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SEO in the AI Era

How to Optimize Your Content for the Google AI Overview

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Today's Goal

Google's AI-powered Search Generative Experience is here—and we're learning how to optimize for it.

+ today's agenda

(1)

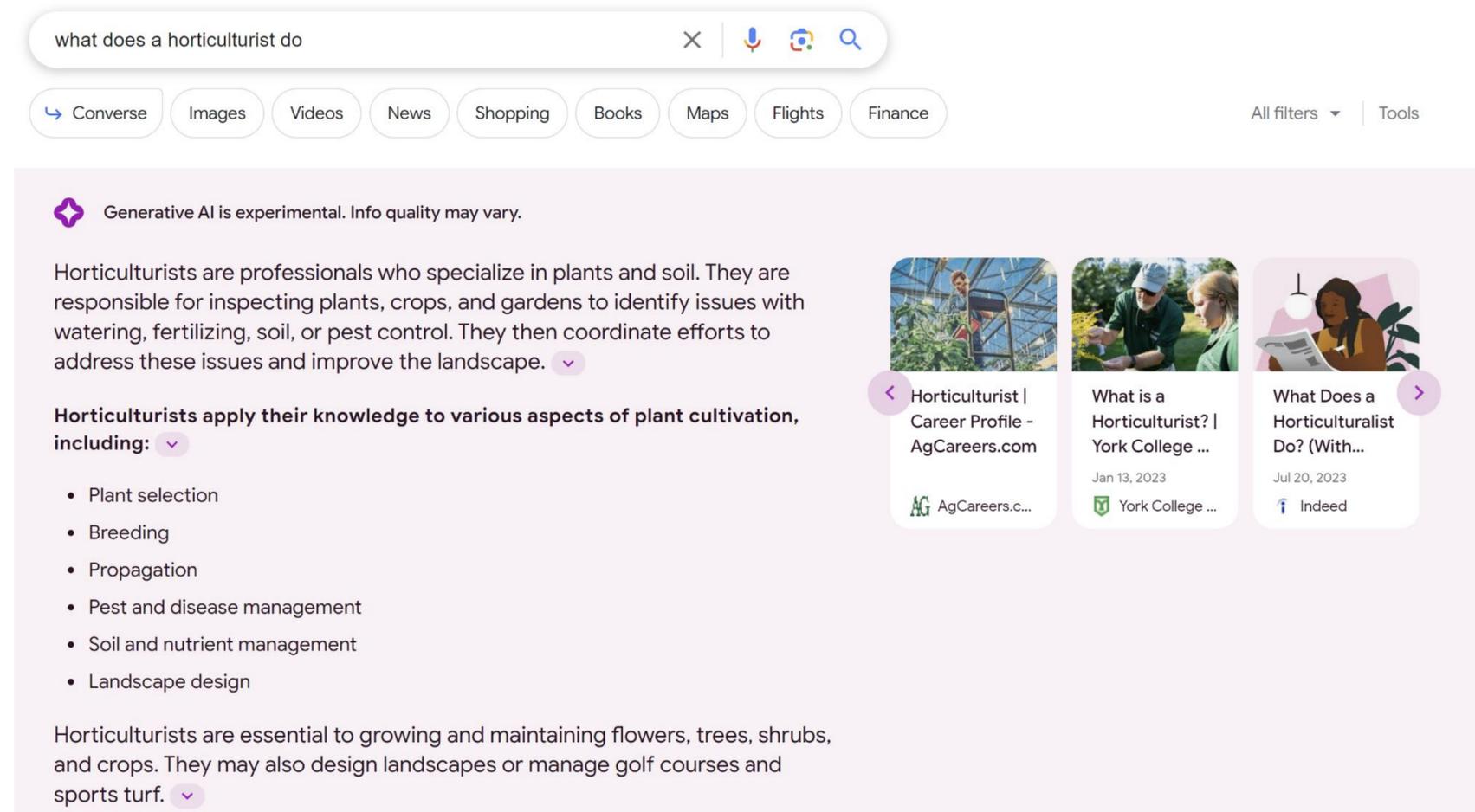# What is Google's Search Generative Experience (SGE)?

Google's Definition

- Experimental "update to the Search experience" which "uses generative AI to give you more information and context to your searches."
- An "AI-powered overview" that surfaces key points of a webpage directly in search results and helps users "dig deeper" by interacting with conversational AI and clicking links to cited webpages.
- "Context will be carried over from question to question, to help you more naturally continue your exploration."

History Since Roll Out

- Rolled out in beta via Search Labs in May 2023
- Consistent testing and improvement changed visuals and functions of AI Overviews slightly over fist year
- August 2023: Expanded rollout and interface update
- January 2024: Search Generative Experience appears in more countries and more often
- March 2024: Search Generative Experience began appearing in main Google search interface
- May 2024: AI Overviews appearing in Google Search to all users

