How to perform a backlink audit on your website

Last Updated / Reviewed: Jan 10th, 2023 Execution Time: ~Starting from 2h



Goal: To execute a comprehensive SEO Backlink Audit on any website that clearly identifies what's working, what needs to be fixed, and action steps on what to work on first.

Ideal Outcome: The end-user receives a comprehensive audit that lets them know the state of their current backlink health, along with specific action steps on what to do next.

Prerequisites or requirements: None.

Why this is important: Backlinks are an extremely important ranking factor for Search Engines, you want to make sure you're taking full advantage of the links you are getting, and are not getting penalized by poor links that you might have acquired throughout the time.

Where this is done: In your browser, Google Docs, Google Sheets, SEMRush and Ahrefs.

When this is done: Periodically, every 3-6 months or when you suspect you might have been penalized due to your link profile.

Who does this: The person responsible for SEO.



□ Environment setup

Create a SEMRush account if you don't have one already:

- Go to https://www.semrush.com/signup/;
- 2. Enter your details and create your account;

Note: If you don't have a paid account with SEMRush follow this SOP very closely or you run the risk of running out of reports before you are able to complete the SOP.

Note 2: SEMRush offers a free 7-day trial on all their plans. If it's your first time using SEMRush and you are only going to perform one audit, a free trial would be enough to perform this SOP.

Create an Ahrefs account If you don't have one already:

- 1. Go to https://ahrefs.com/;
- On the top click 'Start a 7-day trial for \$7';
- 3. Select your plan (unless your website is extremely large the Standard plan works for this SOP) and pay for your trial.

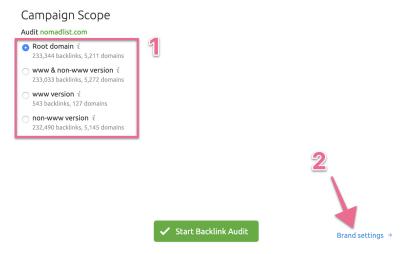
Note: After the 7 days you will be charged the full cost of the plan, if you have never tried Ahrefs and just want to perform this SOP once, the 7-days are enough for you.

□ SEMRush - Identify potentially toxic backlinks

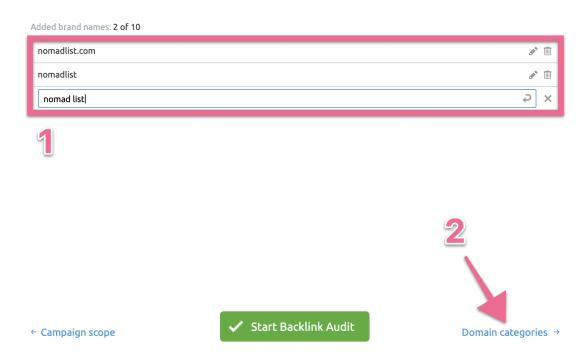
- 1. Log in to SEMRush here: https://www.semrush.com/login/
- 2. Click "Backlink Audit" on the sidebar → Enter the website that you want to audit → Click "Start Backlink Audit":



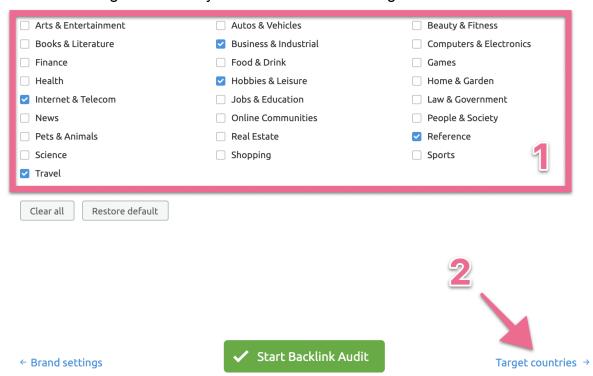
 Select "Root domain" (unless you are sure you want one of the other options) → Click "Brand settings";



4. Enter all the possible ways (common variations, common acronyms) your brand could be mentioned online → Click "Domain category"



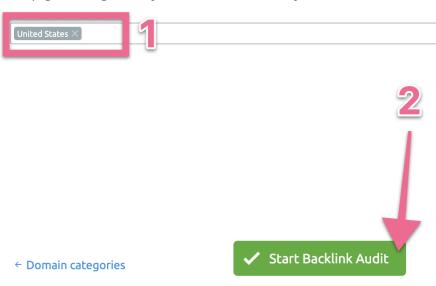
5. Select the categories that fit your website → Click "Target countries":



6. Select the target countries that fit your website → Click "Start Backlink Audit":

Select countries

Select countries associated with your targeted audience. This data will help us to determine if the language of webpages sending links to your website is relevant to your domain.



