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The canonical tag: duplicate pages, www or not, and which address Google keeps

URLs, Redirects & Technical SEO

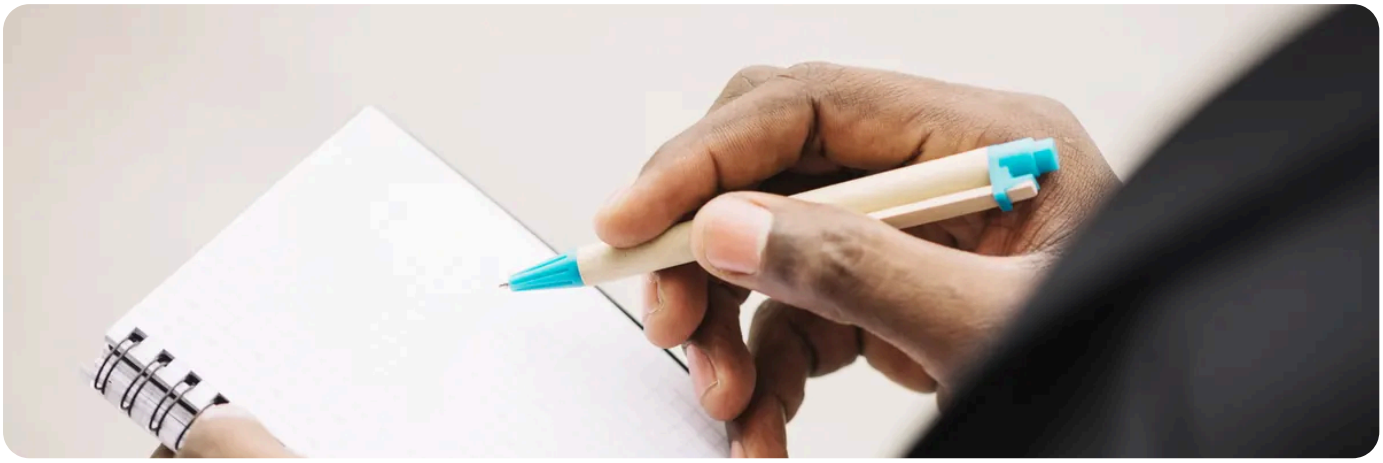
CODE	VERSION	COUNTRY · LANGUAGE
RLX-INT-KB-3690	v2026.10.10	International · English

MozOut International
RLX Holdings (Pty) Ltd. · Group RLX Holdings
Tax no. (SARS) 943 907 6234 · Registration no. (CIPC) 2025/667953/07

https://www.my.mozout.com/knowledgebase/3690

The canonical tag: duplicate pages, www or not, and which address Google keeps

URLs, Redirects & Technical SEO Created on **October 10, 2026** 2 min read



The same content can open at more than one address: with and without `www`, on `http` and `https`, with a slash at the end or without, or with `?colour=blue` after it. To Google, those are different pages with the same text. The **canonical tag** tells it which is the **main version** to keep and show. It is a hint, not an order: Google may choose another.

What it looks like, and where it goes

It sits inside the page's `<head>`, and each page points to its own address:

```
<link rel="canonical" href="https://yourcompany.com/colour-guide/">
```

This is called a **self-referencing canonical**. On a WordPress site, the SEO plugin and WordPress itself already write it. Check: open the page, view the page source (Ctrl+U) and search for `canonical`.

Choosing and tidying up, step by step

1. **Pick one form of the site address** and stay with it: `https` and with or without `www`. Only one.
2. **Redirect the other forms to it** with a 301. The tag alone does not replace the redirect. See **301 redirects**.
3. **Use the same address everywhere** (in WordPress settings, in the sitemap, in internal links) and in Search Console.
4. **Check pages that have variants**: filters, sort orders, addresses with campaign tags. They should point the canonical at the clean address. See **UTM links**.

5 **See what Google chose** in URL Inspection: it shows the canonical “declared by you” and the one “selected by Google”.

What the Search Console statuses say

Status	What it usually is
Alternate page with proper canonical tag	A variant pointing to the main one. That is correct.
Duplicate without user-selected canonical	Google found duplicates and none says which is the main one. Add the canonical.
Duplicate, Google chose different canonical than user	Your hint was ignored because the content or the links pointed to another. Look at which version the site’s links use.
Page with redirect	The address redirects; the indexed one is the destination. Normal.

Three mistakes that cost dearly.
Pointing every page’s canonical at the home page (Google stops seeing the others). Mixing canonical and `noindex` on the same page, which give opposite signals. And pointing a version in another language at the main one: each language is its own canonical (see **several languages and hreflang**).

Pages of a long list
(page 2, page 3) should point to themselves, not to page 1. And in shops, filters generate thousands of variants: see **getting a shop found on Google**.

NEED A HAND?

Does your site address open in two versions and you do not know how to join them? Tell us the domain and we will look at the server configuration.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- 301 redirects →
- Several languages or countries and hreflang →

- Why your site does not show on Google
- SSL certificates

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