What SGE Looks Like

- Shaded bubble appearing above organic search results
- The feature Google calls the "Overview" includes an AI-generated answer to search query with interactive elements and links
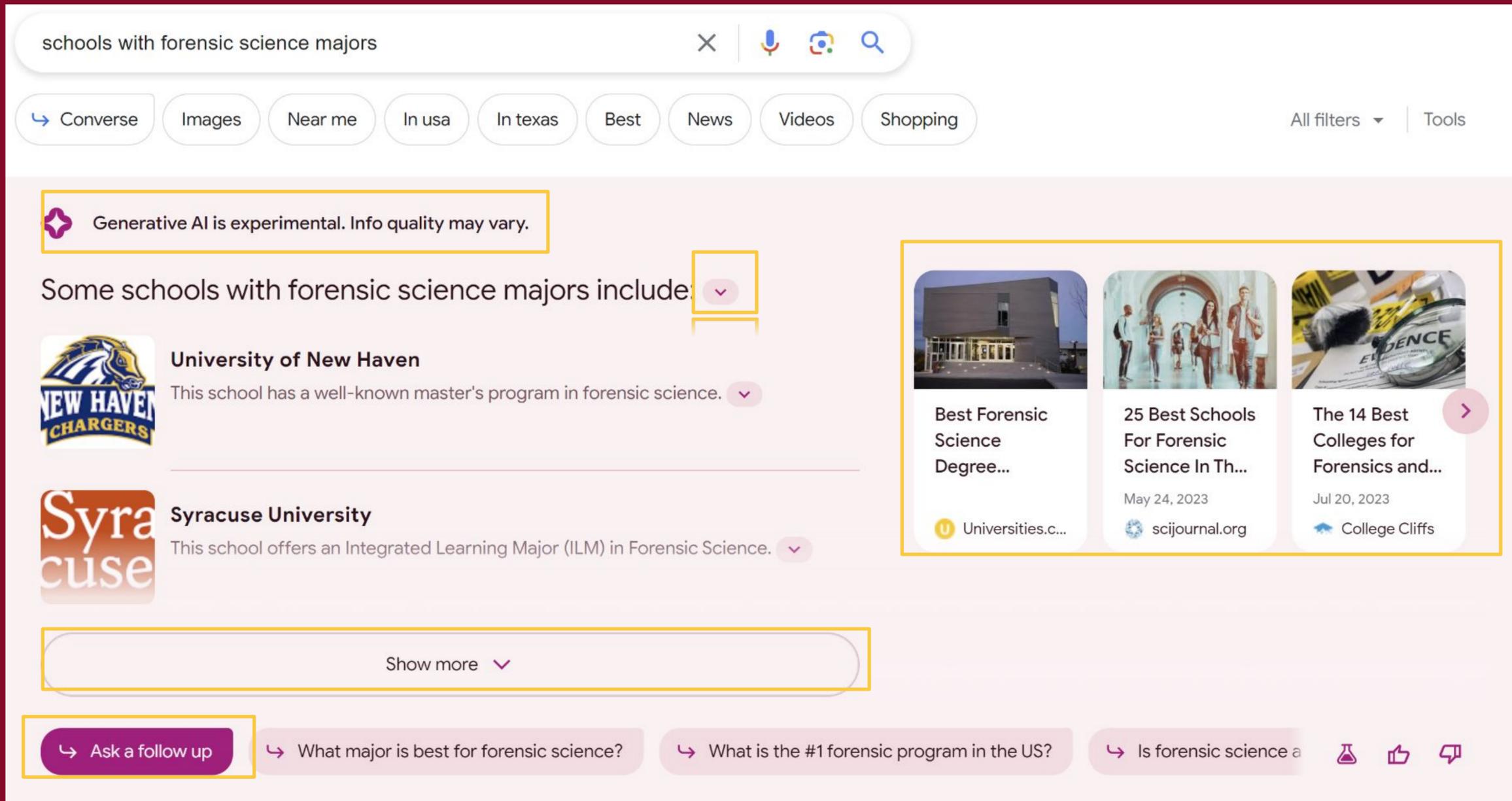
Where SGE Appears in Relation to Organic and Sponsored Results
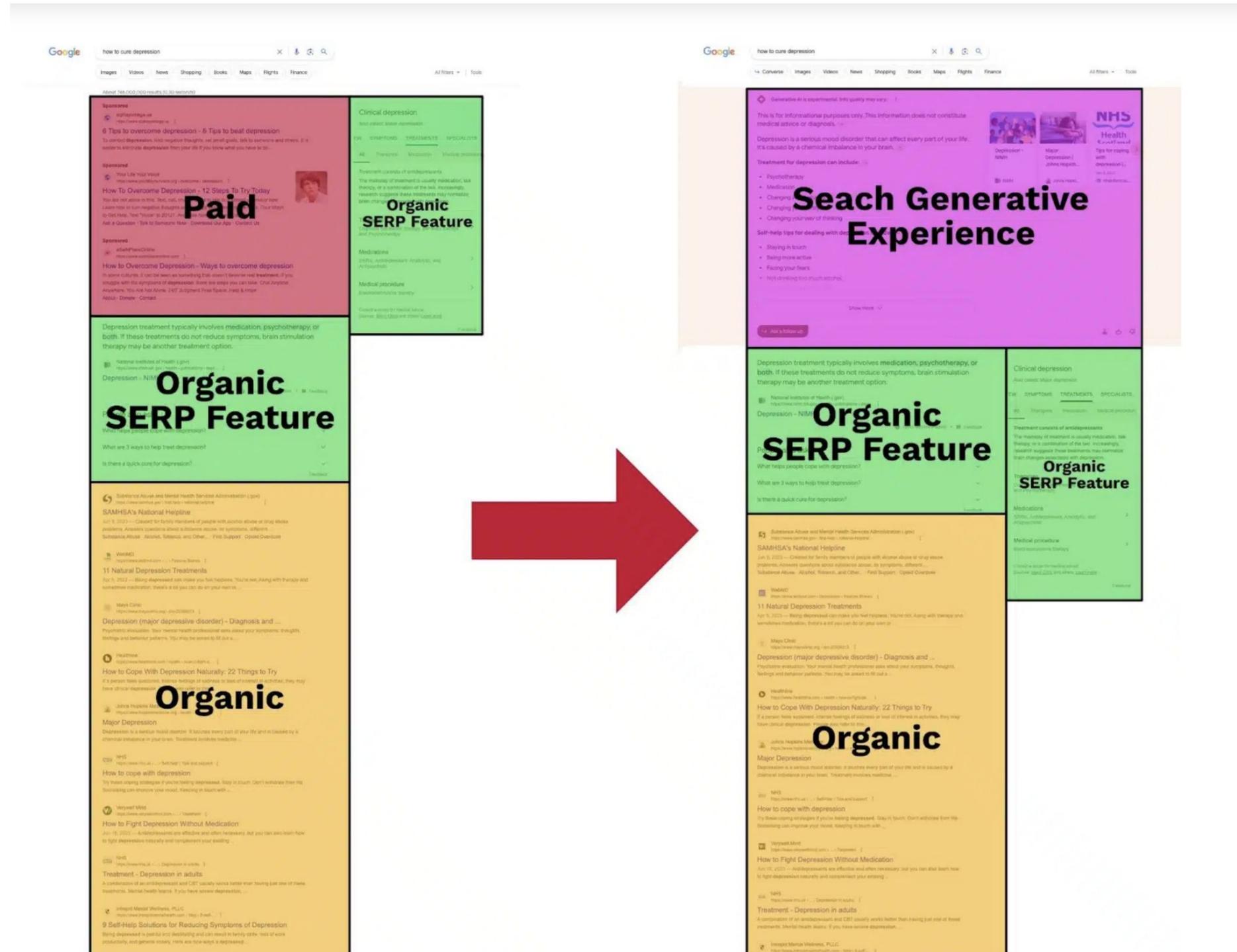
(2)

