# BLOGGING 101
# MASTER
# CLASS

## How to succeed in blogging by knowing what you are doing.

**BLOG**

# By Lorelle VanFossen
## Lorelle on WordPress

# PREVIEW EDITION

This is the preview edition developed exclusively for the Willamette Writers Conference 2017 participants in my Blogging 101 and Blogging 201 workshops.

**It is not for public distribution.**

This free copy is an advanced copy, a draft, of what will become the final book, *"Blogging 101 Master Class."*

Consider this the notes for the workshop.

**Please acknowledge the following:**

1.  This is not a finished nor complete copy. It is a draft.

2.  While feedback is welcome, this book has not yet undergone extensive editing or proof reading. If you would like to provide these services free, please contact the author via her site on lorelle.wordpress.com to assist.

3.  The book is not in its final form. Chapters will come and go, be rearranged, and new information will be arriving soon.

4.  If you would like to receive notifications of when this book is released and available for free download to participants of the Willamette Writers Conference, please sign up for the email mailing list at http://bit.ly/lorellebooks.

Enjoy this advance copy and thanks for flying with Lorelle.

> *This section is under construction. Pardon the dust and thanks for your cooperation.*

**DRAFT PREVIEW SPECIAL EDITION**

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# Introduction

In the late 1980s I moved from USENET groups to CompuServe for my Internet connection with the world. I hung out on forums, build relationships, even taught a few online courses in photography and travel. In 1994, my new husband and I decided to take our life on the road full-time for a few months, which turned into almost 16 years, and our new friends in the CompuServe RV forums were there to help us on our way. In return, I taught more workshops on travel photography and traveling tips, and they offered their advice and homes to us as we traveled North America.

In 1993, CompuServe teamed up with Mosaic and Netscape to create the first web browser, and I was there as a beta tester creating one of the world's websites. The site is still alive today and called *Taking Your Camera on the Road.*[1]

In those early years, I was publishing articles and travel update posts on CompuServe, then on our new website, as well as through emailed and print newsletters. By the end of 1997, I stopped the print newsletters, and by 2001, I stopped sending out email updates, relying solely on our website to update friends, family, and fans. In 2003, I kept hearing about this amazing blogging platform called WordPress, and by the end of that year I'd developed an early version of a text importer to migrate Taking Your Camera on the Road's 2,500 posts to WordPress, and I've never

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[1] cameraontheroad.com

looked back.

I've been blogging since before blogging was a word. In fact, even though I moved my site to WordPress, referred to as a blogging program with some derision in those first few years, I still resisted the concept of blogging and being called a blogger. I was a web publisher, I published articles and online journal entries. It wasn't until early 2005 when I finally admitted I was a blogger and leaned into the term.

During those early years, there were many debates as to the definition of blogging. First came the stereotypes and assumptions about blogging.

1.  Bloggers are unemployed people living in their parent's basement and spending the entire day on the computer blogging in their pajamas.

2.  A blog is just a bunch of personal opinion, gossip, ranting, and raving.

3.  Blogs aren't professional. Websites are professional.

4.  You can't trust a blog. You can trust a website.

As we struggled to define it even for ourselves, we stumbled upon some interesting attempts to understand what this new web publishing phenomenon had become.

Alaskan Mommy blogger, artist, and adventurer, Michelle Mitchell, said:

> *"I'll be curious to see what happens when the majority of people know what a blog is the way they know what a website is now."*

Reporter Katie Hafner wrote in the New York Times:

> *"Never have so many people written so much to be read by so few."*

Trust me, there were days when that felt like a perfect description.

My favorite description came from my friend, Liz Strauss of Successful and Outstanding Bloggers[2].

> *A unique and outstanding blog is one so compelling and remarkable that it sticks with you. Days later you still want to tell folks to experience it. A unique and outstanding blog has an amazing impact on a reader. It is unforgettable to both the adult and the kid in you.*

This is the true definition of a successful blog: *It is unforgettable to both the adult and the kid in you.* These are powerful words. Appeal to both the adult and the child in you, and you will have an audience's full attention.

A couple decades after the first websites and blogs were developed, the world respects the concept of a blog. It is no longer a snide term, but a proud one. People understand that a blog is just a website, and that the terms are interchangeable. Today, if you wish to be a success in business, online and off, you probably have or need to have a blog. It's the way of business.

## Blogging 101 Master Class

In January 2017, my friend and fellow author, Jason Brick[3], asked me to present a couple workshops at the annual Willamette Valley Writers Conference in Portland, Oregon. We talked about a variety of ideas, and he came up with Blogging 101 and Blogging 201, then left me to figure out what he wanted.

I'd been teaching the world's first full-credit and fundamental course on WordPress at Clark College in Vancouver, Washington, for many years, settling down a little from two decades on the road presenting keynotes and workshops on web publishing, WordPress, and social media. I had enough material for 12-week Blogging 101 and 201 college courses. The challenge was deciding how to boil it down into two 90-minute workshops.

I was up for the challenge.

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[2] successful-blog.com

[3] brickcommajason.com

That challenge became this book.

This book is designed for the inexperienced and experienced blogger. For those with little or no experience blogging, this is an ideal place to start. For those with experience blogging, this book will help you hone your blogging skills, and even teach you a few things you didn't know about blogging along the way.

This isn't just a Blogging 101 course. It is a Master Class. The goal is to help you succeed in blogging by knowing what you are doing.

No more assumptions. No more winging it. Let's get down to the basics and take you step-by-step through the lessons to become a master blogger.

This is also an opportunity for me to share the lessons learned, often the hard way, on how to blog. Remember, I started blogging before blogging was a word, and there have been many lessons learned the hard way along the journey to today's modern blog.

This book covers the basics from the first workshop, Blogging 101, with a wide range of tips from from the Blogging 201 course.

You will learn:

1. Define blogging and start a blog.
2. Basic terminology.
3. Developing an online persona.
4. Demographics.
5. Designing your brand.
6. Creating content.
7. Blogging success.
8. Marketing.
9. Content generation.
10. Storytelling techniques.
11. Writing for the web tips.
12. Adherence to web standards and laws.

I chose to not make this book complicated. It doesn't have to be. A well-written book on blogging is a guide not a manual. Blogging is an art form. Every blogger handles their media a little differently, some precisely and elegantly, others thrash around, banging out their thoughts with little thought for consequences. As your artistic instructor, I can merely guide you in the right direct, and set an example of the web standards and laws associated with the art of blogging.

As your guide on this master class journey into blogging, I bring with me almost 30 years experience blogging, and over 20 years teaching blogging, web publishing, and social media. I recommend you fasten your seat belt and strap down your creative skull cap, and hang on. It's going to be a bumpy ride.

# Lesson One: Getting Started

Welcome to Blogging 101 Master Class. My name is Lorelle VanFossen and I will be your instructor through this step-by-step approach to mastering blogging.

I'd like to recommend sitting back and enjoying your flight, but I need you to lean in, grab your pen and paper or keyboard, and get to work immediately. I believe in learning by doing, so let's start doing.

## The Prompt

We look for inspiration around us constantly as citizens of the web, and the world. I like to call such inspiration a prompt. A prompt is a suggestion, concept, or idea upon which you act by writing, photography, drawing, poetry, or other creative activities. Anything and everything can be a prompt, leading you to blog.

In my blogging workshops, I always start with a prompt, typically a photograph of our planet from space. These are timed prompts, typically to be completed in 3 minutes with a timer.

At the end of the 3-minute prompt, I ask for topics and if anyone would like to share what they wrote. The range of topics covered by that single prompt image is astounding.

Many write about the environment, global warming, politics, pollution, peace on earth, the space program, space exploration, the preciousness of

the planet, the lack of visible borders from space, geology, evolution, and other sciences. Some walk down historical lanes through archaeological finds. Others travel back in time and consider the history of the world. Others move into the future to see where we might be in 50 or 5000 years. A few write about the first time they ever saw a photograph of the planet from space and realized how small it was and how fragile. Others take a completely different point of view on the subject, not even writing about the planet but themselves, their relationships, and their beliefs.

In offering these varied perspectives, all help define the concept of blogging.

1. Blogging is sharing your unique perspective.
2. Blogging is the art of sharing online.

If you did the prompt along with us, what you would have written are your words, your thoughts, your opinions, your beliefs, your wisdom. No one else would write what you wrote the way

you wrote it. Sure, they might cover similar topics. You might have tackled it from the position of a child looking at space from the ground up, or an adult looking at space from the outside down. Your view is unique. It is precious. And it is worth sharing.

That is what blogging is all about.

Blogging is sharing your unique perspective online.

## Assignment: Prompts

It's time for you to attempt a prompt.

Here is a list of prompt ideas. Select one or mix two or more together.

Write for 15 minutes then stop.

See where you go. That's your unique perspective. And you be blogging.

1. Planet earth as seen from space.
2. The International Space Station.
3. The windows was open.
4. It was addicting.
5. I didn't see what happened, officer.
6. The song on the radio was interrupted by a voice.
7. We all make mistakes.
8. There was something out of the corner of my eye.
9. Normal.
10. Puzzles.

# Lesson Two: How to Start a Blog in 5 Steps

The following are basic instructions on how to start a blog in 5 steps.

