You click a saved link, a search result or a bookmark, expecting to find an article. Instead, the website shows a 404 page. It can be frustrating, particularly when the page used to work or you need information from it.

A 404 usually means the website could not find a page at the address you opened. The article might have been deleted, moved or renamed, or the link may contain a typo. Sometimes the site has changed but its old links have not been updated.

This guide explains common reasons an old URL stops working, what a useful 404 page should do, and practical steps to try before giving up. It also covers how publishers can handle missing pages clearly and responsibly.

What does a 404 error mean?

“404 Not Found” is an HTTP status code. In plain English, the server was reached, but it could not find the requested page at that particular URL. It does not necessarily mean the whole website is down.

For example, an article may once have lived at example.co.uk/guide-to-saving. If the publisher later removes it without setting up a replacement route, that address may return a 404. The homepage and other articles can still be available.

A 404 is different from some other errors. A 500 error points to a problem on the server, while a 403 means access to a resource is forbidden. The wording shown to visitors can vary, but the status code gives website owners and search engines useful information about what happened.

Why is an old article returning a 404?

The article was deleted

A publisher may remove an article because it is out of date, inaccurate, duplicated or no longer relevant. If the content is deleted and there is no suitable replacement, the old address may return a 404. This is sometimes called a **deleted post 404**.

Deletion may be deliberate, but a missing page can also be an oversight. A website redesign, a change of publishing system or a migration between domains can leave old links pointing nowhere.

The article moved or its URL changed

Websites sometimes reorganise their content or change an article’s title and web address. If the page has moved but the old URL has not been redirected, visitors may see a 404 even though the article still exists elsewhere.

This is one reason an **old url not working** does not always mean the information has disappeared. Try searching the website for the Click here for info article title, a distinctive phrase from the page, or the topic alongside the site’s name.

The link was mistyped or copied incorrectly

A missing character, extra punctuation or incorrect capitalisation can lead to a different address. Some websites treat upper- and lower-case letters as distinct in parts of a URL. Check that the address has not been cut off, especially if you copied it from an email or document.

The site has changed its structure

After a redesign, a publisher may move articles into new categories or change how URLs are built. If old links are not mapped to the right pages, external links from other sites, social posts or saved bookmarks can stop working.

The page is temporarily unavailable

Occasionally, a technical issue makes a page appear missing when it has not been permanently removed. If the problem continues, however, it may be more useful to look for a current version than to keep refreshing the same link.



What can you do when an old URL is not working?

1. **Check the address.** Look for typos, missing words, extra punctuation or an incomplete link.
2. **Go to the site's homepage.** Use its search box or browse the relevant category to see whether the article has moved.
3. **Search by title or topic.** Put the article title in quotation marks in a search engine, or search for a distinctive phrase together with the website name.
4. **Look for an updated article.** A newer page may cover the same subject, but check its date and scope rather than assuming it is identical to the original.
5. **Contact the publisher.** If the page matters to you, send the old URL and explain what you were trying to find. The publisher may be able to point you to a replacement or confirm that it has been removed.
6. **Be cautious with copies elsewhere.** A cached, archived or reposted version may be incomplete or out of date. Check the source and publication date before relying on it.

If you run the website, review important broken links and decide whether a relevant replacement page exists. Where it does, a **redirect missing page** setup can send visitors from the old URL to the closest suitable current page. Do not redirect every deleted URL to the homepage: that can confuse visitors because it does not tell them where the information went.

What should a helpful 404 page include?

A 404 page is often a visitor's first sign that something has changed. It should be clear, calm and useful—not a dead end or a message that makes people think the entire site is broken.

- **A plain explanation:** say that the page could not be found, without blaming the visitor.
- **Useful navigation:** include links to the homepage, relevant categories and a site search.
- **Relevant alternatives:** suggest related or updated articles only when they are genuinely connected to the missing page.
- **A contact route:** give visitors a way to report a broken link, especially if the site publishes information they may need to verify.
- **Consistent design:** keep the site's usual branding and navigation so visitors can tell they are still on the right website.

Trust depends on being open about what has happened. A publisher should not make a missing article appear to be available when it is not, or use a misleading button to push visitors towards unrelated pages. If an article has been replaced, say so and make the replacement easy to identify.

When should you redirect a missing article?

