Skyscraper technique gets described like it's a single trick: find content that already performs, make something better, then ask for links. The reality is less magical and more craft. You are trying to do two things at once. First, you need to produce a page that deserves attention on its own merits. Second, you need to give other people a reason to swap their existing link for yours without making them feel like you're wasting their time.

When I've seen the approach work consistently, it wasn't because the content was "more." It was because the content was more specific, more useful at the moment someone needed it, and easier to reference. Links tend to follow clarity and proof, not just length.

What "skyscraper" really means in practice

The simplest way to think about skyscraper is this: you're looking at a topic where other sites have already decided that a specific resource is worth citing. That citation is a signal, not a guarantee. Your job is to build a superior resource that fits the same intent, then make outreach feel like an upgrade rather than a favor.

"Better" can take a few forms, and you should choose the kind that actually matches the niche you're in. In technical spaces, better often means accuracy, completeness, and fewer gotchas. In competitive industries, better often means a clearer narrative, better examples, and templates people can reuse. In either case, the goal is the same, make the page the one someone would bookmark and share.

A common misconception is that skyscraper requires you to write something longer than what already exists. Length sometimes helps, but the pages that win are usually the ones that answer the question someone has after reading the top results.

If a competing page includes a high-level overview but skips the part that makes it actionable, your edge might be a section that shows the actual workflow, the decision points, and the risks. If the competing page lists tools without explaining trade-offs, your edge might be an evaluation framework and selection criteria. If the competing page has screenshots that don't match current interfaces, your edge might be fresh images and updated steps.

The skyscraper move is not "more words." It's "less friction."

Step zero: pick a page worth trying to improve

Skyscraper works best when the target pages are strong and linkable. If the best available content on the topic is weak, your "upgrade" might still be an improvement, but you'll struggle to get the kind of easy link acquisition you're hoping for. You can still win in that scenario, it just requires more proof and broader distribution.

Here's what I look for before I even touch writing.

First, I scan the current top pages ranking for the query. Not to copy, but to understand the intent. Are they trying to teach, persuade, compare, or troubleshoot? Then I look at the pages that already earned links. Those are often the ones that match a real reference need, not just a marketing angle.

Second, I check whether the content is getting cited in articles, resources, or roundups. If links are coming from people writing guides, curating tools, or answering specific subquestions, that's an environment where a better version can slot in cleanly.

Third, I evaluate whether the page has "surface" issues that you can realistically fix. Examples include outdated screenshots, missing sections, thin data, vague instructions, or a lack of examples. If the page is strong but just not

thorough, you might need a bigger lift. If the page is sloppy, missing basics, or poorly structured, you can often build a clear advantage without boiling the ocean.

Find the right competitors without copying them

Your first instinct might be to search for "best X" and pick the longest page. That's usually not the best method. Instead, use the competitor pages that have evidence of earning attention.

Practical approach I've used:

- Start with the query you care about, then open the top results and look for pages that feel "reference-grade." They should have sections someone would cite.
- Use a backlink tool to identify which pages are actually acquiring links, not just ranking.
- For each promising competitor, open a handful of linking pages and see why they linked. If they referenced a statistic, a framework, a checklist, or a specific method, you have a clear target for what to recreate and improve.

The key is to avoid mimicry. You are not trying to outwrite the page. You're trying to out-reference it.

Build the skyscraper with a specific advantage

When people fail at skyscraper, it's often because their "upgrade" stays generic. They add an extra section nobody asked for, rephrase what's already there, and tack on a few citations. That rarely earns swaps.

A better strategy is to choose an advantage that changes the usefulness of the page. Here are several advantage types that tend to work across niches, with examples of what "better" looks like.

Improve the evidence, not just the explanation

Many guides explain a concept but don't provide enough proof for readers who need to justify decisions. If the competitor page makes claims with little support, you can improve by adding data points you can defend, clarifying methodology, and distinguishing between what's known and what's inferred.

For example, if a page recommends an approach for link building but doesn't discuss outcomes or constraints, you can add context like typical timelines, what affects results, and what you'd do differently for different site sizes. You don't need perfect numbers, you need honest constraints.

Add a missing workflow

If the best page on the topic is "here's what to do," but it doesn't show "here's how to do it," your upgrade can become the resource that people actually follow.