1.  Register for a free blog on WordPress.com (don't pay for anything until you are ready).

2.  Give your site a title appropriate to the topic you will be covering.

3.  Write your About (bio) on the provided About web page.

4.  Add a contact form to the Contact web page to help people contact you. NEVER publish your email address online. A contact form is sent to your email, and you decide whether or not to reply, thus establishing a relationship and providing your email address.

5.  Write a post and hit publish.

Notice that I didn't include designing your site in the steps. WordPress.com offers hundreds of free web designs called *WordPress Themes* for you to select and use on your site. Until you are sure what you are doing, stick with a free Theme. All WordPress Themes on WordPress.com are well-designed and should serve your readers well. You may switch Themes at any time. You may go through many designs over time before you find the one that truly represents you and your content. Put your initial efforts toward building quality content first, then select a WordPress Theme that holds that content well.

That's it.

You thought there would be more?

There is, but that's for another lesson.

## Assignment: Your Blog

The assignment for Lesson Two is to start a blog or reconsider the blog you have already. Let's look at the various aspects of creating and maintaining a blog.

### Hosting

A web host is your site's apartment on the web, a place for you to publish your stuff. You may choose a free blog on WordPress.com, or choose a web host such as GoDaddy, Dreamhost, WP Engine, or another web hosting service, each becoming your landlord. Or, you may choose to blog on Facebook, Twitter, Google+, or another publishing platform. The decision is up to you, however, in addition to a social media platform, I highly recommend you also select WordPress.com or another hosting service as your permanent address on the web. It is still early days for social media platforms and many have come and gone with little or no warning, and you are beholden to their control of your content and terms of service, not always in your best interest. On your own site, you control and protect your content.

If your site is new, make sure you write down your site's address, username, password, and any other security information you provided during the registration process. Use the forms found at in this chapter to make note on all your login information and online activities. Put this in a safe and protected location where you will find it again.

If your site is on WordPress.com or another web host or hosting service, ask yourself if it is still working for you. If it is, keep using it. If it isn't, take note of what is and isn't working for you. The number one complaint of web hosts is consumer service, or the lack thereof, so don't change hosts for this reason. Justify this decision as an opportunity to learn more about how your site works technically. Take plenty of notes in case you have to

repeat your steps in the future. Changing sites can be a messy and complicated affair, so know truthfully the reasons you wish to change and think it out thoroughly before making the switch.

Again, if you are new to blogging, I highly recommend beginning with the free WordPress.com site. There is little or no risk, tons of security and features, and you may move your site to another service at any time.

## Site Title and Tagline

How much thought went into the site title? Are you still happy with it?

For many, the site title is the same as the address or URL (Universal Resource Locator) such as lorelleteaches.com. For others, the site title maybe different such as Taking Your Camera on the Road is cameraontheroad.com, or it maybe totally different such as johnson12com and the title is "Sally's Blog." Few people fuss much about the URL as most sites are discovered through search engines.

It is, however, highly recommended that the title you choose represent your site's goals and topics. "Sally's Blog" doesn't tell us much about what the site is about. "Sally's Dancing Shoes" might tell us that she will be talking about dancing or shoes, or specifically shoes for dancing. This is why a tagline is also critical to the site title.

A *tagline* is a site's subtitle. If the title is "Sally's Blog," the tagline might be "Putting on her dancing shoes nightly" or "Wearing out my dancing shoes," or it might be specific as "Testing dancing shoes one foot at a time." Each of these offer a sense of what the site may be about, one about dancing, one about dancing so much she goes through shoes fast, and the last a review site about dancing shoes. Only the content and other design elements will flesh out the rest of the intentions the site title and tagline, but together, they should provide a solid first impression.

## Bio/About

The About web page on your site is required by web standards and it serves two purposes. First, it must describe the purpose of the site. Second, it must describe the author or authors. We will cover more about writing your bio and the About web page in Lesson Eight.

Until then, consider what you've added to your About that covers you and your site. Did you include a photograph of yourself? Does it represent you and your topic and expertise? Does what you wrote about you and your site represent yourself and your expertise and the topics you will cover?

You may edit and change this web page at any time to better reflect your site's purpose and goals.

**Contact**

The purpose of the Contact web page is to provide a method for people to contact you. It features an opening paragraph that offers suggestions on why people may contact you such as for job offers, project bids, reprints, questions about your site and its content, or many other reasons. It then features a form for the visitor to fill in with their name, email, and possibly website or phone number, followed by a message box to type in their request, comment, or question. When they hit the SUBMIT button, it flies through the interwebs to your email inbox, the one used to register the site as the site owner or administrator, and you may respond or delete the email. This process allows you to filter messages from your site. If you choose to respond, your reply includes your email address, opening the path to communication.

NEVER publish your email on the web EVER. I cannot stress this enough. Your email address is one of the key pieces of information used to register for many sites and services online. Many email addresses include a person's commonly used username such as sallysmith@gmail.com used as a username of "sallysmith" for most social media, insurance, medical, and other online access services. To hackers, this is two of the seven or less pieces of information they need to break into your site, bank account, financial records, etc. Restrict this information as much as possible from public eyes, and use a different username from the name on your email.

Use a contact form on your Contact web page and link to the page each time you need to refer people to a method of contacting you.

**Write a Post and Publish**

How went the process of writing and publishing your first post? Was it easy or a challenge?

If you have blogged before, was this time any different?

What did you think about as you selected a topic? Did you just write or include an image? Did you have to hunt for a copyright-free image to make your point, or take a photograph or make a graphic image of your own? Or did you use one you already had?

Did you include a link or two? How was the process of adding links?

Did you put the post in a category? Add tags? We'll cover more about categories and tags in Lesson Three and other lessons in this book.

Was it difficult to hit publish? What was that like? Easy or hard? Just another step or a terrifying commitment?

The more you pay attention to the sensations and decisions you make as you blog, the better you will blog. As you encounter resistance in the process, study how you push through it. If you feel the resistance increase with time, examine your belief system in the process and check in with yourself to see what is getting in your way. We'll cover more about Blogger's Block and blogging obstacles in Lesson Twelve.

If the process was easy for you, rejoice and note the reasons why. You may wish to remember these in the future when the PUBLISH button becomes a little harder to push.

# Online Inventory Form

As you progress through this book, you will be either setting up a new site or re-vitalizing your old site. You will be creating a new online person or honing the one you already use. You will be reviewing your blogging workflow, blogging tools, and writing and publishing techniques.

To help you keep track of the process, the following is an online inventory form. Print it out and fill it out as necessary to keep track of your online activity and decisions.

> *This section is under construction. Pardon the dust and thanks for your cooperation.*

While the dust is still flying around the room, you will find various free, downloadable forms for developing your blog at https://lorelle.wordpress.com/classes-and-workshops/wordpress-school/tutorials/

# Lesson Three: Basic Terminology

As with any new thing in your life, there is jargon to learn. Let's explore some basic blog jargon.

**Website:** A collection of web pages.

**Blog:** A website.

Surprised? Thought there was a difference in the terms?

There is and there isn't.

A website is a collection of web pages. A blog is a collection of web pages. Technically, a blog is a collection of web pages presented in reverse chronological order.

Historically, the concept of *blogging*, and the blog, has been a hot topic for debate and conflict. Many consider a website a *fixed* site, a website with static content, whereas a blog is frequently updated with new content. Many believe a website is a formal, professional, and business-oriented site, as opposed to a blog that is informal, unprofessional, and a personal online journal.

None of these are true, yet they are all true. A website may be professional or unprofessional. It might be formal or informal. It could be an online journal or provide information about a business.

The only difference is that a website, shortened often to *site*, is a collection

of web pages, and a blog is a website with web pages presented in reverse chronological order.

It's what you do with a blog that makes it whatever you wish it to be.

**Blogging:** Blogging is the modern term for web publishing. If you publish anything on the web, it is called a *post* and the action is called *blogging*. You could be publishing on a site, blog, Facebook, StumbleUpon, Twitter, SnapChat, Instagram, LinkedIn, it doesn't matter. You are not *facebooking* or *instagramming*. If you publish on the web, you publish a post and the process is blogging. An alternative term is *web publishing*.

**Blogger:** A person who blogs, publishing content online via blogs or social media services. Since a blog is a website with content published in reverse chronological order, a blogger is a web publisher publishing in reverse chronological order, so to speak.

**Author:** An author of a blog is the creator of the published content.

An author may or may not be the site owner or administrator, archaically referred to as the *webmaster*. A site or blog may have multiple authors, often called *contributors* or bloggers, or it may have only one person as the author or publisher.

As the author of a blog, you bear certain rights and responsibilities, even liabilities, to yourself, your readers, your web host, often dictated by standards and laws. We'll cover more of these in other lessons.

I used to hold the concept of an author as sacred, *an author* was able to reach into their imagination and create worlds with exciting plot twists and characters fighting for their lives. Just as the smart phone has democratized photography, with one with a phone in their pocket can snap the award-winning or world changing photograph, so blogging has democratized authorship. Anyone publishing online is an author. It's up to you to hold it to a higher level of respect or not.

**Post:** A post is an article or submission published on a website or social media.

In the past few years, *blog* has become a synonym for *post*.

"I published a bunch of blogs this week."

Really? You have a bunch of websites you publish to every week? It must take you hours.

The correct phrase is:

"I published a bunch of posts this week."

This means you published many articles on a single site. Makes much more sense.