Anatomy and Behavior of Google SGE and AI Overviews

Anatomy of the Google Search Generative Experience "Snapshot"
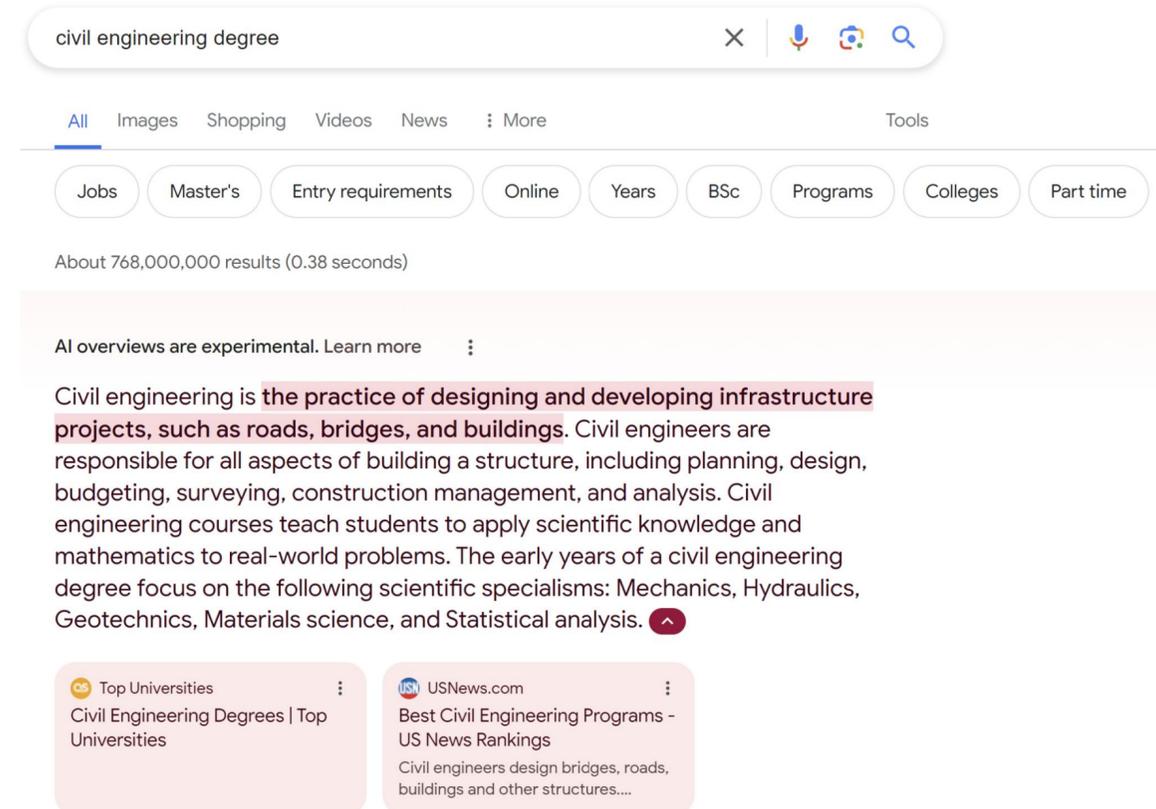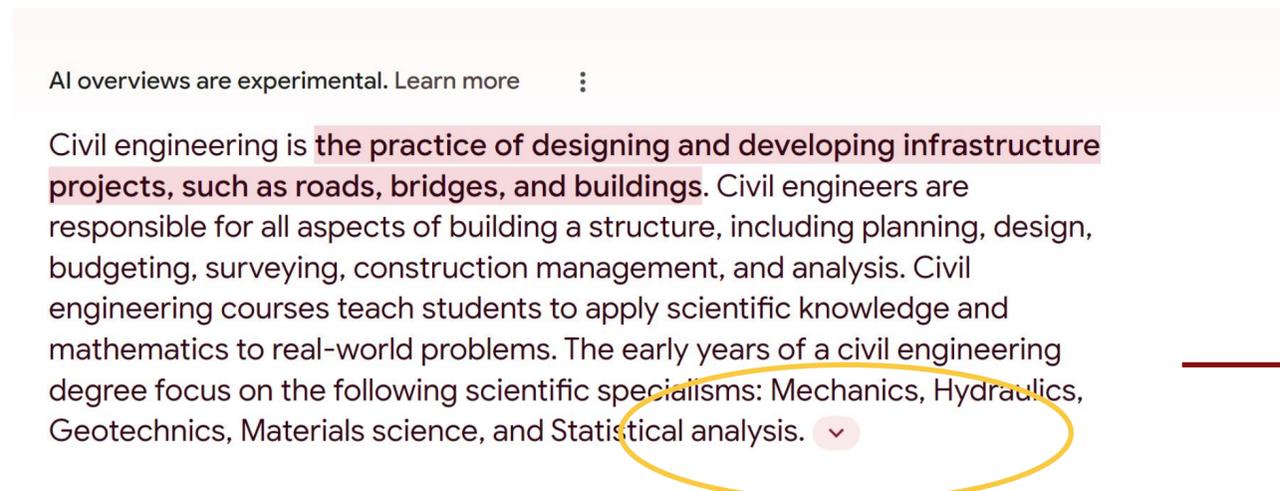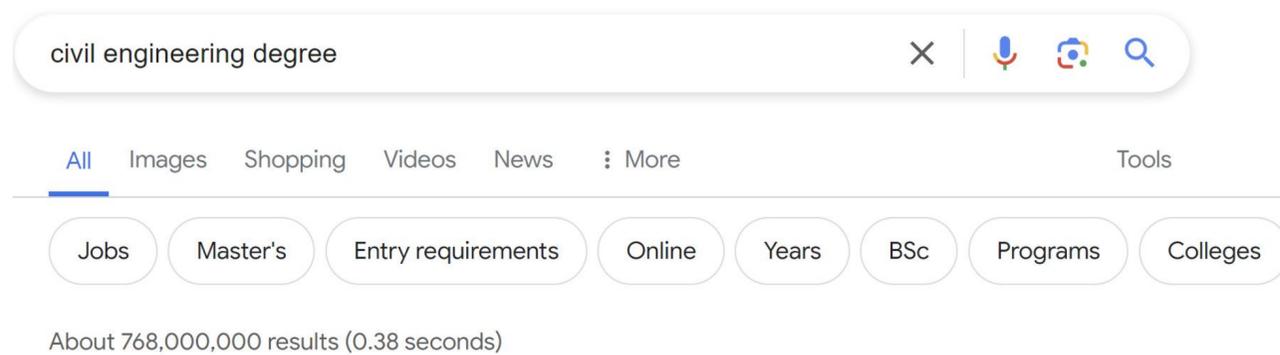
Quality warning

Generated result

Carrot citations

Citation carousel

Show more

Ask a follow up

Carrots and Citations

- Expandable carrot icons reveal links to cited source pages and web pages with content relevant to the search
- Clickable citations revealed by carrots can include an image or logo and can display a title and description for the source page

Carousel

- Six to nine scrollable panels accompanied by images
- One of the best opportunities to capture organic traffic and brand awareness from SGE