A workflow section can include the inputs, the sequence, the decision points, and common failure modes. Even better if you include a mini example. If you demonstrate how a person would evaluate a prospect, or how they would structure research, you reduce the time and uncertainty for the reader.

Make it easier to reference

Linking favors pages that are easy to cite. That usually means strong headings, clear definitions, and sections that answer common questions. If a competitor's page has a wall of text, seo content writing you'll often win by giving readers clean segments they can quote or summarize.

Think like a writer who's busy. If they can quickly find the part that matches their sentence, they're more likely to link you.

Update what's stale and keep what's correct

A surprising amount of linkable content is old in subtle ways: UI screenshots changed, tool features renamed, policies updated, or the "recommended" approach no longer matches current realities. You can often improve by revisiting the topic and refreshing the parts that caused confusion.

The trick is to stay honest. If something in the original is still correct, don't discard it just because it's older. Keep the best parts, update the rest, and call out what changed and why.

The anatomy of a page that earns links

When you're trying to earn links through skyscraper, you should design for three reader types: the person searching, the person referencing, and the person who will decide whether your page is worth citing.

A searcher wants to quickly confirm that the page answers their intent. A reference writer wants to locate a specific segment fast. A link placer wants to feel safe linking out, meaning your content should be credible and not brittle.

That suggests a few structural habits that matter more than people admit.

- Start with a clear framing of the topic and what problem the page solves.
- Use descriptive headings that reflect common subquestions, not clever phrasing.
- Include concrete examples early enough that readers can see how the method works.
- Add a section that addresses constraints. "What if you can't do X?" "What if you're starting from scratch?" "What if your site is new?" These questions come up in outreach emails because they're the exact objections people have.
- Close with actionable guidance, not generic encouragement.

You don't need a formal "guide" style for all niches, but you do need to make the page feel like a resource someone would cite in a rush.

A reality check: better content is necessary, but not sufficient

Even if your page is genuinely superior, you still have to earn attention. Links rarely happen automatically, especially in competitive markets.

The reason outreach is part of skyscraper is simple: most people linking to a resource are not constantly searching for "the best new version." They rely on what they already know, what they're currently writing, and what they can quickly validate.

Your job is to bring your page into their field of view at the exact moment it helps them. That means your outreach shouldn't read like a demand for links. It should read like a helpful suggestion with a clear rationale.

How to evaluate "linkability" before publishing

Before you hit publish, I run a quick internal audit. I'm trying to predict the kinds of emails I'd want to receive if I were writing an article in the niche.

Ask yourself:

- Can someone summarize the page in one sentence accurately?
- Do you have at least a few sections that stand on their own as references?
- Is there enough specificity that another writer can cite you without embarrassment?
- Is the page current and consistent, with no obvious outdated screenshots or questionable claims?

If the answer is “not really,” you still have time. Fixing structure and adding one or two high-value segments often does more than polishing wording.

Outreach: upgrade the recipient’s work, not your ego

Skyscraper outreach works best when your email makes it easy for the recipient to say yes. That means clarity, relevance, and respect for their time.

A message that works tends to do three things:

First, it acknowledges what they were already referencing or covering. Second, it explains what’s better in your resource in a concrete way. Third, it gives a low-effort path to act, such as suggesting where your link could fit.

Avoid vague claims like “we made it better.” Better needs specifics. If the competitor page lacks examples, say that. If it’s outdated, say that. If it includes a framework, mention it.

Also, don’t overreach. If their article is already perfect for their audience, don’t try to force a swap. Sometimes the right outcome is a mention in a different context, like a follow-up resource or an internal link update.

A short list of outreach mistakes that sink campaigns

- Sending the same template to everyone without tailoring the “why.”
- Pointing to your improvements without connecting them to the recipient’s content.
- Ignoring the quality of the existing link, which can make you look like you’re chasing quantity.
- Overclaiming what your page does, especially if the improvement is really just more depth.
- Writing without checking whether your content is actually more up to date or more accurate.

These aren’t theoretical. They show up in the replies you get, in the quiet no’s, and in the way people stop opening future emails.