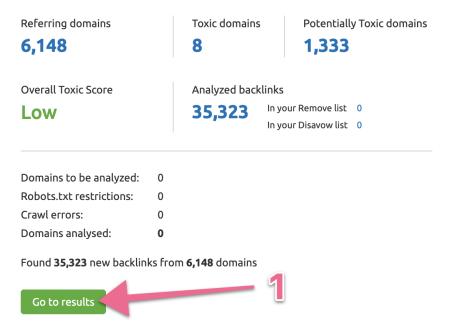
Your audit will start to process, this might take a few minutes depending on how large your site is.

Backlink Audit: nomadlist.com ~

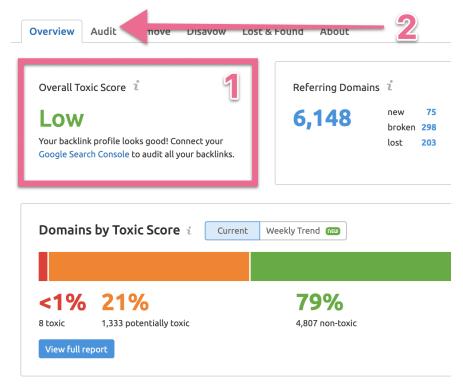
0/8 steps: collecting and analyzing your backlinks

8. When it's ready, you'll get a success message, click "Go to results":

ClickMinded SOP Library



9. Glance over the 'Overall Toxic Score', this will already give you a general idea regarding how spammy the link profile is (and how much work you'll have to do), the lower the better. → Click "Audit".



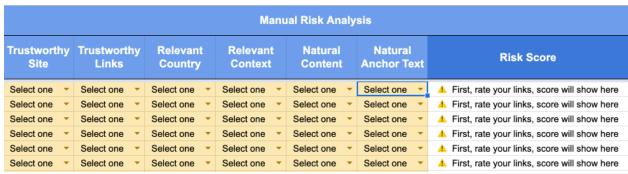
10. In the top-right corner click "Export to CSV":

- 11. Open the CSV file in Google Sheets.
- 12. Open and make a copy of the <u>ClickMinded SOP Library Backlink Audit</u>

 <u>Template</u> (Spam Audit Sheet) → Paste the values from the CSV file you opened in the previous step into the template:

	A	В		С	D	E	F	G	Н		
1	NomadList - Backlink Audit					To make edits: Click File - Make a copy to save a copy of this resource (you have to be logged into your Google account)					
2	Comment	Action		Status	Domai Score	Score	Page Score	Source URL	Source page title		
3	Spammy aggregator	Remove	•	To-do *	1	0	10	http://o-o-0-o-o.co/	o-o-0-o-o Economic Travel & Shopping		
4	Spammy aggregator	Remove	*	To-do "	1	0	10	http://www.o-o-0-o-o.co/	o-o-0-o-o Travel & Shopping		
5	Spammy aggregator	Remove	*	To-do "	1	0	0	http://o-o-0-o-o.ooo/	o-o-0-o-o Travel & Shopping		
6	Spammy aggregator	Remove	*	To-do ~	1	0	1	http://o-o-7-o-o.com/	Travel Search Shell! Useful Travel services in one		
7	Not spam	No Action	*	To-do *	14	0	0	http://colmoli.cf/cost-of-living-in-canggu-in-jun-2019-noma-	dli Cost Of Living In Canggu In Jun 2019 Nomadlist -		
8	Spammy aggregator	Remove	*	To-do "	1	0	0	http://www.o-o-6-o-o.com/	o-o-0-o-o Travel & Shopping		
9	Spammy aggregator	Remove	*	To-do *	1	0	1	http://o-o-7-o-o.ru/	Travel Search Shell! Useful Travel services in one		
10	Possibly a negative SEO campaign	Disavow	*	To-do *	2	0	0	https://vandrouki.asia/2019/samye-poleznye-prilozheniya-	-s Самые полезные приложения и сайты для путе		
11	Possibly a negative SEO campaign	Disavow	*	To-do *	1	0	13	http://misconceptionn.enfapfnnir.ml/misco18261.html	xvideos downloader apps for iphone 6, Xvideos He		
12	Possibly a negative SEO campaign	Disavow	*	To-do "	1	0	13	http://scholarshippen.enfapfnnir.ml/schol18391.html	the only way is essex s15e02 download, The rest		
13	Possibly a negative SEO campaign	Disavow	*	To-do *	1	0	3	http://alupvjts.walnutmortality.gg/alupv23402.html	ssr 2011 keygen, He personally wouldn't have thou		
14	Possibly a negative SEO campaign	Disavow	*	To-do ~	1	0	3	http://diffusecatholi.walnutmortality.gq/diffu16421.html	songs indian download video, She neither seemed		
15	Possibly a negative SEO campaign	Disavow	•	To-do 🔻	1	0	3	http://dnsyrvos.walnutmortality.gq/dnsyr27432.html	hack odnoklassniki ok.exe download, Is it all over		
16	Possibly a negative SEO campaign	Disavow	*	To-do "	1	0	3	http://elusiveforward.walnutmortality.gq/penis-pumps/elusi	26 elusi2690, It would be nice to - elusiveforward.wali		
17	Possibly a negative SEO campaign	Disavow	•	To-do *	1	0	3	http://fervorepoch.danishplume.gg/schools-dirs/fervo2270	6.t fervo2270, Taking a prominent part as - fervorepor		
18	Possibly a negative SEO campaign	Disavow	~	To-do *	1	0	3	http://frigidjournali.walnutmortality.gg/frigi19889.html	bokep briana banks, Bokep RUMMY [gaily] Keep		
19	Possibly a negative SEO campaign	Disavow	*	To-do 🔻	1	0	3	http://fulcrumvulture.walnutmortality.gq/city/fulcr28961.htm	duke nukem manhattan project crack free downloa		
20	Possibly a negative SEO campaign	Disavow	*	To-do "	1	0	3	http://gjkvaixp.walnutmortality.gq/penis-enlargement/gjkva	20 gjkva2018, Such minority was precisely the - gjkva		
21	Possibly a negative SEO campaign	Disavow	*	To-do 🔻	1	0	3	http://gravytennissho.danishplume.gq/index.php/menu-act	ivi gravy2985, The defeat at Nordlingen cost - gravyte		
22	Possibly a negative SEO campaign	Disavow	*	To-do 🔻	1	0	3	http://indoctrinatemi.walnutmortality.gq/indoc14976.html	aloo chaat movie download free, But the best was		
23	Possibly a negative SEO campaign	Disavow	*	To-do 🔻	1	0	3	http://kdeznmmt.walnutmortality.gq/kdezn10862.html	minecolony download 1.7.2, But Lord look you sir-		
24	Possibly a negative SEO campaign	Disavow	*	To-do 🔻	1	0	3	http://khzxstum.walnutmortality.gq/khzxs23360.html	dune film download free, The war has gone on - kl		
25	Possibly a negative SEO campaign	Disavow	*	To-do 🔻	1	0	3	http://kkigoyvt.walnutmortality.gq/kkigo24212.html	canto passaro preto download gratis, This they dic		
26	Possibly a negative SEO campaign	Disavow	*	To-do "	1	0	3	http://kytsvdbo.walnutmortality.gg/kytsv18751.html	td ameritrade android app download, Sir said the		
27	Possibly a negative SEO campaign	Disavow	*	To-do "	1	0	3	http://machinegundist.danishplume.gg/outdoor-and-leisure	n/m machi277. So Shahrvar reioiced greatly and - mac		

- 13. Sort by Toxic Score (Column O)
- 14. Analyze each link individually in the "Manual Risk Analysis" columns and that link will be assigned a Risk Score



Note: By default the Risk Score will be calculated as:

- Low If you replied "Yes" to every dropdown;
- Medium If you replied "No" in one of the dropdowns;
- High If you replied "No" to two or more of the dropdowns;

If you want to change the way this score is calculated you can do so by editing the lower and upper boundaries:

(Optional) Edit the bounds below to change								
Rating	Lower bound	Upper bound						
High	2	6						
Medium	1	1						
Low	0	0						

Important: Make sure that the ranges do not overlap.