Ordered Brand Lists

- Lists of brand names, sometimes accompanied by an image/logo and description, appear in either ordered or unordered list formats
- Generated from website, Google Business Profile, and directories
- Ordered lists appear 38% of the time
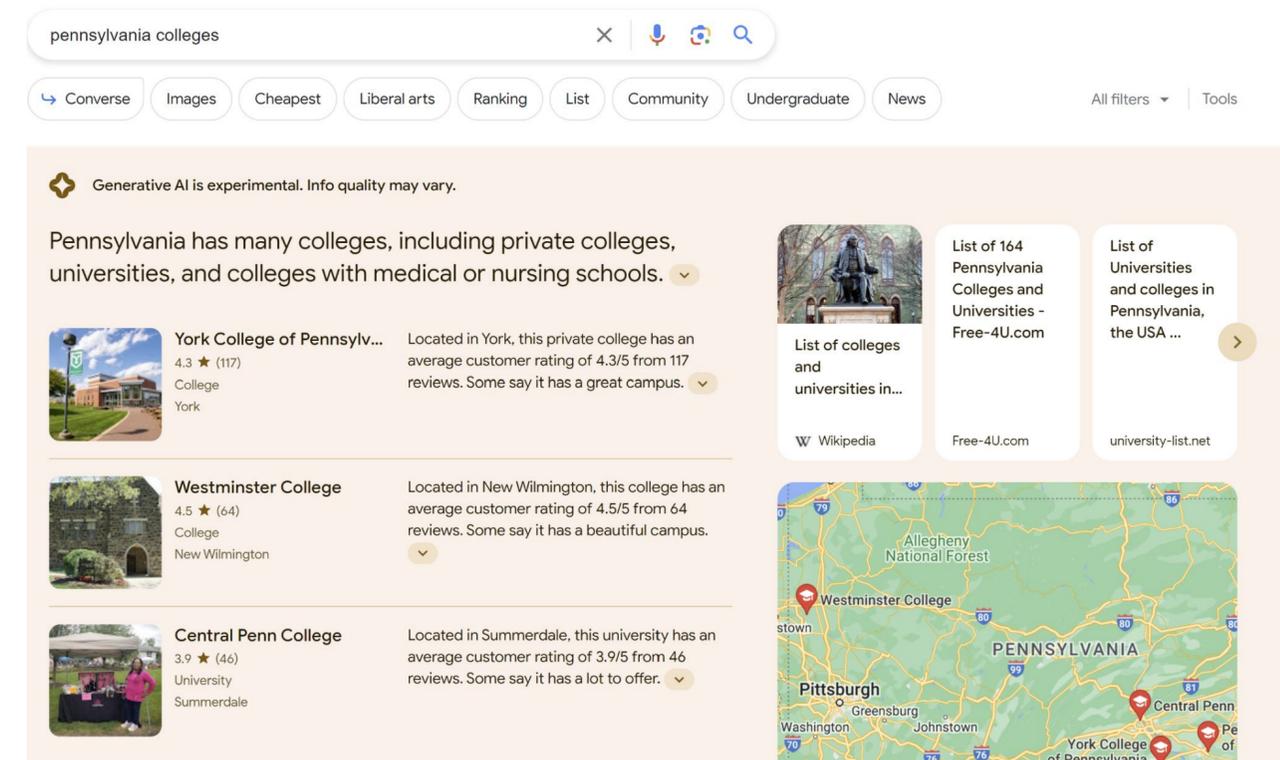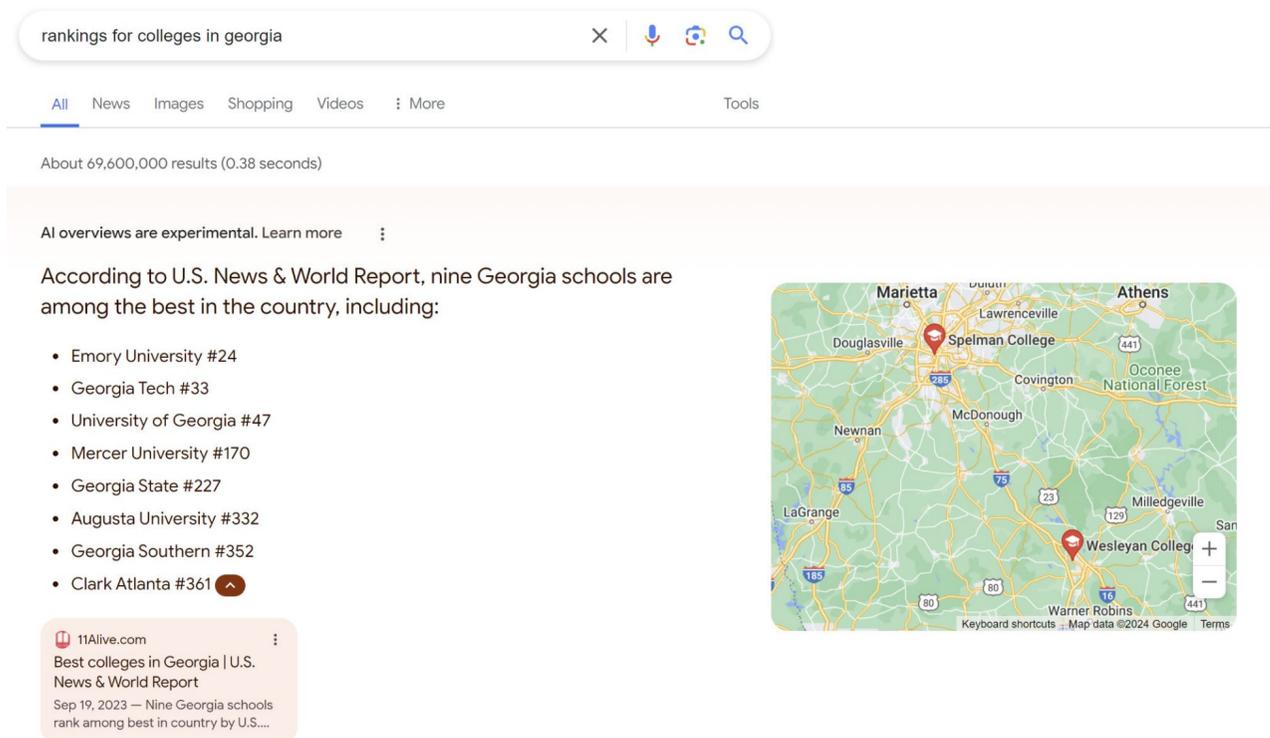
Ordered lists include numerical lists and local modules.

Unordered Brand Lists

- Unordered lists appear 48% of the time, compared to ordered lists appearing 38% of the time
- More flexible to providing helpful information

Ask a Follow Up

- Users can type new query directly in SGE or select from suggestions
- Follow-up searches open conversational chatbot interface with more follow-up suggestions
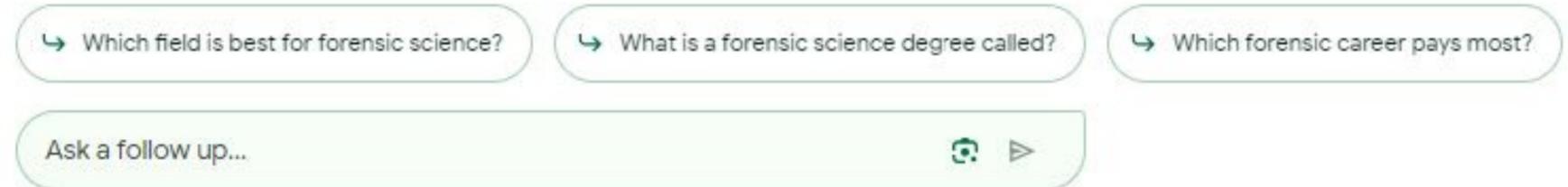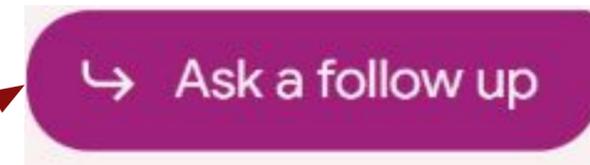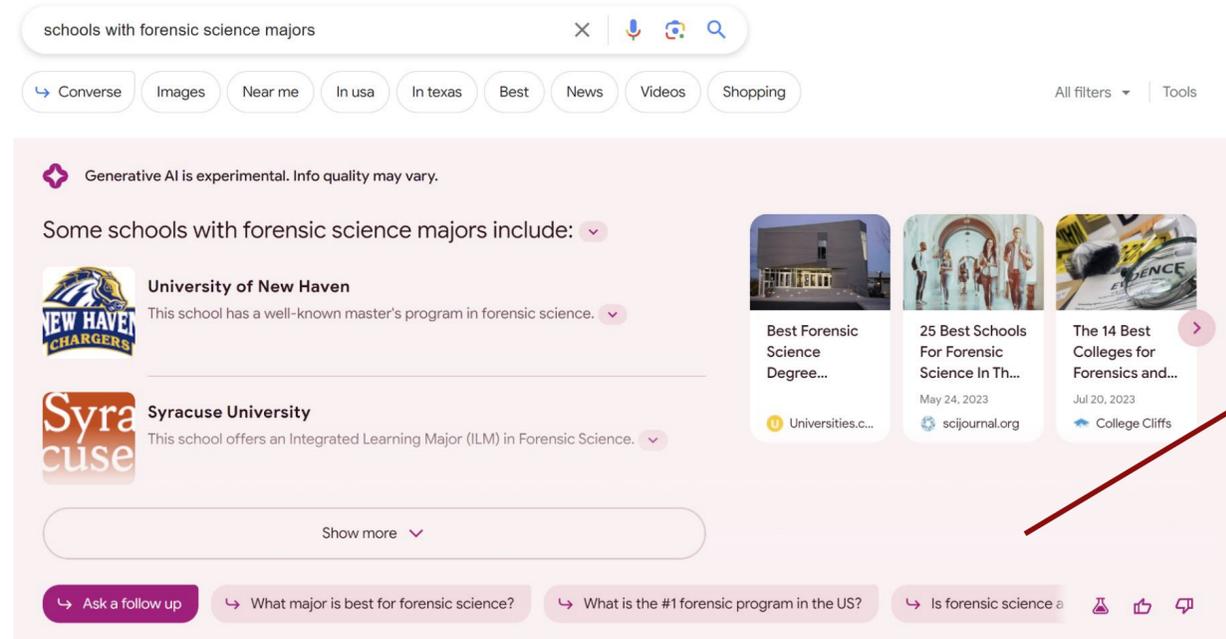
Ask a Follow Up, ctd

