyms and rarely finds products or custom fields. For a small site, it does. For a shop or a site with lots of content, it is worth improving, and understanding what people search for is a mine of ideas.

What the site needs

What	What to do
What it searches	The titles and text of pages and posts. It does not search well in custom fields, in plugins’ own data or in PDFs.
What it does not do	It does not correct “chairr” to “chair”, and does not know that “shoe” and “footwear” are alike.
Where to put the box	In the header, in the menu or on the 404 page: Widgets and sidebars.
Improving it	A better search plugin, or a search that also looks in products and categories (in a shop, WooCommerce brings its own).
What you learn	The searches people make say what the site is missing: Google Analytics.

Getting started

1

Put the search box where people look for it, and do not hide it.

2

Test five real searches: a product name, a typo, a similar word, something that is only in a custom field. See what fails.

3

Tidy the content with clear titles: the built-in search depends heavily on them: **Categories and tags**.

4

If that is not enough, install a search plugin that tolerates typos and searches everything that matters, and try it on a copy: **Installing plugins**.

5

Watch the searches with no results and write what is missing.

A search with a heavy plugin can make the site slow, especially on shared hosting and with lots of content. Measure before and after: **What makes a difference when the site is slow**. On a big site, search may need a service of its own, not the hosting.

For search by meaning instead of words, and AI search over your own content: **Semantic search**. On a growing shop: **Which plan for a directory**.

Want help improving your site's search? Open a ticket with the address.

[Open a support ticket](#)

SEE ALSO

[Widgets and sidebars in WordPress: what they are, and what changed with block themes](#)

[Google Analytics: setting it up and what to look at first](#)

[Categories and tags in WordPress: how to use each without making a mess](#)

[Installing WordPress plugins: where, which ones, and how many](#)

[The site is slow: what actually makes a difference](#)

[Structured data and rich results: what they are and how to add them](#)



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