- 15. In the end, it will be up to you to decide whether or not that backlink would be something that you will want to have on your profile, but be mindful of the score you get on the spreadsheet, if there's a 'Medium' risk or higher, you might want to try and remove that link from your link profile.
- 16. For each link select which "Action" should be performed:
 - a. **Remove:** This should usually be the first course of action unless you are sure contacting the owner of the website will have no effect.
 - b. Disavow: This option should be used cautiously and only if across all your profile there is a considerable number of spammy, artificial, or low-quality links that have caused a manual penalty or are likely to cause one in the future.
 - **c. No Action:** If you believe the link is not spammy or want to keep it in your link profile, select this option.

NomadList - Backlink Audit - SPAM									
Comment	Action	Status							
Spammy aggregator	Please select an action	•	To-do	*					
Spammy aggregator	Remove	•	To-do	*					
Spammy aggregator	Remove	•	To-do	*					
Spammy aggregator	Remove	•	To-do	*					
Not spam	No Action	•	To-do	*					

Note: If you want to add a comment, there's a comment section to the left, and on the right column you're able to track your progress.

17. Column 'O' of the spreadsheet will have a metric called "Toxic Score'. The toxic score is a proprietary metric by SEMrush that represents how dangerous that specific link might be for your website. It's based on a scale of 0 to 100 with 0 being 'Good' and 100 being 'Very Toxic'. → Go through every row of your spreadsheet until you reach a Toxic Score of 45 or below.

Note: Ideally, you would go through every link on that spreadsheet but if you have little time available and a very large link profile that might not be possible.

□ Take action on spammy backlinks

- 1. For every link with an assigned 'Action':
 - a. If the action is "Remove":
 - Go to the website and try to find the details of the person responsible for its content or a contact form.
 - 1. Look for a "Contact us", "Contribute to our blog", or similar link in the top navigation, sidebar, or footer of the site.
 - If you find the name of the website owner/editor, try looking for their Twitter profile and check if they have an email listed on their profile.
 - Use the <u>Mail Hunter Chrome</u> extension. If you are using the free version of Email Hunter, only use this as your last option since you get only 150 requests per month.
 - a. **Note 1:** You might get contact information for the author, but sometimes it will be someone in the company's marketing team or the website's webmaster.
 - b. Note 2: Always try to reach out to an actual person instead of a catchall email address (e.g. info@domain.com, marketing@domain.com, hello@domain.com)

- c. **Note 3:** If there are several contacts, default to the one in which hunter shows the most sources
- 4. Use a Whois lookup tool to see if you can find the contact of the owner in the domain registration info.
- ii. Send them a request to remove the link to your site. If you don't know what to write, you can use the template below:

Hi,

This is [Your Name] from [Your Business Name], I'm reaching out because I've noticed on this page [Backlink Source] you are linking to [Your Business Name].

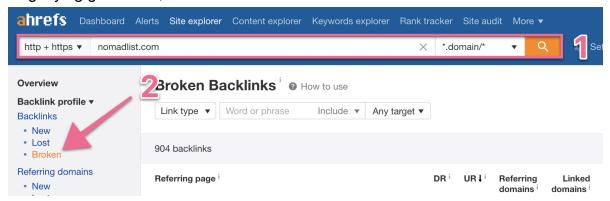
While we appreciate the mention it would be great to us if you could remove the direct link to our site and replace it with a brand mention, a non-linked URL, or just removing the URL entirely.

Thank you, [Your Name]

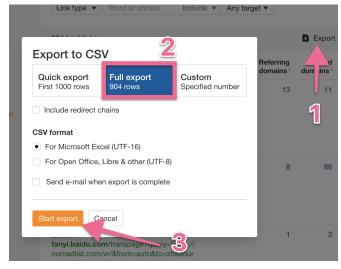
- **b.** If the action is "Disavow": Disavow those links on your site using following the instructions on SOP 080 (web version)
- c. If the action is "No Action": Skip to the next URL on your list.