- Progressive follow-up questions narrow context of search and take past conversation into account to display hyper-relevant results

what can you learn in a forensic science program

How hard is it to get a degree in forensic science?

AI overviews are experimental. Learn more

Forensic science programs teach students how to handle and process evidence, including bloodstains, powders, and fibers. Students also learn about criminal procedure laws, evidence rules, and how to process crime scenes. Programs may also provide students with laboratory skills such as:

- DNA analysis
- Latent print examination
- Firearm and tool mark analysis
- Drug analysis
- Forensic toxicology
- Fingerprinting
- Crime scene procedures
- Report-writing

Forensic Science
Why Study Forensic Science?
Mar 17, 2023 — As a forensic science major, you will learn how to handle a...

theuniguide.co.uk
Forensic Science Courses & Undergraduate Degrees
The degree combines study of chemistry and biology with learning...

AI overviews are experimental. Learn more

Some say that forensic science can be challenging because it's a multidisciplinary field that requires skills in math and natural sciences. The degree requires a bachelor's degree in a science discipline, which usually takes four years and requires 120–128 credits. Students who have previously completed an associate in forensic science can transfer into a bachelor's program, which can cut the required credits in half. Applicants must have a high school diploma or GED, along with SAT and/or ACT scores.

group.com
Forensic
-Step Guide -...
Hard to Become a
tarting a career i...

Criminal Justice Degree Sch...
Forensic Science Degree Programs
A bachelor's in forensic science is a four-year degree that requires 120-...

Grand Canyon University
How To Become a Forensic Scientist | GCU Blog
Jan 12, 2024 — Is Forensic Science Hard? Forensic science can have its...

Forensic science programs cover topics such as forensic chemistry, physical, and organic chemistry. Students also learn about problem solving, critical thinking, and using math to collect and analyze data for evidence in a case.

Forensic scientists work in many industries, including forensic technicians, crime scene investigators, and digital forensic analysts.

Show More Expansion

- May appear as collapsed version of full answer
- When expanded by clicking "Show More", first citation(s) may appear without clicking on carrot

Multimedia

- Overviews regularly include images, YouTube videos, Google Business Profile photos, and Google reviews

YouTube clip in SGE

Your Institution's Social and Web Presences Can Appear in AI Overviews

- Google Business Profile
- Google Maps
- YouTube
- TikTok
- Reddit, Quora, and Forums
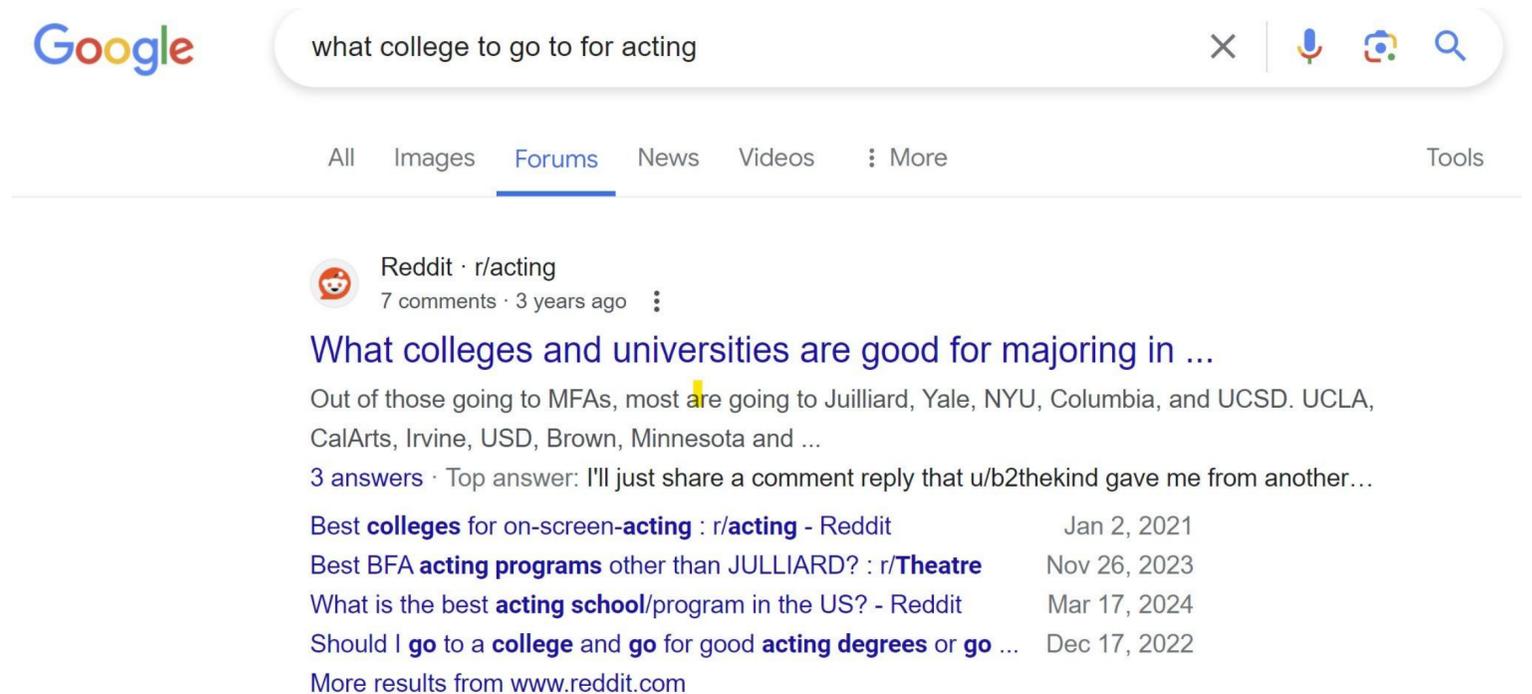
Availability of AI Overviews

