

Anchor Text Distribution Guide

A Complete SEO Reference for Website Link Building

Anchor text distribution is one of the most critical—yet often overlooked—elements of a successful SEO link-building strategy. This guide explains every anchor text type, recommended distribution ratios, best practices, and red flags to help you build a natural, penalty-resistant backlink profile.

1. What Is Anchor Text?

Anchor text is the visible, clickable text in a hyperlink. Search engines use it as a relevance signal to understand what the linked page is about. A well-balanced anchor text profile tells Google your links were earned naturally, while an over-optimised profile can trigger a manual or algorithmic penalty.

Anchor Text Types at a Glance

Type	Example	SEO Signal	Risk Level
Exact Match	"best SEO tools"	High relevance	HIGH
Partial Match	"top SEO tools for beginners"	Moderate	MEDIUM
Branded	"Moz", "Ahrefs"	Trust / authority	LOW
Naked URL	"https://example.com"	Natural signal	LOW
Generic	"Click here", "Read more"	Minimal	VERY LOW
LSI / Semantic	"link building guide"	Contextual depth	LOW
Image Alt Text	alt="SEO checklist infographic"	Supplementary	LOW

2. Recommended Distribution Ratios

There is no universal perfect ratio, but the percentages below reflect industry consensus for a healthy, natural-looking backlink profile. Adjust based on your niche competitiveness and current profile state.

Anchor Type	Recommended %	Notes
Branded	30 – 40 %	Largest share; builds brand trust
Naked URL	20 – 30 %	Looks very natural to algorithms

Anchor Type	Recommended %	Notes
Generic	15 – 20 %	"Click here", "this article", "source"
LSI / Semantic	10 – 15 %	Related terms, synonyms of target keyword
Partial Match	5 – 10 %	Keyword included but not exact
Exact Match	1 – 5 %	Use sparingly — highest penalty risk
Image Alt Text	~5 %	Descriptive; avoid keyword stuffing

Note: These are starting benchmarks. Always audit your existing profile with a tool like Ahrefs, Semrush, or Majestic before building new links.

3. Best Practices for Anchor Text Optimisation

Prioritise Naturalness

Google's algorithms are trained to detect unnatural patterns. If 40 % of your links carry the exact same keyword phrase, that is a red flag. Vary your anchors as a real editorial process would.

Match Anchor Intent to Page Content

The anchor should accurately describe what the reader will find on the destination page. Misleading anchors harm user experience and can be penalised under Google's helpful content guidelines.

Use Contextual Relevance

Anchors embedded in topically relevant content carry more weight. A link from a cybersecurity blog using 'password manager guide' as anchor is far stronger than the same anchor on an unrelated recipe site.

Avoid Over-Optimisation

Repeatedly using the same exact-match keyword anchor—especially via paid or low-quality links—remains one of the fastest ways to trigger a Google Penguin-style penalty. Keep exact match below 5 %.

Leverage Brand + Keyword Combos

Anchors like "YourBrand SEO services" combine brand trust with keyword relevance, making them effective and relatively safe.

Monitor & Audit Regularly

Run a monthly or quarterly anchor text audit. A sudden spike in exact-match anchors (even from positive link-building activity) can look unnatural if not balanced.

4. Red Flags & Penalty Triggers

- Over 10 % of backlinks carry identical exact-match anchor text
- Sudden spike in keyword-rich anchors within a short time window
- Anchors that do not match the destination page's topic
- Bulk anchor text from low-DA, spammy, or irrelevant domains

- Purchased links with pre-agreed keyword anchors
- Hidden links or anchors invisible to users (white-on-white, tiny font)
- Exact-match anchors from exact-match-domain (EMD) sites pointing inward

5. Anchor Text Audit Checklist

Step	Action	Tool / Resource
1	Export full backlink profile	Ahrefs / Semrush / Majestic
2	Categorise each anchor by type	Spreadsheet or Ahrefs Anchors report
3	Calculate current % per type	Excel / Google Sheets COUNTIF
4	Identify over-represented anchors	Compare vs. recommended ratios (Section 2)
5	Disavow toxic exact-match links	Google Search Console Disavow Tool
6	Plan new links to balance distribution	Content outreach / PR campaigns
7	Re-audit after 60–90 days	Repeat monthly

6. Quick-Reference Summary

Anchor Type	Target %	Key Reminder
Branded anchors	30–40 %	Safe, trust-building, always prioritise
Naked URLs	20–30 %	Highly natural; great filler
Generic anchors	15–20 %	Balance; avoid repetition of same phrase
LSI / Semantic	10–15 %	Strengthens topical authority
Partial match	5–10 %	OK in moderation with varied phrasing
Exact match	1–5 %	Handle with care; high penalty risk
Image alt text	~5 %	Descriptive; avoid keyword stuffing

This document is intended as an internal SEO reference guide. Distribute freely within your team. Last updated: April 2026.