☐ Identify 404 (broken) backlinks

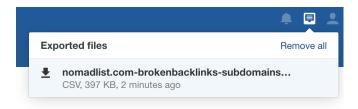
1. Open <u>ahrefs</u>, and enter the site you want to analyze in the box, click the magnifying glass icon, and then click "Broken":



Click 'Export' → 'Full export' → 'Start Export'



3. On the notification icon, download your exported CSV file when it's ready

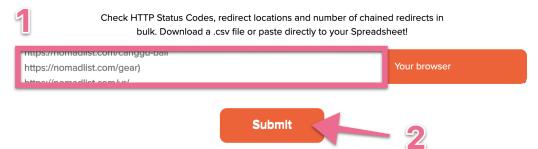


4. Copy the content of that CSV over to the <u>ClickMinded SOP Library - Backlink</u>
<u>Audit Template</u> (404 Audit Sheet)

	A	В	С		D	Е	F	G	
1	Nomad	List - Backlink Audit - 40	04s		To make edits: Click File - Make a copy to save a copy of this resource (you have to be to				
2	Comment	Action	Status		Domain Rating	URL Rating (desc)	Referring Domains	Referring Page URL	
3	Redirect to https://nomadlist.co	301 Redirect 🔻	Updated Backlink	•	66	21	13	https://levels.io/startups/	
4	Typo in the article, contact writ	Contact to Request Fix =	Contacted (waiting)	*	72	19	9	https://doist.com/blog/travel-remote-work-digital-nomad/	
5	Link is not live anymore	Do Nothing	Done	*	82	13	1	http://fanyi.baidu.com/transpage?query=https://nomadlist.co	
6	Link is not live anymore	Do Nothing	Done	*	82	12	2	http://fanyi.baidu.com/transpage?query=https://nomadlist.co	
7	Feature unavailable redirect al	301 Redirect ▼	301 Redirected	*	87	12	0	https://www.producthunt.com/posts/nomad-list-5-0/reviews	
8	Spam	Do Nothing	Done	*	18	12	5	http://alexatop1m.kritih.com/List-19.html	
9	Spam	Do Nothing	Done	*	79	11	0	https://a.pr-cy.ru/nomadlist.com/	
10	Spam	Do Nothing	Done	*	79	11	0	https://a.pr-cy.ru/en/nomadlist.com/	
11	Link is not live anymore	Do Nothing	Done	*	72	11	1	https://www.geektime.com/2016/11/23/5-holiday-travel-apps	
12	Project abandoned. Create a r	Bring Page Back	To-do	*	65	10	0	https://www.netted.net/extra-netted/nomadlist-vr-videos-web	
13	Feature unavailable redirect al	301 Redirect ▼	301 Redirected	-	56	10	0	https://wip.chat/@neosilky/todos/111542?page=2	
14	Feature unavailable redirect al	301 Redirect ▼	301 Redirected	-	56	10	0	https://wip.chat/@neosilky/todos/90589	
15	Feature unavailable redirect al	301 Redirect ▼	301 Redirected	*	56	10	0	https://wip.chat/@neosilky/todos/74207?page=2	
16	Feature unavailable redirect al	301 Redirect ▼	301 Redirected	*	56	9	0	https://wip.chat/@neosilky/todos/109878?page=2	
17	Feature unavailable redirect al	301 Redirect ▼	301 Redirected	*	56	9	0	https://wip.chat/@neosilky/todos/28625?page=2	
18		Please select an action *	To-do	*	21	9	1	https://placestowork.net/larnaca	
19		Please select an action 💌	To-do	*	56	9	0	https://wip.chat/@neosilky/todos/106007?page=2	
20		Please select an action 🔻	To-do	*	56	9	0	https://wip.chat/@neosilky/todos/74790	
21		Please select an action 🔻	To-do	*	21	9	1	https://placestowork.net/burlington	
22		Please select an action *	To-do	~	21	9	1	https://placestowork.net/batumi	

- 5. (Optional, might save you time) Make sure those URLs are still 404'ing and remove them from the list if they aren't, using <u>URLitor.com</u>:
 - a. Copy the "Link URL" from column 'K' \rightarrow Paste those lines in the text box \rightarrow Click 'Submit'