- Generated text "AI Overview" not available for all searches
  - Costs and Your Money, Your Life topics may play a part in volatility
- In February 2024, education is one of three industries where SGE appears for 98% of queries on average
- Overview appears for 84% of all searches in two main variants:
  - Opt-in: 68% of the time (User must click "Generate" button)
  - Collapsed: 16% of the time (Appears but user must "show more" to expand)
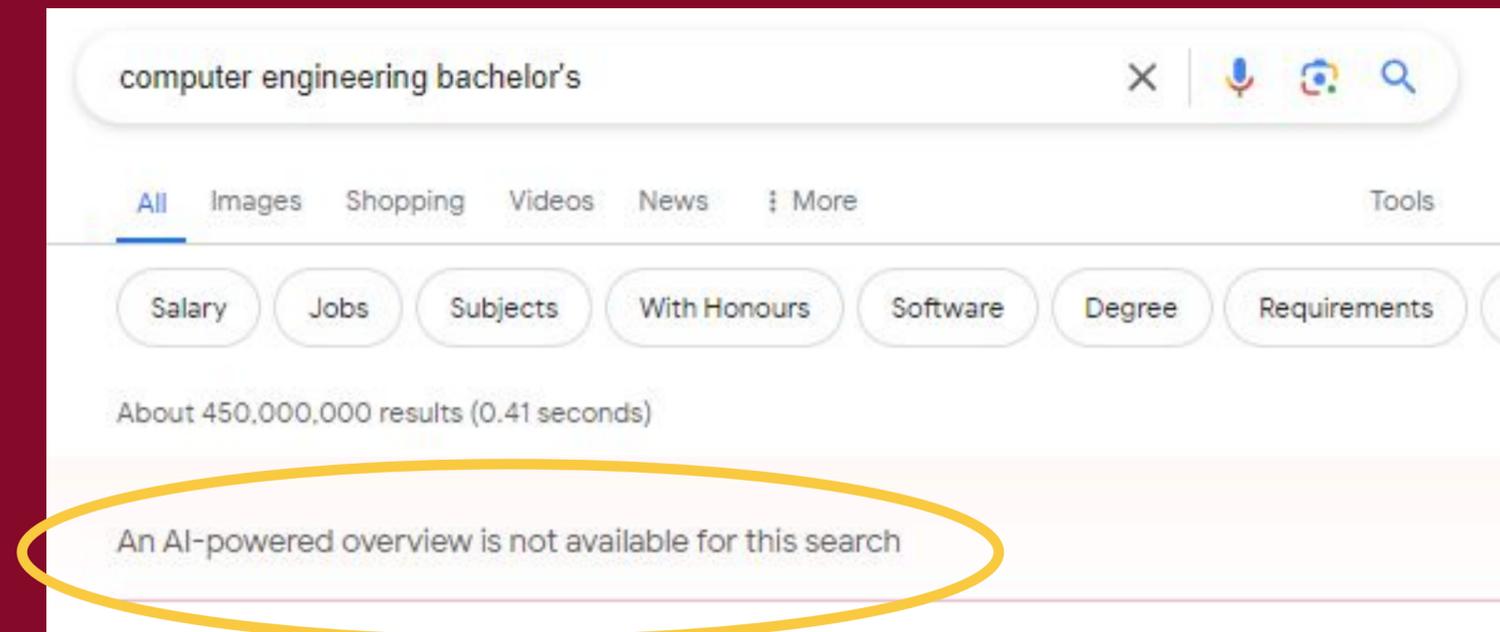
Opt-in vs. Collapsed vs. Full Appearance

- SGE appears for 84% of all searches in two main variants:
  - Opt-in: 68% of the time
    - User must click "Generate" button
  - Collapsed: 16% of the time
    - Appears automatically, user must click "show more" to expand
- Full appearance is the third variant, though it is very rare. This is when the full snapshot loads upon a search.

Logistics

- AI Overviews take an average of 6.08 seconds to generate
- On average show about 10 links
  - Just four unique links on average; the same links can be and typically are cited in multiple places in Overview
- 94% of links in AI Overview are different from organic search results

Higher Education Content in AI-Generated Search Results

- Higher education institutions' academic content, admissions content, thought leadership articles or blogs, and video content may be featured in the Overview for queries related to a topic, area of study, degree path, or career field

Higher Education SGE Example - Program Page Content

Citation in generated text

Linked panels in carousel

After structured brand list

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Higher Education SGE Example - Admissions