On a blog, posts are grouped by categories and tags, or labels, as some systems call tags. Posts are found in site feeds. Pages are not. If social media is integrated into the blog, posts will generate a social media post upon publishing in WordPress and other Content Management Systems.

**Site Title:** The site title is the name of the site. It might be found in the site address or URL, but it is definitely the first words at the top of each web page on the site. It defines the site, describes its purpose, and may become your brand or brand name.

**Tagline:** A blog's tagline is the subtitle of the site. A site title may be vague such as *Mary's Blog* or *Dancing in the Moonlight*. The tagline defines the purpose of the site such as "Exploring My Scottish Heritage" or "Tales from Working the Night Shift." While the site title might be enough, the tagline sets the site's purpose and intentions.

**Call-to-Action:** A call-to-action (CTA in marketing lingo) is a request of the site visitor to initiate or complete an action. There are many times of calls-to-action such as advertisements, header art, links, reshare content, landing pages, purchase points, email subscriptions, etc. Anything that motivates someone on your site or social media to action.

**Gravatar:** A Gravatar is a Globally Recognized Avatar, a service provided by Gravatar.com that integrates into every WordPress site, and many other site types, email services, and social media services, to provide a single avatar and profile across multiple sites.

**Incoming Links:** An incoming link is a link from another web page or site to your site, either to the front page or a specific web page on the site. These are also known as *referral links* as someone is referring their readers to your site.

**Referral Links:** An incoming link, or referral, from another web page or site to your site. The link may be to the front page or a specific web page on the site. These are also known as *incoming links*.

**Web Design:** A web design is the canvas of your website upon which you add content. It is the structure, layout, and design elements present on every web page. It consists of the design modules for the header, sidebar, footer, and content. It may also include menu areas and other modularized sections. On WordPress, the web design is in a WordPress Theme, a web design package easily changed for another with a couple of clicks. In general, a web design is a frame into which you add content.

**Publish:** Publish, when used in reference to the publishing of a post or Page, is the button on a post or Page that makes the web page live for public viewing. If the page is not live, it is in Draft mode.

**Draft:** A post or Page that has not been published. It is viewable only by those logged in with the permissions to view draft content.

**Pages:** Pages are pseudo-static web pages on your blog with timeless content such as About, Contact, Schedule, Events, Resources, Policies, etc. They are top level navigation items providing information related specifically to your site and its purpose.

**Link Dump:** A link dump is when a link is improperly embedded in web content as the link and not a properly formed HTML link. For example, http://lorelle.wordpress.com/2006/04/10/what-do-you-do-when-someone-steals-your-content/ is a link dump. This is an example of a properly formed link to an [article on copyright infringement](). A link dump is ugly, hard to read, and violates web standards for readability. A properly formed link is readable, easily recognized, and allows the reader to read the content without interruption or confusion.

**User:** One the web, a user is anyone on the web *using the web*, clarified in context to denote a site owner (site user), site visitor (site user), web member (Facebook user), or person accessing a site through a mobile device (mobile user).

**Blog Echo Chamber:** An echo chamber is any acoustic location that generates an echo from an initial sound such as a shout or possibly a

whisper. When the concept of sharing on line first became popular, many realizes that the original voice was being drown in an echo chamber of shares, people publishing non-original content to share it with others. The term *blog echo chamber* was used to describe the loss of the original voice as more and more bloggers became curators of content rather than creators.

**Sharing:** The act of passing on information on the web, an essential part of the Internet culture. If you find something of interest, you are likely to want to pass that information onto others as a gift by sharing, resharing, forwarding, reblogging, and content curation, all synonyms for sharing online.

**Curation**: Curation is the process of gathering, organizing, and presenting content, and content curation is the process of publishing and sharing that information online. Typically, the content represents the interests, purpose, and goals of the person curating and sharing the information. Some bloggers specialize in content curation, never adding their own unique perspective to what they share. Others include their perspective and justification as to why a reader would be interested in the topic.

## Types of Blogs

There are a wide range of blog types. Again, these are not necessarily indicative of a blog as a website. The publishing platform might be a blog, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, SnapChat, whichever you choose as the best means of reaching your audience. Blog types are the classification of the type of content published and the publishing purpose.

**Personal Blog:** A blog that is published by an individual covering their personal interests. It may feature ads and sponsorship, but the site is not about a company or specific products.

**Business Blog:** A blog owned and published by a company representing the company interests. It may feature one or more bloggers.

**Professional Blog:** A blog owned and published by an individual that

represents their professional self and interests. It could represent their company, but often represents their CV, their resume, along with published content that constitute their expertise and experience, establishing their credibility and reputation online and in their industry.

**Corporate Blog:** A blog owned and published by a corporation as a communication and goodwill tool. It may feature one or more bloggers, though tends to feature a single persona as the main author.

**Hobby Blog:** A hobby blog is published by one or more individuals and focused on a specific hobby such as stamp collecting, knitting, antique cars, cooking, etc. There may be personal topics covered in addition to topics related to the hobby, but the majority of content is about the hobby.

**Special Interest Blog:** While it may appear to be similar to a hobby blog, this is a blog type that covers a specific topic such as US politics, a specific industry (often related to whistle-blowing, protectionism, or politics), a belief (religious blogs are a type of blog under the category of special interest or hobby), philosophy, and other perspective and opinion topics.

**Photoblog:** A blog that publishes mostly photographs with little textual content.

**Vlog:** A video blog that publishes mostly video with little textual content.

## Web Publishing Platforms

A web publishing platform is an online service to which you subscribe or join as a member that permits you to publish and share content. There are literally hundreds of web publishing and social media platforms, each serving a different community and topic.



A web publishing platform could be a social media network or service, or a Content Management System (CMS) like

WordPress. Social media networks and services manage your content for you. A CMS allows you to manage your own content including the presentation, design, comments, categories, tags, and other taxonomies of a site or blog.

Some of the most popular sites for English (and other languages) are:

**WordPress:** WordPress is a free, open source, web publishing platform also known as a CMS. It consists of WordPress.com, a managed web-host with free and paid hosting options, and the free WordPress publishing platform that may be installed on your web host's server.

**Twitter:** Twitter is an open web publishing platform that limits the number of characters you may publish in a post.

**Facebook:** Facebook is a web publishing platform behind a membership wall.

**LinkedIn:** A web publishing platform behind a membership wall that many use as a resume service. It is often used by potential employers and others to evaluate your job and community involvement history and activities.

**Instagram:** A photo/image sharing platform behind a membership wall.

**Snapchat:** An image messaging and multimedia mobile app behind a membership wall with a quick delete button.

Notice how some of these sites are defined as *behind a membership wall.* These means:

1. The content is not or barely indexed by search engines, thus available in public search results.

2. The content is accessed by subscribers or members of the service or platform.

Think of a membership site as a sandbox in a home backyard compared to the sandbox in the public park playground. You can play in both bandboxes the same way, but one is hidden from the rest of the world and the other is viewable by anyone wandering around the park.

## The Web Platform

> *"Author platform is one of the most difficult concepts to explain, partly because everyone defines it a little differently. But by far the easiest explanation is: an ability to sell books because of who you are or who you can reach."*

> *Friedman, Jane, The Author Platform Definition[4]*

"An ability to sell books because of who you are or who you can reach." This is an excellent description of the concept of a web platform, and one we are going to dissect because it contains the two most relevant aspects of marketing online: *identifying yourself and your audience.*

I cover more on defining your audience and market in later lessons, but in this section on blog jargon and terminology, let's break down the concept of a web or online platform to help you understand its relevance to everything covered in this book.



Your Author Platform

### Who Are You?

Who you are determines your audience. It is the filter through which you run all your online decisions, what to say, how to say it, where to say it, when to say, and how what you publish online meets your goals. The next lesson in this book is on creating an online persona, defining who you are on the web.

### Who Can You Reach?

When you understand fully who you are online, your online character, personality, perspective, voice, and purpose, you define your audience. You determine who you will attract and who will join you on this quest to build an online community in and around you and/or your products and services.

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[4] https://janefriedman.com/author-platform-definition/

As we move forward with these blogging master class lessons, we are building a web platform, a soapbox, for you to shout, or whisper, your message, and be heard.

## Taxonomies

**Taxonomy:** Taxonomy is the category of people and things. Taxonomy defines relationships and connections between those relationships. It is associated with the concept of the *Internet of Things*.

Technically, it is a branch of science vested with classification and systematics, typically naming, describing, identifying, and cataloging specimens and organisms to provide a conceptual framework and reference for discussion, analysis, and information storage and retrieval. The term comes from the Greek for *taxis* and *nomos*, arrangement or division of the law. On the web, taxonomies represent the categorization of people, content, and systems.

Taxonomies for content on the web consist of:

**Circles/Groups:** Circles or groups are terms used by various social media publishing platforms to categorize collections of individuals for messaging directly or as a group.

**Hashtag:** Identified as a single word or hyphenated phrase with a # sign in front of it such as #jargon or #saveearth or #save-the-planet, a hashtag is a social media system for micro-categorizing related topics, memes, or themes.

**Category:** A collection of like content, used on blogs and some social networks to group related content. A well-designed site has 5-7 categories, their table of contents. Categories can have subcategories such as Vegetables as a parent category can have child or subcategories such as Carrots, Lettuce, Beans, and Squash.