Bulk HTTP Status Checker



b. You will get a list of the same URLs and information on their current status, if the URL does not display a '404' you don't need to analyze it in the next steps and you can remove it from your list. (You can either do that manually or export a CSV from URLitor and cross reference it with the list on your <u>ClickMinded SOP Library - Backlink Audit Template</u>)

JRL .	HTTP Status	HTTP Status (final destination)	# of Redirects	Response Time
https://nomadlist.com/coworking/larnaca	200	200	0	0.55 seconds
https://nomadlist.com/canggu-bali	404	404	0	0.35 seconds
https://nomadlist.com/gear)	404	404	0	0.34 seconds
https://nomadlist.com/vr/	404	404	0	0.44 seconds
https://nomadlist.com/coworking/burlington	200	200	0	0.52 seconds
https://nomadlist.com/@neosilky	404	404	0	0.37 seconds

- 6. For each link, select which "Action" should be performed:
 - a. **Contact to request fix:** Select this option if the reason for the 404 is due to improper linking (i.e. a typo, or a parameter that doesn't exist) or you think it would be better if they update their page instead.
 - i. Example: https://nomadlist.com/gear)
 Note that the parenthesis ')' at the end isn't supposed to be part of the link
 - b. **Redirect:** Select this option if you're going to redirect the currently 404'ing page on your site to another relevant page on your site.
 - i. Example: https://nomadlist.com/chiang-mai-thailand/ and https://nomadlist.com/chiang-mai/
 Note that the first page is a 404 but it actually could just be redirecting to the new page where that content exists.
 - c. **Bring page back:** Select this option if you're going to recreate the content that once was available on that page, or create a similar piece of content.
 - i. **Example**: https://nomadlist.com/vr/
 Note that the page used to be a virtual reality tool that is not available anymore. That page's content can be recreated to mention what happened to the tool, and provide the users with added value.

- d. **Nothing:** Select this option if you're going to take no action on this 404'ing page.
 - i. Example: https://nomadlist.com/default.htm
 Even the URL alone doesn't give us much information regarding why no action will be taken on this page, looking at the links that point to this page it appears to be a negative SEO (Spam) campaign that was pointed towards that URL. Therefore no action will be taken since those links are not valuable and not 'real'.

□ Take action on 404'd backlinks

- 1. For every link with an assigned 'Action:
 - a. If the action is "Contact to request fix":
 - 1. Go to the website and try to find the details of the person responsible for its content or a contact form.
 - i. Look for a "Contact us", "Contribute to our blog", or similar link in the top navigation, sidebar, or footer of the site.
 - ii. If you find the name of the website owner/editor, try looking for their Twitter profile and check if they have an email listed on their profile.
 - iii. Use the <u>Mail Hunter Chrome</u> extension. If you are using the free version of Email Hunter, only use this as your last option since you get only 150 requests per month.
 - a. Note 1: You might get contact information for the author, but sometimes it will be someone in the company's marketing team or the website's webmaster.
 - Note 2: Always try to reach out to an actual person instead of a catchall email address (e.g. info@domain.com, marketing@domain.com, hello@domain.com)



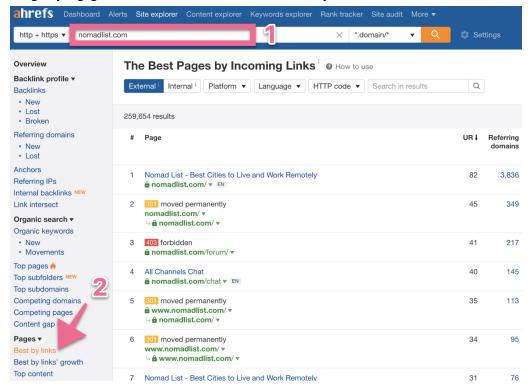
- c. **Note 3:** If there are several contacts, default to the one in which hunter shows the most sources
- iv. Use a Whois lookup tool to see if you can find the contact of the owner in the domain registration info.
- 2. Send them a request to fix the link to your site, explaining that it will improve their reader's experience if the link is corrected.
- b. If the action is "Redirect": Redirect that page to the desired page (ideally you have written this down in the 'Comment' column), to do so on WordPress you can follow SOP051 (web version)
- c. If the action is "Bring page back": Create the new content that you will be adding to that page. If it's a blog post you may want to follow R001-Writing SEO Friendly Blog posts that Convert.