- Both admissions and blog content appears for some higher ed searches

Linked citations

Citing program page content

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Higher Education SGE Example - Thought Leadership and Evergreen Content
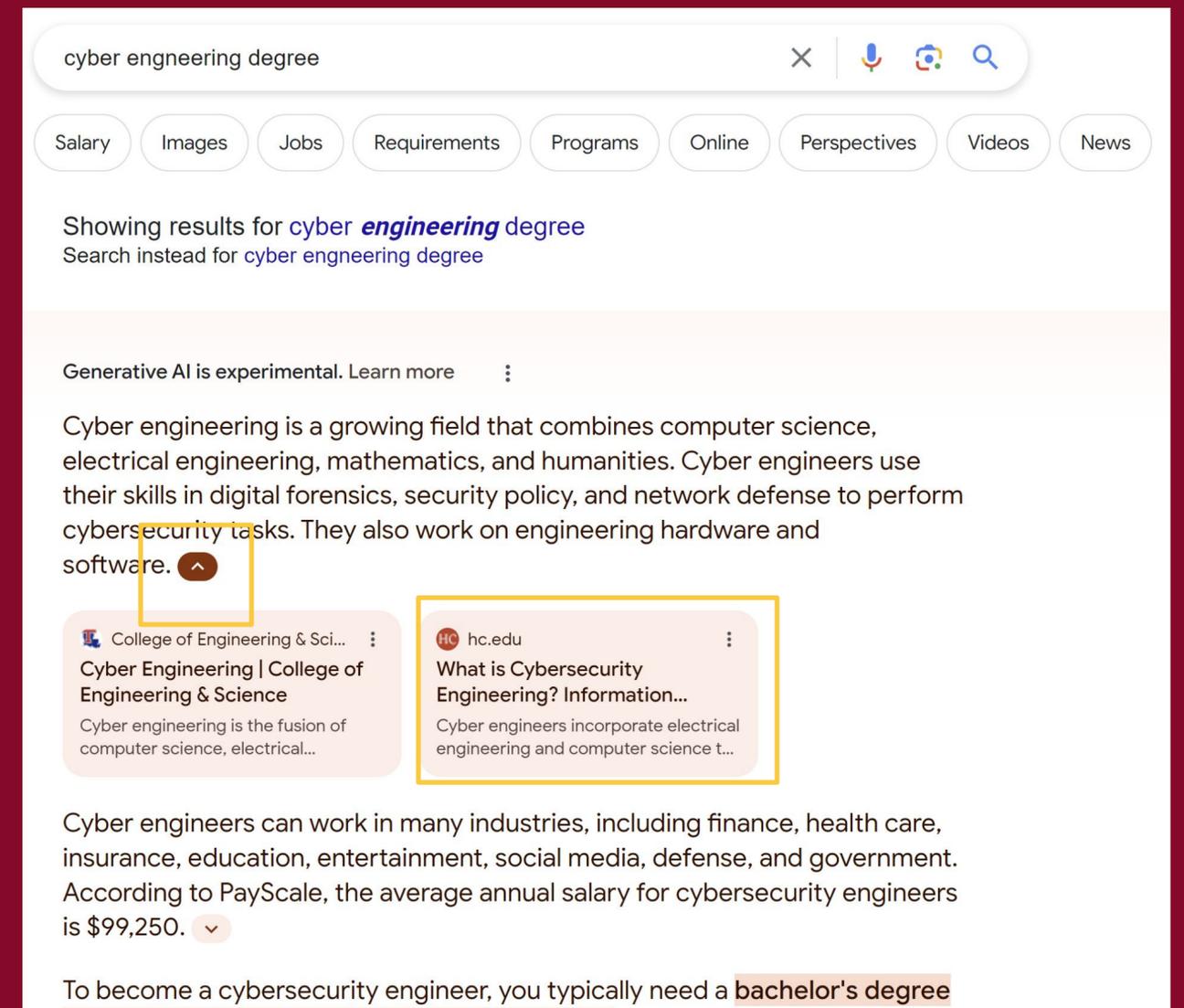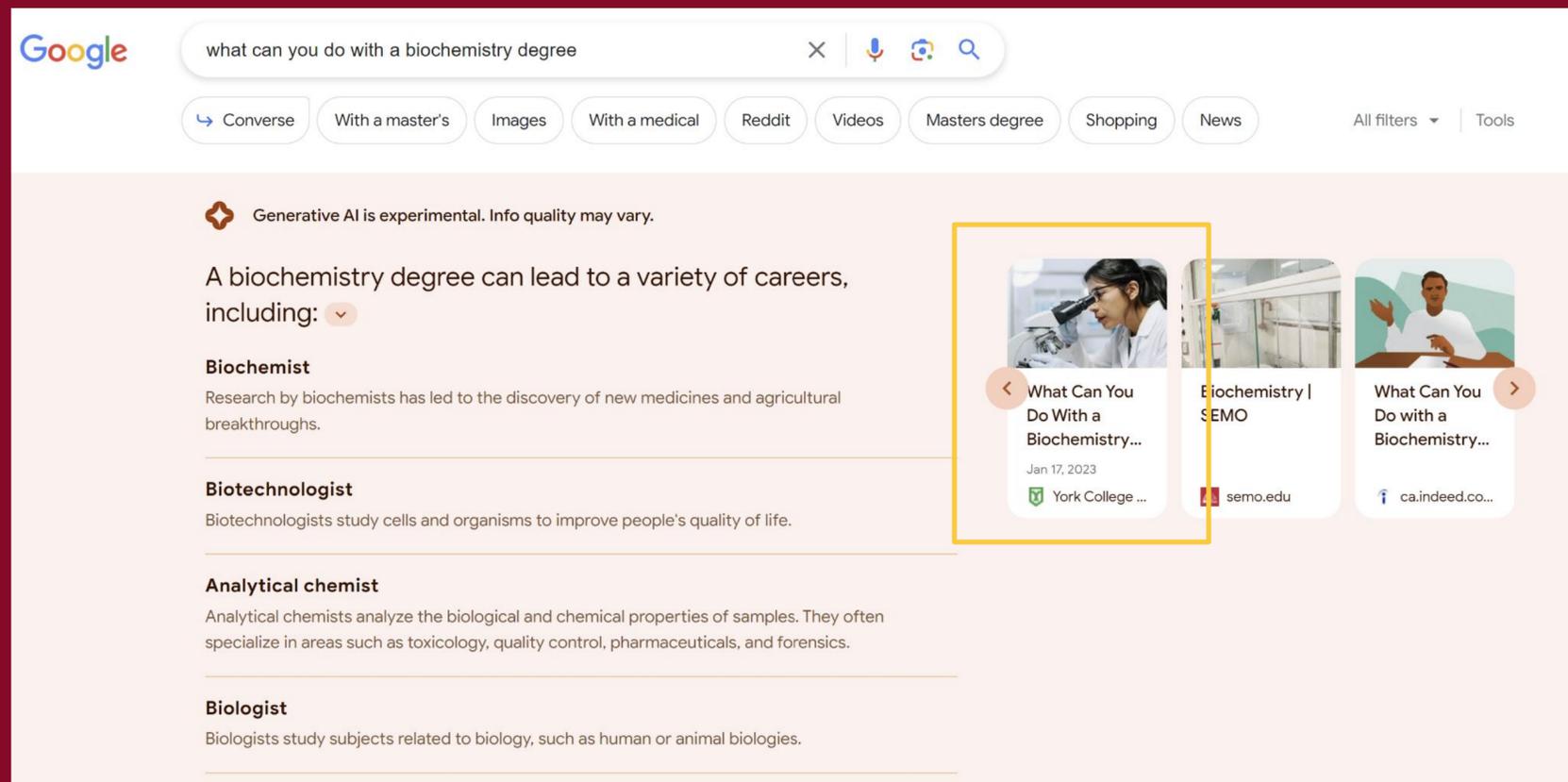
In scrolling panel carousel

In expanded Snapshot citations

Higher Education SGE Example - Faculty Content

- "Ask a follow up" chat box appears alone without Snapshot bubble
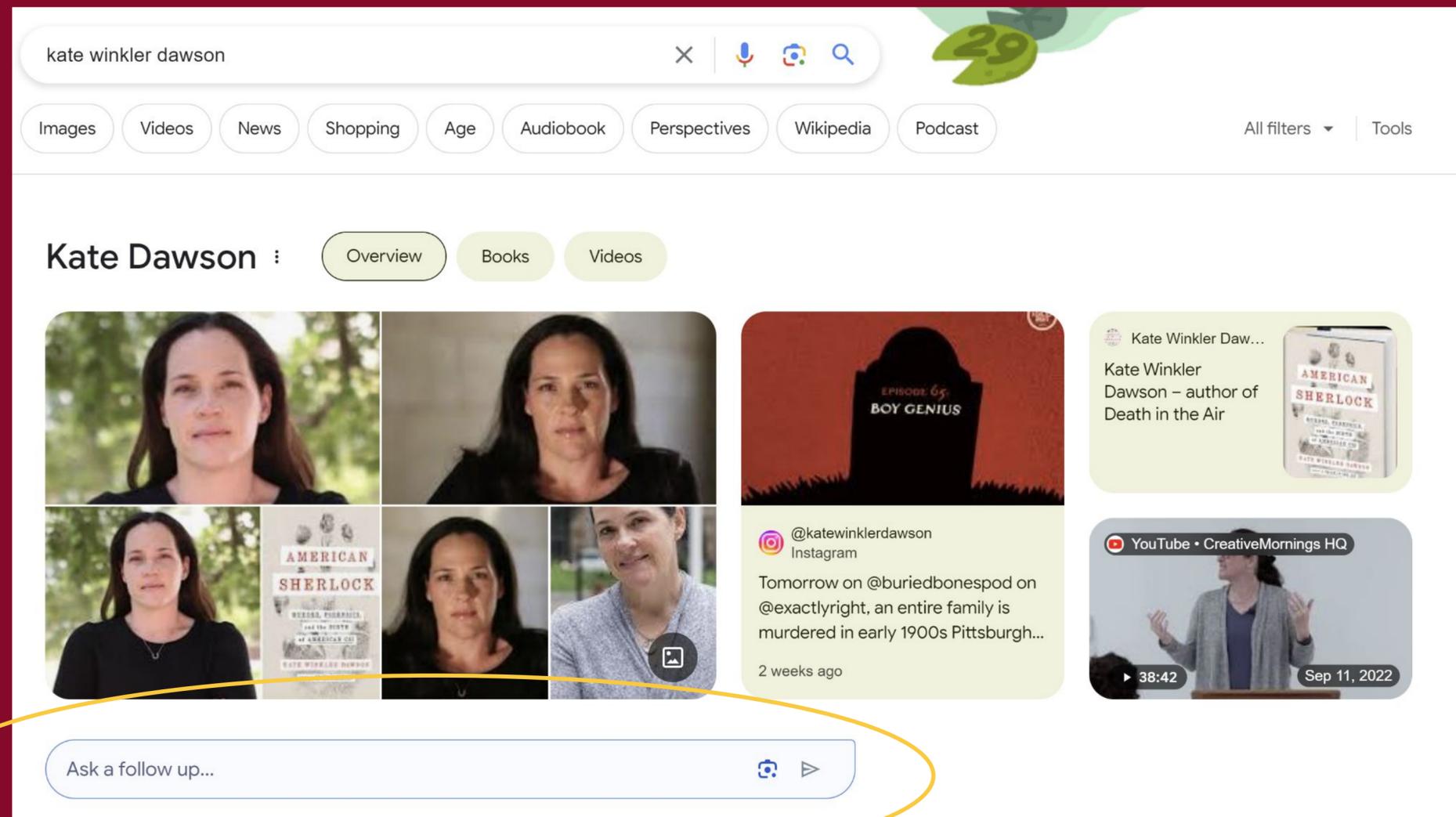
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How to Optimize Content for SGE