**Tags:** Tags are micro-categorization of like content, used on blogs and social media to group related content differently from categories. Consider the site's index words, they are often displayed in a heat map or tag cloud format, the tags with the most posts larger than the others. Categories are

considered required, tags optional, though they do increase site navigation options. Rarely a site will feature their primary navigation through tags.

**Meme:** A social media themed topic. A meme could be a contest, competition, idea, behavior, or other usage passed along through social media sharing. Some bloggers promote memes with hashtags, encouraging others to have their say and link the related topics together with the same hashtag for tracking.

Examples include memes such as:

- **Be Like Bill:** A stick person illustration that used a "passive-aggressive way to make public judgments about other people's life choices."[5]

- **Ice Bucket Challenge:** Introduced as a fundraiser by a group of ALS organizations to raise awareness and funding for ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease, this campaign meme turned into a viral individual, corporate, and celebrity challenge to pour a bucket of ice over your head while being filmed and uploaded to YouTube. By 2014, it became a meme by filming yourself making the commitment to donate money, dumping a bucket of ice water dumped on your head, then challenging someone else to do it, taking it viral. Famous participants included Barack Obama, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Benedict Cumberbatch, Stephen Hawking (though the water was dumped on his children), and LeBron James. Millions of dollars were raised for ALS associations in North America and around the world.

- **LOLCats:** The site LOLCats and the infamous "I Can Has Cheezburger" inspired a craze that started about 2005 and continues on, photographing cats (and dogs and other animals, and even people in awkward situations) and adding words above and below as comedy, satire, and sarcasm. There are now cat video festivals and huge fan clubs of cats (and dogs, etc.) to gather and discuss their latest finds. Many individual cats became celebrities

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[5] https://www.lifewire.com/internet-memes-that-have-won-our-hearts-3573553

out of this meme phenomenon including Grumpy Cat, Little Bub, and Maru.

- **Chuck Norris:** While many claim the Chuck Norris meme began online about 2005, "Chuck Norris Facts" tout satirical facts on what the tough guy actor, would do with whatever the "fact" described, featured on the web with an image of Chuck Norris looking mean. Examples include "I'm Chuck Norris, I make one direction go the other way." "When Chuck Norris does push-ups he doesn't push himself up, he forces the earth down." "Jesus could walk on water. Chuck Norris can swim through land." "Chuck Norris has a grizzly bear carpet in his room. It's not dead. It's just afraid to move."

- **Where the Hell is Matt?** Matt Harding danced his way into people's hearts as he took his amateur dancing in front of landmarks into a paid trip around the world to 40 countries to dance alone and with others in front of famous locations.

- **Gangnam Style:** This popular YouTube pop song and dance video created a multi-year craze as Psy's invisible horse riding and funky dance moves inspired tons of parodies.

## Assignment: Taxonomies

Your next lesson is on taxonomies.

Using pen and paper or your computer's word processor or spreadsheet program, write a list of everything you want to blog about.

Write down every word or phrase you have thought about, or that pops into your head right now, that you want to publish on your blog or social media.

Do this for a minimum of 25 minutes. I recommend 45-60 minutes for an even deeper and richer self-discovery process.

There are no right or wrong answers.

You may do this as a list, spreadsheet, doodle, or mind mapping.

## Assignment: Grouping

Taxonomy is the process of identifying collections, of grouping related things.

Your next assignment is to group related words and concepts from your list into 5 groups.

Only 5.

If you can't do five, do at least three.

You may keep or toss any words or phrases from your list.

When you are done grouping, select a word or short phrase as the title of each group. The phrase should be no longer than three or four words.

## Assignment: Review

What did you learn from this assignment?

Some people are able to stay on topic, finding plenty of synonyms related to their blogging topic. Others find themselves wandering off topic, and actually finding their way to something more interesting and in line with their passions. For those spending more than 25 minutes at the task, many find themselves surprised at where it takes them, finding new channels of inspiration and focus.

How did you do?

How did the process go grouping related topics together? Was it easy or a challenge? Could you group your list into five different categories, or not even two or three? Maybe you wanted seven or ten categories.

As a general guideline, you do not need more than five to seven parent categories on your site. A parent category is similar to a top-level outline item. A subcategory or *child category* is a second or third level outline item in a hierarchal list. You may have 3-7 subcategories under each parent category, though 3-4 are recommended. A well-structured site typically has at most seven categories and no more than two to three

subcategories under each parent category.

Are you happy with the category titles? Do they fairly represent the collection of topics? A well-written category title is 1-4 words long, typically short words. "WordPress," "Blogging," "Web Writing," and "Social Media" are great category titles. Look for ways to reduce the word count if you have longer titles such as "Writing for the Web" as "Web Writing," and avoid cute or clever names such as "Scratching Out Stories" or "Digging the Dudes." The words you choose for the categories should be instantly recognizable as a collection of content topics on your site, otherwise you have to train your readers to know what "Mind Wipes" means on your site.

Categorizing your content isn't easy. If you are new to blogging and social media, you will often feel like it doesn't matter or anything goes because you can change it later. That's not quite true. While you may switch site titles and designs with a few clicks, changing your site's category system is much more complex.

Start small and easy, and be cautious about adding new categories. Use general and common terms for your categories at first, and re-evaluate after you have at least 100 posts. By then, you should know what you are doing and what you are blogging about.

Save these assignments. We'll revisit them and redo them throughout this master class.

# Lesson Four: You Can't Blog Until You Know Who You Are

It is a truth. You can't blog until you know who you are on online. Until you identify your mission, your purpose, your goals, and your online person, how do you know what to say or how to say it?

This doesn't stop most bloggers, but you aren't just any blogger. You are here because you want to succeed in blogging by knowing what you are doing.

Knowing who you are as a blogger means answering the question: *Who the hell are you on the web?*

In September 2017, Queen Rania of Jordan tweeted out the following post as she arrived in New York City.

> Arrived in NYC for work. As always, excitement and trepidation. Will I be able to champion the causes & people I represent well enough?
>
> 8:44 AM Sep 21st from mobile web
>
> **QueenRania**
> Rania Al Abdullah

> *"Arrived in NYC for work. As always, excitement and trepidation. Will I be able to champion the causes and people I represent well enough?"*

Read this again. From just this single tweet, what does it tell us about who

she is as a person? What does it tell us of her character? Her attitude? Her persona?

Instead of bragging about what she is going to do in New York, or offering commentary on the world around her as she arrived from the desert country of Jordan into the hustle and bustle of big city New York, what does she do?

She shares her worry that she won't be able to do enough. She won't be able to do the right thing, to help others, to do her best. She admits to her excitement with a mixture of fear, revealing her vulnerability.

How do her few words make you feel? What would be your public response to her?

While there is the possibility that this tweet was actually written by her professional social media representative, we like to believe that this came directly from the celebrity. Either way, within less than 140 characters, Queen Rania's tweet might have made you want to cheer her on, give her moral support, be impressed with her sincerity and concern for the welfare of those she represents, or even smile that a queen would even be in such a conflicted state - after all, she is royalty.

In just those few words, you have a sense of her personality, her belief, her mission, and her goals.

When was the last time you examined one of your own tweets or posts to see if it truly represented you and your personality and mission.

In an article on Forbes on how social media has changed us[6], Anita Rosener of Snork podcast discussed the relaunch of her acting career after a twenty year hiatus.

> *"I've ditched posting the best of myself, and now post photos that are very authentic - even when I'm made to look awful - because that's part of the job. I've noticed a lot more hits on my podcast as a result."*

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[6] https://www.forbes.com/sites/carriekerpen/2016/04/21/how-has-social-media-changed-us/

Deena Baikowitz, Chief Networking Officer of the Fireball Network, shared a similar thought in the article, adding that it made her a better networker.

> *"I love using social media to share more of my personal life with my network. It makes me - and everyone who uses it - more memorable, relatable, interesting and approachable. Now, at business networking events, the first thing people say is often 'how's the dating going' or 'I love your photos-- where do you dance.' Sharing my personal life creates much more meaningful connections, provides fun conversation starters, and sets a friendly tone to lead into business talk."*

In 2006, I walked into a conference having not meet anyone attending previously. Within the first minute, two people came up and started talking to me about a discussion held online over the past week. We didn't introduce each other. We knew who we were. I knew each person's online identity, their personalities, even their opinions on the subject. We didn't need formal introductions. We had a relationship before our arrival. With social media, the conversation just continues in person. The wall between virtual and reality is very thin.

When Google+ started their social media network, a competitor to Facebook, users were not permitted to use fake names such as "CuteChick69" or "Nothing To See Here." Their real names were exposed through their profiles as an attempt at complete transparency, promoting trust among users that you would be who you say you are. While welcome at first, unfortunately it backfired as many whistle blowers and those whose work and blogging required anonymity were exposed or unable to participate in the network. Google changed their policy. However, it still holds true that those most successful on social media and blogging represent themselves well with solid online personas, allowing their personal lives to leak into the professional lives online.

Which begs the question: *Who the hell are you online?*

We have many faces in our lives. We want to be one person, but we have to play many roles in our lives. We are parents, children, siblings, employees,

business owners, hobbyists, and just regular folk. We are teachers, leaders, students, learners, listeners, talkers, dictators, peacemakers, crafters, artists, and more. During a visit with a niece recently, I had to play teacher, learner, disciplinarian, coach, chef, bottle washer, maid, chauffeur, tour guide, banker, and friend, and all of those roles were acted out in just a few days.

So who am I on the web?