The workflow I trust when doing skyscraper (and iterating fast)

You can treat skyscraper like a repeatable process. The important part is iteration. You’ll learn what kind of “better” actually resonates only after you see how people respond, even if the page is well crafted.

Here’s the lean workflow that tends to keep the work focused:

1. Choose one competitor page with evidence of links and a clear reference function.
2. Audit what’s missing, outdated, or hard to reference, then pick one or two upgrades that directly fix those gaps.
3. Produce the improved page with strong headings, examples, and constraints baked in.
4. Publish, then do light outreach to writers linking to the competitor or writing on closely related subtopics.
5. Track replies and adjust the page if legitimate concerns show up (for example, add missing examples or clarify methodology).

That last step matters. If someone says, “This section is helpful but I wish you covered X,” that’s a gift. You can update the page and follow up with an updated link.

How to “improve” without breaking trust

One of the hardest parts of skyscraper is making edits that truly improve the page, while staying accurate. It’s tempting to aggressively critique the competitor. In my experience, that’s rarely productive.

Instead of attacking, focus on what you added. If the competitor’s page is outdated, you can say your page reflects current practice. If a method is disputed, you can present your approach as a perspective and explain why. If you’re using data, explain how you got it or at least provide the level of confidence you have.

Trust is an asset in outreach. The more confident you sound about your claims, the more likely someone will feel comfortable adding your link. A page that feels careful will outperform a page that feels defensive, even if the defensive page is “more complete.”

Common edge cases: when skyscraper needs a twist

Skyscraper is not one-size-fits-all. There are situations where the standard approach needs adjustments.

When the competitor’s page is the “hub,” not the target

Sometimes a page ranks and earns links because it’s a hub for multiple resources. If you create a better single-resource page, you might not replace the hub. In those cases, you can still win by becoming the most valuable linked subsection within the hub ecosystem, or by creating a companion piece that addresses a missing angle.

When the links are driven by something other than content quality

Some competitors earn links due to partnerships, sponsorships, brand strength, or community presence. If you copy the content style but not the link context, you may struggle. The content upgrade might still be valuable for readers, but link acquisition will need additional tactics, like distribution in communities where those links originate.

When “better” requires expertise you don’t have yet

If your advantage depends on data you can’t verify, don’t fake it. In that scenario, you can still build a strong skyscraper by improving clarity and methodology, and by being transparent about what you tested versus what you recommend. Overpromising is one of the fastest ways to lose the kind of credibility that makes writers comfortable linking.

Measuring success beyond “did we get links?”

It’s tempting to judge skyscraper purely by link count. That’s a noisy metric. A more useful approach is to measure how the page performs and how it contributes to future wins.

Here are signals I pay attention to:

- Which sections get referenced in follow-up comments or shares.
- Whether search traffic grows steadily for the target intent.
- Whether new link opportunities start appearing because your page becomes the reference point.
- Whether outreach replies shift from “maybe” to “this is exactly what I needed.”

Sometimes the first link doesn't come right after publication. Sometimes it comes after the page has been crawled, indexed, and mentioned somewhere else. If your content is truly linkable, the feedback loop usually improves over time.

Keeping your "skyscraper" sustainable

The best content strategy is rarely a one-off. But skyscraper can become exhausting if every page requires a huge rewrite from scratch.

A sustainable approach is to treat skyscraper as an ongoing practice:

- Keep a running list of topics where your site can plausibly improve existing references.
- Revisit your own top pages periodically to see what changed in the world, in tools, and in user expectations.
- Identify questions your audience keeps asking, then build small, reference-grade answers that can grow into linkable resources.

The payoff is that you build a library of pages that keep earning attention, instead of constantly chasing the next competitor page.

The real win: you become the resource people reuse

Skyscraper technique works when your improved page becomes the one others reach for. That happens when you stop thinking of your content as an article and start thinking of it as a tool. Tools get reused, cited, and updated.

If you want a simple guiding principle, it's this: your page should make someone's work easier. Whether they are writing a blog, updating a resource page, or advising a client, the best skyscrapers reduce their effort and increase their confidence.

Write like you're trying to help the next person who has to explain the topic quickly. Then make it easy for them to share what you built.

If you'd like, tell me your niche and one topic you want to rank for, and I can suggest the kind of "better" upgrade that usually earns links in that specific space.