Areas of Focus

- Create Subject Matter Expert (SME) content that illustrates "Experience, Expertise, Authority, Trust (E-E-A-T)"
- Put greater focus on question-based long-tail keyword phrases
- Put more energy into image and video optimization

Adapt SEO and Content Strategy for the Age of SGE

- Prioritize authority management
  - Leverage subject matter experts within your institution
  - Focus thought leadership strategy on core pillars of knowledge
- Optimize for low-competition, long-tail keywords in robust academic and admissions content
  - Ex: "small colleges with internship programs in the new york city area with no application fee"
  - This through strong site architecture and H-tagged headings
- Pages with images have upper hand in appearing in carousel or panel-style citations, video appearances in SGE

Subject Matter Expert Content

- It's no longer good enough to just optimize program pages
- Build out pages that answer key questions:
  - What careers can I pursue with an MBA degree?
  - What's the difference between a computer science degree and a cybersecurity degree?
  - How can I become an accountant?
- Remember: with SGE search is becoming more **conversational**

Subject Matter Expert Content

Question-based long-tail keyword phrases

- Pivot your keyword research strategy to identify question-based long-tail queries
  - Google Search Console
  - Answer the Public
  - Search listening

Identifying Question-Based Searches in GSC

● In Google Search Console, you can create a regex filter to identify
question-based queries.
  ○ Regex: "what|why|how|when|where|who|^is|^are|vs"

Search type: Web ✎	Date: Last 3 months ✎	Query: Custom (regex) ✕	+ New	Last updated: 9 hours ago ⑦

QUERIES	PAGES	COUNTRIES	DEVICES	SEARCH APPEARANCE	DATES

Top queries	Clicks	↓ Impressions	CTR	Position
what is supply chain management	0	5,408	0%	63.8
what is a woman documentary	4	4,990	0.1%	33.6
what is business intelligence	0	4,252	0%	66.4
how to see ghosts	271	3,465	7.8%	1.6

Utilizing Answer the Public

- Answer the Public is a free keyword research website that allows you to identify question, preposition, and comparison searches
  - what jobs accounting degree
  - accounting degree with minor in finance
  - accounting degree vs. business management degree

Search Listening

- Add "search listening" to keyword research and content strategy
  - Does the AI Overview appear? If so, prompted or unprompted?
  - What type of content appears in the top three carousel panels?
  - What kind of answer is being generated? What kind of content is cited?
  - What are the follow-up questions? Can you answer them?
  - Does the information supplied in the Snapshot indicate the query is related to a certain position in the enrollment funnel?
  - What else appears in the search landscape outside of SGE?

Image Optimization

- Images are a critical aspect of appearing in the SGE carousel feature
- You want to ensure that your web pages have an engaging featured image that is optimized for search engine visibility
- Key optimization areas include:
  - Alt text
  - Image file name
  - File type/size

Cybersecurity vs. Computer Science: A...

sopa.t...

Alt Text

- Alt text, or alternative text, is essentially a backend description that you associate with an image in your CMS.
- Alt text is important for both SEO and accessibility.
- Alt text should be kept to 125 characters or less. It should accurately describe the image while also incorporating in keywords you are targeting for that page.

Alt Text Example

Alt text: Two **Colorado State University Civil Engineering majors** use survey equipment.

File name

- The image file name should always contain keywords and should never be a string of numbers and letters.
  - Not good: "xy23xb5.jpg"
  - Good: "civil-engineering-majors.jpg"

File Type/Size

- JPEG is the smallest image file size type, which means a JPEG image loads fast.
- Generally speaking, JPEGs are best used for most photos while PNGs are best used for charts, graphs, and other text images.
- In all cases, compress your images so that they are not larger than they need to be, unnecessarily bogging down page speed and load times.

Existing Technical SEO Best Practices to Stay On Top Of

- Optimizing metadata
- Maximizing crawl budget and submitting new pages for indexing
  - Ensures Google can easily find serve your most important SEO pages
- Building internal link strategy around UX and accessibility
  - Pages deeper in IA tend to be relevant to more specific queries and internal links build equity and value for harder to find content
- Implementing structured data

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Reporting Challenges with SGE

Drop in Click Through Rate (CTR) and Organic Traffic

- May see initial or sustained loss in website traffic and Click Through Rate (CTR) from informational/high funnel queries
- When reporting, weigh clicks against value of visibility, brand awareness
- Carousels getting the most CTR opportunities
- Less CTR for regular listings which get pushed way down the page with AI Overview
- We had this same panic when featured rich snippets rolled out
- For higher ed we have a long buyer's journey, so we may be in a better position

Drop in Click Through Rate (CTR) and Organic Traffic

- We have to adapt. Even if we don't get the click, don't we want our content appearing in AI Overview instead of someone else's? We have 0 chance of clicks if we aren't even there.
- "So, instead of anticipating a drop in website traffic, marketers and content creators should look for ways to increase it by leveraging the ranking opportunities presented by Google's generative AI." - Julia McCoy in a recent *Search Engine Land* article

Rank Tracking Tools

- Tools like SEMRush provide special SERP feature data for rich snippets, People Also Ask, and the like.
- We can predict that these tools will eventually effectively incorporate AI Overview appearances into the mix, but we are not there yet.

Google Search Console

- Dedicated tracking of AI Overview rankings and traffic not yet available in Google Search Console either.
- This may take longer, as GSC currently doesn't even track all the special SERP features to the same degree that third-party rank tracking tools do.

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The Future of Search

What We Still Don't Know About SGE

- When we will know the full behavior of AI Overviews and their impact on traffic and clicks
- How paid ads will be incorporated
- What, if any, reporting capabilities Google will give us in Search Console

A Search Behavior Evolution Is Coming

- Search is becoming much more conversational
  - We have already seen Google going in this direction over the past few years with rich snippets, People Also Ask, and other special SERP features
  - AI takes it to the next level, as it allows the search engine to build knowledge and search input based on previous queries
- People will change *how* they search
  - Queries will get longer, "head terms" will be less prominent
  - Users will adapt how they phrase queries, again more conversational

Google GSE is (another) new landscape in search—

And we are ready for it.

Thank You!

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