I have a variety of archetypes online, each one honed so the reader knows exactly who is speaking on each site.

On *Lorelle on WordPress*, I am a trainer. My job is to teach you how to teach yourself how to do it. I'm your personal web publishing and social media trainer. The majority of the posts are written in second person, using "you" instead of first person "I" or third person "they." I explain how "you click this button" and "you select a WordPress Theme." The tutorials are instruction manuals on how to blog using WordPress and use social media.

Contrast that with who I am when I blog on my site *Lorelle Teaches*. There, I'm the teacher, the educator. I teach how all this work. Most of the posts begin with "how to" and include words in the title like *guide, tips, techniques, help*, etc. In the first site, I'm training you how to blog. In the second, I'm teaching you how to do it. Subtle. I use different terms, different voices, and present similar content from a slightly different perspective.

On the site *Writers in the Grove*, I blog representing a community writing group in Forest Grove, Oregon. Our

group meets weekly and is open to the public. The site offers weekly writing prompts and a variety of news about writing events and activities in the community, along with some writing tips, techniques, and tutorials published by myself and other members of the group. When I blog on that site, I am sharing information and offering guidance. It is up to the reader to use it as they wish. We work hard to have little or no agenda on that site other than offering up information to help and encourage creative writing in all its forms.

On my site, *The Tech Nag*, I am the whiner, nagger, complainer, and bitcher. My motto is "If you can't complain about tech, it ain't worth talking about." I complain about all forms of technology from the inability to uninstall a program to the lack of beautiful and enjoyable problem-solving games like *Myst* today in a world of shoot-'em-up violence. I tend to blog angry, be a disruptive force, and use NSFW[7] words I would not use on my other sites.
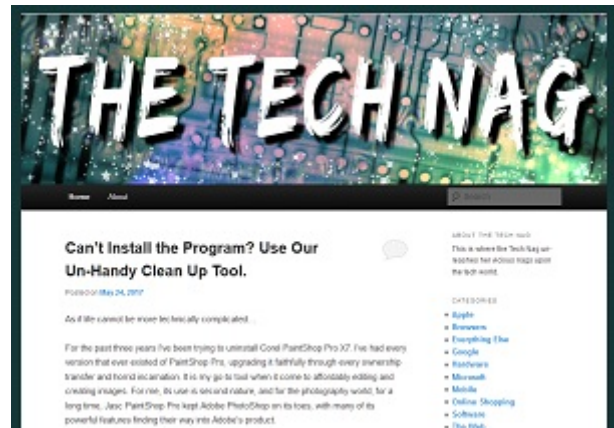
When I publish content on my clients' sites, I am them. I write in their voice, their style, their personality, their persona. The visitor must believe that these are their words, representing the passions and personality of the site owner.

Each of these sites represents a part of myself and my work. Each is one of the many faces I wear as part of my work, and each serves a purpose, including the last site where I get a chance to share my technology expertise while vent a little steam once in a while.

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[7] Not Safe for Work

A friend of mine is considered a bastard on the web, mean, spiteful, disruptive, argumentative, and vengeful. He is angry but brutally honest as he tells it like it is, and takes the brunt of rejection eagerly. He loves a fierce debate.

If you met him in person, you would find a shy, reticent person, a teddy bear, someone who smiles often and loves hugs. He loves reading stories to his young children in the evenings, adores his wife, and is a good friend to so many. He lives simply and quietly in a small rural, and cooks wonderful meals for his family from his vast garden in the backyard. I've asked him many times over the years why he developed such a different personality on the web. In summary, he explained:

> *"It's a job. I've created someone so drastically different from who I am, it's fun. It's a challenge to crawl into his skin every day and find topics to rip to shreds. People love it. They keep coming back for more.*
>
> *I give a voice to the angry people in the world and they find some self-respect. Some tell me that it chills them down, makes them realize they aren't alone in the world. They slow down, pay attention, and listen.*
>
> *And learn, if I'm doing my job right. They learn to respect the opinions of others. They learn that there are multiple sides to every issue. They learn that anger doesn't have to be the first, gut response to a topic. They learn that debate can be healthy. Sure, there are trolls everywhere, but my people learn to be healthy in an active way, learning how to gel their thoughts, how to be heard, and how to take constructive action to change the world."*

Researchers Pruit and Adlin stated in their book, *The Persona Lifecycle: Keeping People in Mind Throughout Product Design*:[8]

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[8] Pruitt, John & Adlin, Tamara. *The Persona Lifecycle: Keeping People in Mind Throughout Product Design*. Morgan Kaufmann, 2006

*"Personas are said to be cognitively compelling because they put a personal human face on otherwise abstract data about customers.*

*By thinking about the needs of a fictional persona, designers may be better able to infer what a real person might need."*

This applies to consumer demographics and marketing, but the reverse applies to bloggers. Your audience wants to see a human face on the web, specifically yours. They want to know a real person, not a bot or robot. They want to know you. They want to feel like they have a relationship with you online, a connection.

By thinking about the needs of your online persona, and understanding the *law of attraction*, like attracts like, you better understand your audience and how best to meet their needs.

We all have personas, the personalities and roles we play in our day-to-day lives. We also value our privacy, the things we keep to ourselves, protected from public eyes. Like my friend, you choose what to share or not share with the world, and it begins with creating an online persona to help you achieve your goals and have clarity with your blogging topics and voice.

## Online Personas: Archetypes

Throughout history, scholars have identified what has become known as *archetypes*, characters and personalities.

The Greeks analyzed the personality patterns of individuals to divide them into archetypes, defining personalities as well as life events, culture, beliefs, and life values.

Carl Jung dove deeply into the concept of archetypes, developing what are known as the universal, inherited forms of personality and stages-of-life archetypes images: *archetypal objects* (water, sun, circle, serpents, garden, road, etc.), *archetypal events* (birth, death, separation from parents, initiation, marriage, etc.), *archetypal figures* (great mother, father, child, god, devil, wise old man/woman, trickster, hero, etc.), and *archetypal motifs* (apocalypse, deluge, creation, etc.).

While Jung did not propose a specific twelve archetypes, over time scholars have honed down his archetypes to what are now known as the *Twelve Character Archetypes* used by writers of every genre. These are also ideal online personas to consider.

1. The Ego Types: Innocent, Orphan/Everyman, Hero, Caregiver.

2. The Soul Types: Explorer, Rebel, Creator, Lover.

3. The Self Types: Jester, Sage, Ruler, Magician.

Each archetype features a description, their fears, strategies, weakness, and various names used to identify them. The archetypes are not good or bad, positive or negative characters, and are not better than or lesser than other character types. They are personalities, personas if you will.

There are extensive web and magazine articles online and books on these character archetypes, so let's just examine a few of these and compare them to popular blogs and bloggers.

## The Sage

The sage is described as having a desire to find truth. She uses intelligence and analysis to understand the world around her. Her fear is being mislead or ignorance. Her strategy is to seek knowledge and share it with others. Her weakness is that she gets lost in the details and often fails to act. She is also known as the thinker, expert, teacher, scholar, planner, mentor, adviser, researcher, academic, detective, problem-solver.

The blogging sage shares these characteristics. She is a truth teller, and uses intelligence and analysis to understand the world around her and share it. Her biggest fear is ignorance, a battle she fights daily with the strategy of seeking knowledge and sharing it. Her biggest weakness is when she gets so lost in the details, she fails to publish. And she goes by and is called by the same names as above.
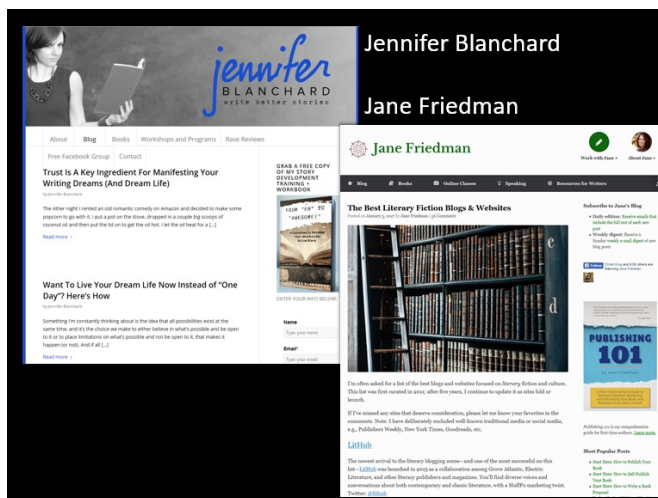
In the writing world, Jennifer Blanchard[9] and Jane Friedman[10] are well-known sages on the topic of writing. Their deeply thought essays and educational material has helped many a writer, amateur and professional, through the writing and publishing process.

Seth Godin[11] is a long time blogger and author and lives up to the archetype of sage, offering a calm, experienced voice in the middle of the crazy world of web publishing, marketing, and business through his site and his books.

