

Writing for Bloggers

A Quick Guide on Style, Substance and Strategy

This is a short guide that wants to encourage you to blog, and to blog well.


The most important thing to remember is that blogging is about **conversing** – discussing the things that interest you. When you blog, you join in the online discussions that are happening all around us.

Blogging is about sharing your ideas and thoughts, and it's about contributing. Blogging is not about poetry, great literature or polished prose.

So join in the conversation, and don't be afraid of getting things wrong. It's better to stumble your way through blogging, learning by doing, than to spend hours agonising over every blog post.

Why bother?

Before we look at how you can blog well, and enjoy it, let's consider **why** you're doing this. Think about which of the following apply to you:

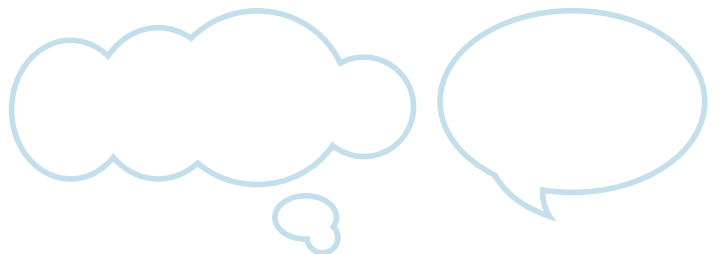
1. To promote your business
 2. To reflect on your personal development
 3. To announce your news
 4. To share discoveries
 5. Because your boss says you have to
 6. To stake out your corner of the web
 7. To improve your website's Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)
 8. To get recognition for your work
 9. To connect more personally to your customers
 10. To provide a platform for customer feedback
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Conversational communications

Blogging is very different from traditional media (like newspapers or TV) because the web allows everyone to become the producers and commentators of every item of news. Your blog should acknowledge the conversations already taking place around you.

How can you hold a conversation on the web?

- Invite comment from your readers
- Respond to commentators' opinions
- Freely link to relevant blog posts
- Comment on other bloggers' posts



What to write?

An empty blog can be intimidating – and as uninspiring as a blank page or white screen. Before you start blogging, it can be difficult to decide what subjects to cover. You may be wondering:

- What is permissible?
- What will be interesting?
- How will I come up with ideas?

Deciding what's right to write about

Your understanding of the 'subject' of your blog will probably change over time. As you write more blog posts, you'll learn which things work and which things don't. To start with, stick to what you know, or what you feel most comfortable writing about.

A note on subjects you know and subjects you don't know:

You don't have to be the world's foremost authority on a subject in order to write about it. Blogging is about discovery and development as much as it's about sharing ideas or knowledge. If you're not certain about a particular topic or subject area, say so. Your readers will appreciate your honesty.

Where do ideas come from?

The hardest time to find ideas for blog posts is at the start. That's because you've said nothing at all, and everything remains to be said. Once you start blogging, ideas flow as though a dam has burst – one idea leads to another, readers suggest new posts, comments beg to be answered, the Blogosphere* draws you inwards, onwards!

To begin with, try brainstorming ideas with a friend or colleague. Look at other blogs for inspiration. Try a list – something like 'The Top 10 Tricks for...' Turn a list into a series – so rather than giving away ten ideas in one blog post, create ten blog posts – publishing one a week for the next ten weeks.

Why not write about...

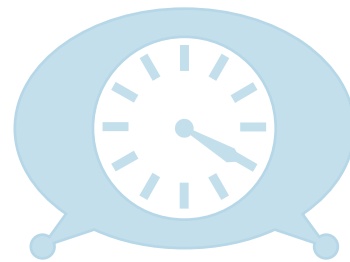
- A book you've read
- A problem you've solved
- A question you can't answer
- Something that inspires you
- What motivates you
- A recent project
- A favourite client



Scheduling

How often will you blog? It's a good idea to set a target. If you're starting out, aim for one post per week, as a **minimum**. Twice a week is better.

Once you have a list of blog post titles or rough ideas for posts, outline a schedule for posting. Decide which post you'll publish on which day. Mark the posts on a calendar. Tell your readers when you will be posting, and don't let them down!



Writing for your blog

Luckily, the way we communicate has moved on from the lessons we learned in school. Here are some old-school rules you can forget about:

- Split infinitives. What is a split infinitive? It doesn't matter.
- Contractions. Words like: can't, don't, shouldn't. Feel free to use contractions, especially if they make your writing sound more conversational.
- Repeating words. If you're writing about computer networks (for example), it's okay to repeat the words 'computer networks'.

What's the point?

The best way to start writing a blog post is by defining your purpose. Answer the questions:

- What am I trying to say?
- Who am I writing this for?
- What do I want to achieve?

*Blogosphere: the term used to encompass the interconnected mass of blogs and bloggers

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Remember your reader!

Be nice to your reader. Think about them as you write. It's them that you are writing for:

- After writing a blog post, leave it overnight, then review it again. You're more likely to spot mistakes or problems with your posts after taking a break.
- Use sub-headings to break up the text. Remember that reading on screen can be hard on the eyes. Sub-headings help people to scan your posts – great for readers in a hurry!
- Use a spell-checker.
- Ask a friend or colleague to read your blog posts before you publish them. Ask them to check that your posts make sense.

The Internet: nothing to fear

Some people worry about the reaction their blog posts will receive. You shouldn't worry. As long as you write informative, useful blog posts in a friendly, considerate way, you will receive friendly, polite responses from your readers.

Links

Hyperlinks, or links – the clickable text that leads you from one website to another – are one of the things that makes the web such a special place. You can use links to provide evidence for your claims, or support for your argument, or additional resources for your readers. Use links in your writing wherever they might be useful.

Writing makes you a better writer

I hope this brief guide has given you a few pointers to get writing. With any kind of writing, the only way to learn and improve is to write.

Imagine that you have a writing muscle. You might not have exercised this muscle recently, but all you need to do is start writing. **So start writing, and flex your writing muscles!**

Key Points

- Blogging is conversational – write as you would speak, and be open to comments from your readers
- Schedule your blog posts in a calendar and blog regularly
- It's okay to split infinitives, use contractions and repeat words
- Use short sentences and headings to make your writing easier to read on screen
- Ask someone to read your posts before you publish them, and use a spell-checker
- Regular writing practice will improve your writing skills
- Don't be afraid of making mistakes – become a better blogger by blogging!

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