Remember: The URL of that page will have to be the same as the URL that is currently 404'ing.

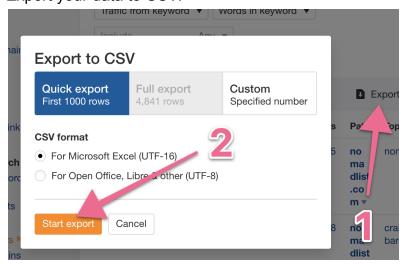
d. If the action is "Do Nothing": Skip to the next one.

Analyze your top linked pages

1. Open <u>ahrefs</u>, and enter the site you want to analyze in the box, click the magnifying glass icon, and then click "Best by links":



2. Export your data to CSV:



 Paste your data on the <u>ClickMinded SOP Library - Backlink Audit Template</u> (<u>Popular Pages Sheet</u>):

NomadList - Backlink Audit - Popular Pages			To make edits: Click File + Make a copy to save a copy of this resource (you have to be logged						
Comment	Action	URL Rating	Page URL	Page Title					
Homepage		82	https://nomadlist.com/	Nomad List - Best Cities to Live and					
Homepage		45	http://nomadlist.com/						
Feature (Forum)		41	https://nomadlist.com/forum/						
Feature (Chat)		40	https://nomadlist.com/chat	All Channels Chat					
Homepage		35	https://www.nomadlist.com/						
Homepage		34	http://www.nomadlist.com/						
Location Card (Chiang Mai)		31	https://nomadlist.com/chiang-mai	Cost of Living in Chiang Mai. Prices					
Signup	Redirect or Canonicalize	31	https://nomadlist.com/?join=nomadlist	Nomad List - Best Cities to Live and					
Signup	Redirect or Canonicalize	31	31 https://join.nomadlist.com/						
Location Card (Chiang Mai) Redirect, Canonicalize, or Mei			https://nomadlist.com/chiang-mai-thailand						
Tool (Financial Independence Calculator)			https://nomadlist.com/fire						
Not True - Negative SEO Campaign	Remove Backlinks	27	https://nomadlist.com/forum/t/whats-the-best-place-to-incorporate-an-online-business/6711?p						
Location (Berlin)		26	https://nomadlist.com/berlin	Cost of Living in Berlin. Prices Upda					
Feature (Open Startup)		31	https://nomadlist.com/open	Open Startup - Nomad List					
		29	https://nomadlist.com/help	Nomad List — Help					
		27	https://nomadlist.com/blog/						
		21	https://nomadlist.com/gay-friendly-cities-in-south-americ	a}					
		24	https://nomadlist.com/bangkok	Cost of Living in Bangkok. Prices U					
		23	https://nomadlist.com/barcelona	Cost of Living in Barcelona. Prices U					
			https://nomadlist.com/chat/all_channels	All Channels Chat					
		25	https://nomadlist.com/best-cities-for-digital-nomads	Best Cities for Digital Nomads					
		22	https://nomadlist.com/budapest	Cost of Living in Budapest. Prices U					
		21	https://nomadlist.com/bangkok-thailand						
		26	https://nomadlist.com/canggu	Cost of Living in Canggu, Bali. Price					
		20	https://nomadlist.com/berlin-germany						
		24	https://nomadlist.com/cities-with-fast-internet	Cities with Fast Internet					

7. For each link, add comments and actions as needed. You might use the comment section to identify what kind of page it is to spot patterns. For example, which types of pages and content are best at generating links, or you might find some additional actions like 'canonicalization' that need to be performed on those pages.

Example of possible outcomes:

- "Tools do especially well for link building"
- "Profile pages on Asian locations are linked more than any other locations in the world"
- "Spanish websites use us a lot as a reference"
- "These URLs are actually the same page they should be canonicalized"
- 8. That's it! Take those insights into consideration for your next link building campaign and the next pieces of content that you create. If there were SEO issues that you have identified on this section of the website, assign them the right action and follow-up on it.