David Brin's site, *Contrary Brin[12]*, is an author site, but it serves his audience best as an opinionated scientist, futurist, and best-selling and award-winning science fiction author. Fans flock to his site for his unique perspective on the world around him on various topics of science.
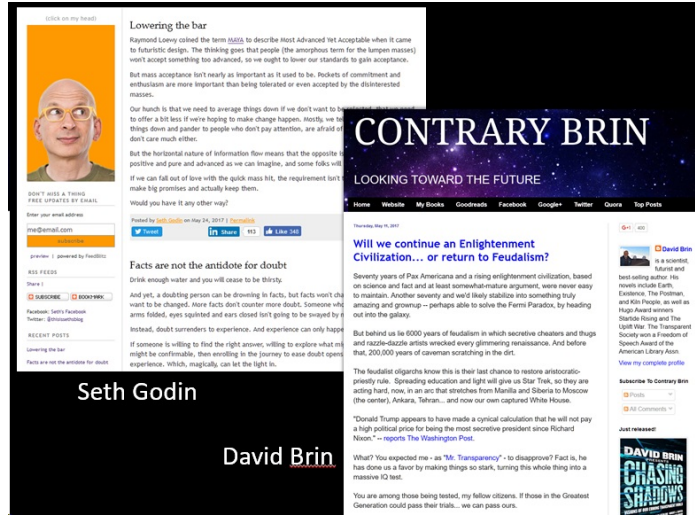
Three multiple contributor sites could also be classified as sages. *Ted Talks[13]* offer thousands of sages sharing their wisdom and learned view of the world around them in video talks available on their site and through YouTube, radio, and television. *The Write Practice[14]* offers sage advice on writing and publishing. It appears to offer educational material, but if you look deeper, you will find that the information comes from experience, not just academia. The third example of a multiple contributor sage persona


Seth Godin

David Brin

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[9] jenniferblanchard.net

[10] janefriedman.com

[11] sethgodin.com

[12] avidbrin.com

[13] ted.com

[14] thewritepractice.com

site is *Lifehacker[15]*. Its frequent posts and books offer experienced lessons in how to function better and wiser in the modern world.

## The Rebel

The rebel is a persona archetype famous for saying "rules are for breaking." He has a desire for revenge or revolution, to change the world with his strategy of disruption, shock, even destruction. His fear is powerlessness, and his weakness is crossing over to the dark side of the force: crime. He is known as the outlaw, revolutionary, misfit, disruptive thinker, wild man, iconoclast, terrorist, and anarchist.

The blogging rebel is a rule breaker. He is determined to change the world through shock and awe and sharing his disruptive thinking. His fear is powerless and helplessness. His weakness is pushing the limits of freedom of speech and losing control. He's on the edge all the time. And he loves being called the outlaw, revolutionary, and misfit, among his other titles.

Rebel bloggers come in various forms from blatant to subtly disruptive forces. Chuck Wendig's *Terribleminds[16]* is a great example. His own bio reads:

> *"He talks a lot about writing. And food. And pop culture. And his kid. He uses lots of naught language. NSFW. Probably NSFL[17]. Be advised."*

His post titles use aggressive and rough words like *snags snap, aftermath, invasive, burns, blazes,* and *revenge.* He doesn't just write on a subject. He tackles it. Aggressively. He also pokes fun at himself and is a master of satire and irony, challenging people's thinking and opinions.

Tara Lazer[18] is the author of *"I Thought This Was a Bear Book"* and *"Way*

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[15] lifehacker.com

[16] *terribleminds.com*

[17] Not Safe For Life

[18] taralazar.com

*Past Bedtime."* Her self-description is:

> *"As a children's book author and mother of two, I'm pushing a stroller along the path to publication. I collect shiny doodads on the journey and share them here. You've found a kidlit treasure box."*

She may appear to be a mild-mannered parent and children's author, but she is a disruptive force in the children's publishing industry. She pushes boundaries all the time, in her books as well as her on her blog. Her posts are filled with outrageous screenshots and animated gifs to make her point. She tackles the children's book industry with gusto. She holds competitions, give-aways, and enthusiastically promotes other children's writers. In her way, she is changing the world of children's literature.

Andy Borowitz of The New Yorker writes *The Borowitz Report* as an ideal rebel. He uses his sharp wit to write satirical "news" reports as editorial commentaries, blasting politicians and celebrities equally scathingly. His tag line is "Not the news." His disruptive and insightful stabs present a straight-faced comedic look at our government, a rebel against the establishment.

## Other Archetype Personas

Stephanie Klein describes herself as:

> *"A foodie who sometimes abuses hair care products, I write about love, relationships, beauty and skin care, parenting, and the creative process. I'm an author and screenwriter, photographer, mother, and lifestyle connoisseur living in New York (having moved back from Austin, Texas)."*

Re-read this profile again. Can you identify her archetype persona?

Her site and persona is a perfect match for the explorer archetype. The explorer has the desire for freedom to find out who they are by exploring the world. Their goal is to experience a better, more authentic, more fulfilling life, and their fear is conformity, being trapped, cornered. The explorer's strategy is the journey, constantly seeking, experiencing, hunting for the next adventure. Their weakness is aimless wandering and are often classified as society misfits, and proud of it. They don't want to be like everyone else. They reveal in their difference. They are the seekers, wanderers, individualists, and pilgrims of society.

Wil Wheaton represents the everyman archetype. An actor, author, and popular blogger, he demands the world see him as "just one of the guys," a sensitive intellectual rather than a celebrity on a pedestal. The everyman archetype's motto is "free to be you and me." His desire is to belong and find peace and understanding among his common man. "I'm okay, you're okay" is another motto. His fear is being punished for doing something bad or wrong, so his strategy is to do things right, very right, expending a tremendous amount of energy avoiding the pitfalls of life. His weakness is naive innocence that appears as boring. He isn't boring. His talent is faith, optimism, and hope. He is a Utopian, traditionalist, mystic, dreamer, saint, romantic, and a classic naive.
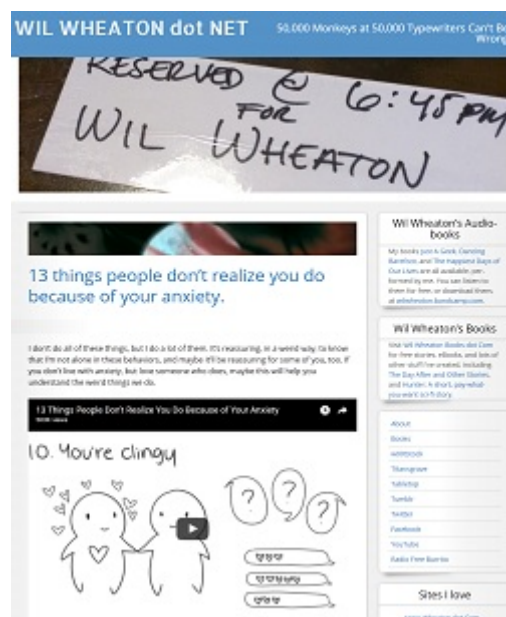


The site fightersgeneration.com offers a long list of modern personas for you to consider beyond the twelve archetypes proposed by Jung and scholars. They include:

- The Rival
- The Quiet
- The Loud
- The Outcast

- The Big Guy

- The Cute Girl

- The Ladies man

- The Psycho

- The Mystery

- The Goof Off

- The Boss

- The Alter Ego

Sometimes the purest character archetype is a good choice for a blogger. Sticking to a set of known values and morals is easier, and consistent. The stereotypes meets expectations.

Most of us, however, are a mixture of several character archetypes, slipping into them to meet the demands of our roles in life. Ask yourself what your audience demands from you, and what role you play in your online story. Do you need to be the explorer? Is that a natural fit? Or the sage? Maybe the jester?

As you consider which character archetype to represent you online, let's move onto taking inventory of your online character, the persona you are when you blog.

## The Character Inventory

It's time to take inventory of your online character to define your online persona.

The following are just a few of the character details to consider as you outline and describe your online persona. I encourage you to consider these inspiration, encouraging you to go deeper. The better fleshed out, so to speak, your online persona, the better decisions you will make as a blogger.

Having a clear picture of who you are when you blog, your decisions on what to publish, how to publish, and the voice you use to have your say runs through the filter of the online persona. Would she share this? Would this be interesting to her? Would this be interesting to her followers? How would she share this? How would she say this? How would this help her meet her goals and reflect well upon her online personality?

For now, it's time to take to make a character inventory on your online persona to clarify the details and literally draw a picture of who you are when you blog.

### Age Identification

What age are you when you blog?

Are you young, old, a young person in an old body, an old soul, your exact age, a relic from the past, eternally young, young enough to get into trouble and old enough to know the difference?

Consider your physical age as well as psychological age of your online persona. The age a person is, as well as the age they feel, dictates voice, speech patterns, jargon, the topics you cover, your perspective on various subjects, and a wide range of physical, philosophical, and psychological traits.

A person who is a wise sage speaks from experience. They've been there, done that, and not only got the t-shirt, they got their name emblazoned on a hypothetical plaque honored for their accomplishments.

A young person often has an enthusiasm and insatiable curiosity, constantly asking questions, challenging the world to come up with not just answers, but answers that elicit more questions, more challenges.

An older person is less likely to use swear words readily. A younger person uses them as a synonym for every noun, adjective, and adverb. An older person often looks back more than forward, where a younger person is all about moving forward, and a middle aged person is often about standing still, pushing a few boundaries, but staying safe.

An older, more educated person uses big words. A younger or less educated person tends to use shorter, more common language as they tell their stories and share their thoughts.

These are ageist stereotypes, but I want you to consider them as you develop your online persona. If you identify with any of these for your persona, great. If not, then how old are you when you blog? Does it matter? Maybe it doesn't. Be timeless. Either way, be you.

**Sexual Identity**

What is your sexual specificity? Not your orientation but identity on legal papers if you were to tick the sexual identity box on a legal form for your online persona.

