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Independent research, November 2026

Answered by the FAQ

In 2023 I found Google answering eight legality searches with two sentences from one page's FAQ, one of them about tax. I reran the same searches in November 2026.

Rerun of my 2023 study · Draft · site anonymized

THE SAME QUESTION, THE SAME PAGE, THREE YEARS APART

2023 — Pulled from a tax FAQ

Search: **is online poker legal**

> "Yes. Under U.S. law, online poker is considered a form of gambling, and you must report those gambling winnings as income..."

2026 — Opening answer

Search: **is online poker legal**

> "Yes, but your options depend on where you live. As of 2026, nine states have legalized online poker..."

8	2	3
searches, 2023 and 2026	FAQ sentences Google relied on	different state counts in one SERP

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About this study

A 2023 note, rerun three years later

In December 2023 I looked at the top queries for a US poker legality guide and checked what Google showed for each. In November 2026 I searched the same eight queries again.

1

What it is

A **before and after look** at one state-laws page: my 2023 SERP notes and positions, against a fresh search of the same eight queries on 3 November 2026.

2

The goal

See **which sentences Google used** to represent the page, whether that changed, and what the results page looks like now.

3

What I compared

Ranking position, the text Google showed from the page, and the **facts other results stated** about the same question.

4

The challenge

2023 positions come from my notes and screenshots. 2026 results were collected from Vancouver with US settings, in a signed-in browser. **Positions aren't strictly comparable.**

Why it matters

This was an early version of a question I still work on: **which passage does a search system pick to answer a question**, and what happens when it picks the wrong one?

The short version

What I found

8 of 8	**searches in 2023 surfaced the same two FAQ sentences.** Google treated two FAQ answers as the core of the page, not the main body.
1	**of them answered the wrong question.** For “is online poker legal,” Google showed the FAQ answer about **reporting poker winnings to the IRS**.
8 of 8	**searches still show the page in the top four in 2026.** It's first for two queries, and moved from first to fourth for “states with legal online poker.”
Dated	**main-body answers now lead the snippets.** “As of September 2026, nine states have authorized regulated online poker...” is what Google shows today.
6, 9, 10	**states, according to different results on one page.** The top results disagree on how many states allow online poker, because they **count different things**.

What it means

In 2023 the page's best answers were hidden in its FAQ, so Google borrowed them, including one that didn't fit. In 2026 the page answers first, with a date. The new problem isn't the page. It's that **the facts themselves are defined differently** across sources.

Finding 1 (2023)

The FAQ became the page

My 2023 note: for all of the top queries, “two answers from our FAQ sections were consistently triggered.” These were the two sentences:

FAQ answer 1: tax

“Yes. Under U.S. law, online poker is considered a form of gambling, and you must **report those gambling winnings as income** to the IRS when you file your taxes.”

FAQ answer 2: which states

“As of the start of 2023, **seven states** offer state-regulated online poker: Nevada, Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Michigan, and Connecticut.”

The mismatch

For “is online poker legal,” the page ranked third, and the text shown was the **tax answer**. It starts with “Yes,” so it superficially fits a yes/no question. It doesn't explain where poker is legal at all.

My recommendation then

“Reframe and reorganize the content, moving away from relying on the FAQ section for key responses,” and **answer the queries directly in the main body**. The information was there; it was in the wrong place.

Finding 2 (2026)

Same queries, three years later

Positions count organic results with a title, including Reddit and YouTube. 2023 positions are from my original notes.

Search	2023	2026
is online poker legal	3	3
states with legal online poker	1	**4**
legal online poker	3	**1**
online poker legal states	4	3
states where online poker is legal	4	4
online poker legal	2	**1**
where is online poker legal	4	4
is online poker legal in the us	3	3

What Google shows now

For “is online poker legal”: “Yes, but your options depend on where you live. As of 2026, nine states have legalized online poker…” For list queries, the state-laws page shows “**As of September 2026**, nine states have authorized regulated online poker.”

What changed on the page

The answers now sit **at the start of the page, with a date**. That's what the 2023 note recommended. I can't say who changed it or whether the change caused anything. Positions were broadly stable.

Finding 3

Six, nine or ten states?

On the 2026 results pages, sources ranked side by side gave **different counts**. None of them is necessarily wrong. They're counting different things.

Result (2026)	What it says	What it's counting
Poker news site	“only six states have legalized and actually offer online poker”	Legal **and live**
Betting guide	“legal in ten states and operational in six”	Legal vs. **operational**
Poker news site 2	“nine US states with regulated online poker”	Regulated
The study page	“nine states have authorized regulated online poker”	Authorized
Reddit thread (3 years old)	“online poker is legal in only 6 states”	Undated count

Why it matters for AI answers

An AI system summarizing these results has to **reconcile six, nine and ten**. Pages that state their definition and date are easier to cite accurately. Pages that don't leave the system to guess.

The fix is wording, not length

A sentence like “X states have authorized online poker; Y currently have live sites” answers both versions of the question in one sentence. That's the **claim-level precision** my *Claim to Source* playbook is about.

What I'd do now

Writing answers a search system can lift

Six rules that follow from both the 2023 problem and the 2026 one.

1

Answer in the first paragraph

Put the direct answer to the main question **in the body, near the top**. Don't leave it to the FAQ.

2

Date time-sensitive facts

“As of September 2026” tells readers and systems **how fresh the fact is**.

3

Define the count

Say what you're counting: **authorized, regulated or live**. Give both numbers if they differ.

4

Keep FAQs for side questions

FAQs are for **secondary questions**. If an FAQ answers the page's main question, it belongs in the body.

5

One fact, one wording

The body, FAQ and homepage should **state the same number the same way**.

6

Recheck when the law changes

A legality page ages with every new state. Set a **review trigger** for legislative changes, not just a calendar date.

Where this connects

This is the SERP side of my *Passage Retrieval Lab* and *Semantic Coverage* work: the passage a system picks is the passage you made easiest to pick.

Limits and sources

What this study can and can’t say

Small and specific

Eight queries, one page, one niche. Results describe **this page and these queries**, not legality guides in general.

Not comparable measurement

2023 positions came from manual checks recorded in my notes. 2026 positions were collected on 3 November 2026 from Vancouver, Canada, using US settings in a **signed-in browser**. Location and personalization can change results.

No causal claim

The page changed between 2023 and 2026. I don't know **who changed it or why**, and stable positions don't show the change helped or hurt.

AI Overviews not assessed

I didn't see AI Overviews on the results pages I checked and **didn't measure them**. Snippet text is quoted from the organic results.

01 **State law page research, December 2023 (my notes, unpublished)**
Top queries, positions and the two FAQ sentences Google surfaced, with SERP screenshots.

02 **Google Search results, 3 November 2026**
Eight queries rerun with US language and region settings. Quotes are from visible result snippets.

03 **Claim to Source Verification. SEO Girl**
Claim-level wording and definitions, used in Finding 3.

By Ameneh Saeednia, prepared with AI assistance. The study page and its competitors are not named. Quoted snippets are short excerpts from public search results.