A redirect can be useful when the original article has moved or when a close, genuinely useful replacement exists. It sends a visitor who opens the old address to another page. Website owners commonly use a permanent redirect when a page has moved for good, and a temporary redirect when the change is expected to be short-term.

Before adding a redirect, check that the destination matches what visitors would reasonably expect from the old link. For example, an old guide to a specific product might point to a current guide covering the same subject, if it exists. Sending it to a broad homepage or an unrelated commercial page may frustrate visitors and undermine confidence.

If there is no suitable replacement, a clear 404 page may be more honest than an irrelevant redirect. The page can still help visitors continue browsing, but it should not suggest that the missing article is available elsewhere unless it really is.

Situation Possible response What to check The article has moved Redirect the old URL to the new article Confirm that the destination is the same or a close replacement The article has been withdrawn with no replacement Show a helpful 404 page Offer search, relevant navigation and a way to report the issue The URL contains an error Correct the link if possible Check links on the site and in other published material The page may be temporarily unavailable Investigate the technical issue Check the server response and whether the page still exists

Information-only content is not personalised advice

Some sites publish general information to help readers understand a topic. That is different from assessing an individual's circumstances and recommending what they personally should do. A disclaimer can explain this distinction, but it cannot turn unsuitable or inaccurate content into reliable information, and it should not make promises about legal or financial outcomes.

For example, a site such as Help & Advice might explain a general process or point readers towards further sources. Readers should not assume that a page is a substitute for advice tailored to their situation. If the

topic is financial, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) is the UK's financial services regulator. Mentioning the FCA does not, by itself, mean that a website is authorised by the regulator, that the FCA has reviewed its content or that a particular product or action is suitable.

Publishers should describe what their content does—and does not—cover in specific language. Avoid broad statements such as "this information is guaranteed to be correct" or wording that suggests readers can rely on a general article as a personal recommendation. If a page is old or has been removed, be especially clear about its status and direct readers to current, appropriate sources where possible.

Affiliate links, disclosures and missing pages

Some publishers earn commission if a reader follows a link and makes a qualifying purchase. Where relevant, explain that commercial relationship in a clear place, rather than hiding it in wording that visitors may overlook.

For example, the Amazon Services LLC Associates Program is an affiliate advertising programme. A publisher may use tools such as Amazon Associates to create affiliate links to products sold on Amazon.com. If a site uses these links, it should provide an appropriate disclosure and make clear that the link may earn the publisher a commission. That relationship should not be presented as independent endorsement of a product.

A 404 page should not quietly send visitors to affiliate links as a substitute for the article they expected. If it includes product links or other commercial content, label them clearly and make sure they are relevant. Visitors should be able to understand that the requested page is missing and choose what to do next without being misled.

Do your own research before relying on an article

Even when a page loads correctly, its information may be out of date, incomplete or unsuitable for your circumstances. Check the publication or update date, who produced the content, what sources it cites and whether it distinguishes facts from opinion or promotion.



For important decisions, compare more than one reliable source and seek appropriately qualified, independent support where needed. Do not assume that a replacement article covers every point in the missing version. If a topic involves money, health, legal rights or safety, take particular care to verify information with relevant authoritative sources.

What should website owners check?

If you manage a website, a rising number of 404s can point to broken internal links, an incomplete migration or old external links that still receive visitors. A regular review helps you fix avoidable problems and decide what should happen to content that has been withdrawn.

- Check site analytics and server logs for frequently visited missing URLs.
- Repair internal links that point to pages you still publish.
- Map moved articles to their new URLs during a redesign or migration.
- Use redirects only where the destination is relevant and useful.
- Keep the 404 page clear, accessible and consistent with the rest of the site.
- Review old content for accuracy before republishing or redirecting visitors to it.
- Make any affiliate relationship and information-only limitations clear where they apply.

Do not remove a page simply because it is old without considering whether visitors still use it or whether it contains material that needs a clear correction. Equally, keeping outdated content available without context can mislead readers. The right approach depends on the page, its accuracy and whether a suitable replacement exists.

What to do next

If you are a visitor, check the URL, search the site and look for a current version. If you cannot find one, contact the publisher and verify important information with reliable sources before relying on it.

If you own the site, identify why the page is missing. Restore it if it was removed by mistake, redirect it if a close replacement exists, or keep a clear 404 page if there is no appropriate destination. Explain changes honestly, avoid implying that general information is personalised advice, and give visitors useful ways to continue.