Are you male, female, androgynous, trans, non, or something else?

Go deeper. If you are male, do you lean toward feminine qualities or testosterone? If you are trans, are you dreaming of the switch, half-way there, or fully transformed? Does it matter at which stage you are in or is it critical to define your online person as in transition?

Is it even important for your audience to know your sexuality? When I published for over seven years using second person familiar on my main site, I'd meet many people at conferences who assumed I was male or were grateful I was female as that met their expectations. Do you need to be one or another? Maybe.

What is your sexual identity when you are you? What do you need it to be when you blog?

## What are Your Origins?

We've covered the physical and some of the philosophical traits of character archetypes for your online persona. Now ask yourself where your online persona comes from.

What is her family history, background, upbringing, education, lifestyle? Did she come from poverty or wealth or middle class?

Where was she born and raised? In the same town all her life or at least most of her childhood, or moved around by parents seeking jobs or in a job that required frequent relocation? What was it like, the place where she spent her formative years? Was it fun, boring, or exciting? Was it desert, tropical rain forest, or cement jungle? What was the environment at home like? What was the household like? Happy, close knit, angry, conflict, distant? What was the community like? Active, energized, frustrated, defensive, protective, cooperative?

What were her experiences, dramas, traumas, blessings, failures? How did she handle each of them? With confidence or insecurity? Or apathy, riding out the experience until things calmed down? How did these change her?

Consider writing a time line or bio that describes your online persona's early years. The first twenty or thirty years of a person's life often defines them for the rest of their life, dictating their interests, desires, and perspective on the world around them.

## Geolocation/Time Period Identification

Where are you, psychologically and philosophically, when you blog?

Many of us identify with a specific place and time period. If you find yourself longing to have been born during the Victorian Age, Napoleonic Years, in the 1600s during the vast expansionist movement of Europeans around the world, especially in the New World, or maybe in the Roaring Twenties or stuck in the 90s, then your time period identification would be that era.

Are you an Anglophile, fascinated with all things British? Spanish? Latino? Greek? American?

Do you have a cultural affiliation such as First Nation, Greek, Indian,

Russian?

Do you have an accent? What does it sound like? How would it be represented in your word choices when you blog?

Consider where and when your online persona identifies with and how that manifests within your online persona's character.

**What Are Your Favorites?**

Everyone has favorites. Favorite people, favorite movies, even favorite children in spite of what every parent claims. There are always favorites.

Consider your online persona's favorite things to do, books to read, favorite pets (dead or alive), favorite personal possessions, hobbies, places to hang out, favorite blogs, favorite social media folks and topics, news sources, movies, televisions shows, and favorite exercises or sports or sports teams.

Does your online person enjoy travel? What is their favorite way to travel? What is their favorite destination? What places or activities do they return to over and over again? Why?

Most of all, what are the favorite things your online persona likes to talk about. These are likely the main topics of your blog.

**Where Do/Did You Work?**

Where did your online persona work? If you are still working, where does your online person work?

This characteristic works best when it comes as close as possible to match your authentic employee history and experiences as they are most familiar to you. While some bloggers taking on the persona of a call girl or medical expert can carry that off for a short time, odds are you will be found out if you lack some of the fundamental characteristics, qualities, and experiences of such a persona. Attempt to be truthful to your own life experiences.

Describe your online persona's job and work experiences. How did the job influence you? What are your strongest skills? Your weakest? What did you accomplish? What are you most proud of? What are you least proud

of? Where did you fail? Where did you succeed. How?

What makes you a good worker? Are you a better employer than employee? Risk taker? Status quo enabler?

Then examine what you would have done differently. This is where many post ideas come from. What would you have changed? How would you have responded if you could go back in time? What are the lessons you learned along the way? What wisdom did you gain that you wished you knew back then?

Personally, I hate being defined by my job, but we do it constantly. The second question typically asked after meeting someone is "What do you do?" For me, I want to know who they are not what they selected as an occupation, but we define people by their career choices. Does the career decisions and occupations of your online persona define them? How? Why?

## Who are You in Your Community?

What role does your online persona play in your community? Online and off. Are you a volunteer, a leader, a good neighbor, a friend, team player, watcher, guard, invisible, disruptive, or actively involved?

What are your favorite charities? How do you give? How are you involved?

Where do you volunteer your time and energies? How? What do you do? Why did you make these choices? How do they define the character?

Describe your relationships, the friends and people you spend the most time with as your online persona. Who are they? How do they lend support and encouragement, or maybe they don't. How do you spend time with them? What are the gifts your online persona gets from them? Why do you need them?

## Self-Physical Description

What do you look like when you blog? What do you feel like when you blog?

Are you tall, short, thin, thick, blond, brunette, blue eyes, brown eyes, disabled, hunched, straight, or do you have an identifying marks or

features such as tattoos or scars? Is your hair long and straight or short and curly, or are you bald?

What is your online persona's body shape? Are you round, square, pear shaped, or curvy?

Does your online person struggle with weight issues? Is your body one shape physically but another in your head? How do you feel about this? Are you happy and content with your body shape and image or constantly at war with it? How does this manifest in your online persona's personality, interests, and communication styles?

How would you describe your physical persona to others? Would it be the same if you described her to a friend or different if you described it to a fellow employee or family member?

Consider painting a verbal or drawn picture of what your online persona looks like, covering all these details.

**What Gets Your Goat?**

"That really gets my goat."

The term is from a tradition in horse racing when a goat was placed in a stall to calm a temperamental horse before a race. We use the coloquialism in North America to identify something that angers or frustrates us.

What frustrates your online persona?

We all have buttons, and we all have people around us who know how and when to push, or not push, those buttons. What are your online persona's buttons?

This is a very important part of your character inventory. Knowing what generates energy in your online persona defines their words, their sharing choices, and what inspires the character.

Do politics get your goat? Do you rage against racism, global warming, child abuse, religion, domestic violence, or violence of any kind?

Define the passions behind your online persona, and ensure they are in line with their character's personality traits, or possibly in conflict. Sometimes the most interesting characters are those who are pushed

beyond their mild mannered outward appearance to become heroes, tested beyond their comfort zone. What tests your online persona? What draws him or her out to test their boundaries, to draw a line in the sand or cement?

The energy behind our buttons are our passions. Those who blog with passion, tempered, thoughtful, and inspired passions, tend to blog better, and attract others with similar passions. Passionate bloggers also tend to have longevity, quickly attracting like minds and supporters.

**What Are Your Goals?**

List the top five goals in life for your online persona.

Then list the top three things to accomplish in the next five years.

What is your online persona's greatest ambition? Is it one of the top five or three things listed above? Should it be?

What motivates and inspires you?

Which of these goals and tasks will be accomplished through your blog? Do you need the blog to achieve these things?

Now, examine closely what gets in your way the most, in life, in work, in relationships, in everything you do. Make a list. Make it a good list. List all the obstacles that consistently interfere with your ability to achieve your goals, small or large.

How will blogging attract those obstacles, and how will you overcome them? How are your self-sabotage efforts a part of your online personality's character. Just as an archetype has fears and weakness, so must they have strategies for handling them. What are they for your online persona?

What doesn't kill us makes us stronger, so what makes your online persona stronger? What gives them the strength to keep going and achieve their goals in spite of themselves?

## Assignment: Who Are You When You Blog

You've just finished reading through a list of suggestions for defining your online persona's personality in a character inventory.

Throw all your notes away.

Okay, not really. Keep them. Keep them close.

The character inventory list was designed to ignite your imagination, to help you brainstorm the personality traits and descriptions of who you want or need to be on the web.

Here is the real assignment.

List 5 things you want to be known for and listed in your obituary when you die.

That's it. Get started. Write your obituary.

## Assignment: Define Your Online Persona

Using the following chart, define your online persona.

List your online persona's desires, goals, fears, strategies, weaknesses, and talents.

## Assignment Review

How went the assignment? Did the five topics match your site topics you grouped together in Lesson Three? Are they different?

Can blogging help you accomplish these goals? What do you need to get it done? What will it take to get it done? Be clear about the obstacles that may cause you to stumble, and be clearer on who you are and what it takes to get the job done.

Your goals help you define the person you want to be online, the person who will succeed in blogging.

Was it easy to define your online persona? Sometimes it is challenging to stand back and look at who you are on the web with an unbiased

perspective. If it was a challenge, consider asking people familiar with you online to help you determine your online persona archetype. If it was easy, how do you feel about the list of your fears, strategies, and weaknesses? Do these help you identify your obstacles, the self-sabotage you throw up in your way when you are on the right path? Have you come up with strategies to get past them?

This and the next few assignments and lessons will dive deeper into your online persona and purpose for blogging, helping you clarify both. Be open to the experience. Changes will happen along the journey of this master class in blogging. You may hone your persona and publishing interests, defining your niche in the online community, or you may jump ship, switch paths, or do a u-turn. Anything is possible.

This process is designed to test you and prepare you to succeed in blogging by not just knowing what you are doing but how you are doing. It is a constant process of testing, challenging, and checking-in to ensure you are on the right road.

# Lesson Five: Who Are You Blogging For?

With a clear picture on paper and in your head about your online persona, you've done the majority of work to define your audience. As Pruitt and Adlin reported in their research, it is important to put a human face on your customers, to know who they are, what they like, dislike, and define their expectations and meet them.

The best bloggers know their audience is of like-mind, sharing common ground in thought and belief, so you are your best customer.

That's right.

By defining your online archetype persona, you've described your audience.

And you thought this would be hard.

## Like Attracts Like

The law of attraction is best described  by Ralph Trine, one of the New Thought leaders, in his book "*In Tune with the Infinite*" in 1897:

*"The law of attraction works universally on every plane of action, and we attract whatever we desire or expect.*

*If we desire one thing and expect another, we become like houses divided against themselves, which are quickly brought to desolation. Determine resolutely to expect only what you desire, then you will attract only what you wish for."*

The law of attraction is a thought process, but it has been proved repeatedly that like attract likes with common interests, shared passions, and like personalities. We enjoy spending time with people with common interests for that reason, we have something in common.

In his book, *"The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success,"* Depak Chopra described the Law of Intention and Desire:

*Inherent in every intention and desire is the mechanics for its fulfillment..intention and desire in the field of pure potentiality have infinite organizing power.*

*And when we introduce an intention in the fertile ground of pure potentiality, we put this infinite organizing power to work for us.*

He goes on to explain that "energy and information exist everywhere in nature." At the quantum field level, there is nothing but information and energy. On the material level, we are no different from a tree. We are based upon the same technologies, the same natural elements. The difference is that we, as humans, are aware of the energy and information around us and the impact on our bodies, minds, and lives. We can change it, harness it, and cause things to manifest, a complement to the Law of Attraction.

The same principles apply to your blogging audience. You attract people like you, who think like you, believe like you, and share common interests. By clearly identifying your persona's character archetype, your personality traits, interests, and passions, you also define your demographics, that which you attract.

When I ask a room full of students or workshop participants, even clients, to define their customer, most respond with "everyone." "I want to reach everyone. " "I want to sell my stuff to everyone."

Guess what? You can't. It's not possible. Not everyone will want what you have. It's just common sense.

Be more specific. Always be more specific.

I spent a long time defining my audience on *Lorelle on WordPress*. In a sense, it was everyone, but it wasn't. It was only people interested in improving their blogging, WordPress, and social media experiences. They wanted answers to question and to learn how to do it themselves. This defined me as a trainer. The fact that these individuals represented a wide swath of careers and interests, everything from doctor and lawyers to teenagers with an opinion or desire to share their interest in their education or new hobby, to 90-year olds desiring to leave their legacy on the web. That fits just about everyone, but if I dig down into the specifics, it is only those with an interest in web publishing and sharing on the web.

Because I'm so passionate about helping people have their say in the world, letting their voices be heard no matter what it is they want to say, my passion attracts those seeking to do the same, irregardless of education, career, or topical interest.

A friend of mine is an author of romance novels. She wanted to blog but was tortured with the subject matter. "What do I blog about?" We talked about her interests and why she came to write her novels. "Because I'm a romantic at heart." I wanted more a more specific reason. We dug deeper. It turned out that she wrote romance novels because she became enchanted with them as a teenager and the excitement never left. "These books gave me hope that I would find love someday, and it would last." Her readers want the same thing. She's in the middle of rebooting her site right now, and asked not to be named, but she told me last week that she just finished five days writing nothing but posts on hope, finding love, losing love, and finding hope again in love with a passion she hadn't felt in her own writing in years. She has about six months or more of blog content, and she is considering turning these into novellas after publishing

them on her site to widen her market reach and product line. I can't remember hearing her so excited about anything in a long time.

Deepak Chopra became an international best-seller and speaker using his own methods, by tapping into the energy that attracted like minds, those willing to improve themselves, often identified as fellow spiritual travelers.

The Dilbert cartoons became an international success in newspaper syndication, books, video games, animated television series, and products because the characters represented the everyman employee stuck in the day-to-day grind of bureaucracy, satirizing the corporate workplace. My father, stuck in a dead end job in the ship building industry, would carefully cut out the cartoons and stick them on his cube at work, their stories telling his story to anyone passing by.

When you are clear about who you are and what you do, and what your goals are, you know your audience. They are you. They like what you like, and they want to know more about what you share in common.

Again, you thought this would be difficult?

Who is your audience?

You.

Blog for you and you will attract like-minds and fans.

# Lesson Six: Designing Your Brand

Unless you know where you are going, you'll probably get there all the same.

This is a truism. We all get there. We just take different routes and have different experiences along the way.

So goes planning your online brand.

By now, you should have a clear picture of who you are on the web when you blog, your online persona, character archetype, whatever you wish to call it. It is from this that we drawn inspiration for your site's layout, structure, content organization, and the overall design.

## Your Blog is Your Business Card

One of the workshops I teach often is called "Your Blog is Your Business Card." And it is.

Your blog is the modern calling card. In the Victorian Age, it was common to arrange a meeting with an individual or company by delivering a small card with your name and business imprinted on it to the home or office requesting a meeting. If acceptable, a note would be returned with a time and place. Acceptable meant that the person would check with their trusted associates to do an informal background check, inquiring as to the

respectability and quality of your personage, and if what you had to offer was legitimate.

Nothing much as changed since then. It's just easier to check out a person's credentials on the web. The first stop: their site. Second stop? LinkedIn. Third stop? Facebook, Twitter, and other social media channels.

Today, not only is your blog your business card, you also better have those other channels covered with your well-written profile and appropriate content as proof you are respectable and worth knowing.

A blog does not stand alone. Combined with your presence on social media, it is your online identity, your brand. It is a permanent placeholder on the web for your identity, your resume, your purpose, and an aid for you to reach your goals. A key purpose of a blog to to help people get to know you on the web.

How do they get to know you, your online person, through your site?

They get to know who you are because every pixel on your site matters. Make it matter. Make each one represent you, and do so well.


## How to Succeed in Blogging

Andy Weir is a computer programmer for Sandia National Laboratories. In his free time, he likes to write science fiction[19]. He tried and failed numerous times to get published, and basically gave up. Life was busy. But he still had time for his life-long fascination with going to Mars.

Andy hung out online with people using their collective creativity to consider all the possibilities for not just getting to Mars but living there. For fun, he started a series on his site about Mars, a collection of "what-if" stories. When he found that he had a bit of a plot figured out, he put it together and offered it as a free PDF on his site.

Some less techie folks asked him to put it on Amazon so they could access it with their Kindle. He didn't have to do that as Kindle will read PDF files,

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[19] http://www.galactanet.com/

but he decided to make it easier for them. He published it as a 99 cent book since, at the time, Kindle wouldn't let him offer it for free.

Three months later it sold over 35,000 copies. It made Amazon's Science Fiction Best Sellers List in the first month, followed soon after on the New York Times Best Seller List. Agents and publishers came knocking.

He sold the movie rights and in 2015, *The Martian* became the 10th highest grossing film of the year, directed by Ridley Scott and staring Matt Damon as the astronaut left behind on Mars who has to survive until he is rescued. The book won the Hugo Award for Best Dramatic Presentation, and he won the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer in 201 He's currently at work on his next novel, and CBS picked up a pilot written by Weir titled *Mission Control*, which hopefully will hit the small screen soon.

Ree Drummond is today known around the country as *The Pioneer Woman*, but it didn't start out that way. Traveling cross country, she literally stumbled into the man who would become her future husband. She was a city girl, and he was a horse-ridding rancher. She didn't know anything about his world, and he didn't know much about hers, but love is blind and the two figured it out.

Part of the process included Ree starting her blog to share her stories of a city girl learning to raise and family on a huge ranch in Oklahoma. She explained her process in an article in Costco Way Magazine.

> *"I didn't start focusing on my blog until I'd been blogging about eight months. I started sharing things I was cooking and that part of my blog took off, partly because of the step-by-step photos I posted. I did that because that's just the way I like to learn things. I'm very visual."*

She turned her energy in the direction of visual tutorials, using photographs, then video, to discuss cooking tips, techniques, and recipes.
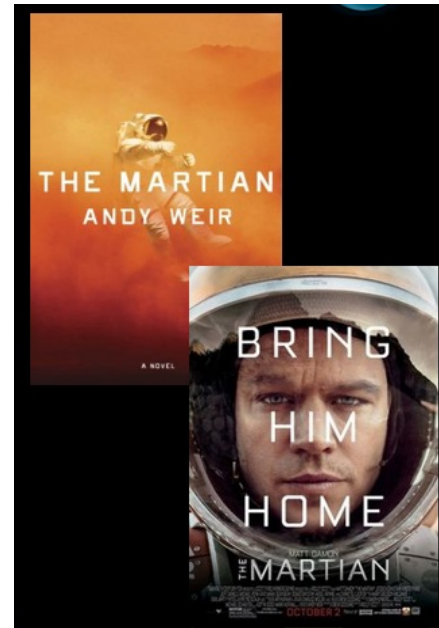
Her site was so popular, they demanded a cookbook, and she soon after published *The Pioneer Woman Cooks: Food from My Frontier*, followed soon after with another, then a couple children's books. You probably already have heard of her, and have watched her popular Food Network television show with the same name as her blog.

These two people not only serve as inspiration for other bloggers, they also define what it means to be a success in blogging.

1. Each had a clear sense of self-identity (persona).

2. They clearly identified their passion and values.

3. They freely shared expertise and experiences.

4. They attracted like-minds to build a community.

5. They served their readers.

6. They became a brand organically.

7. They opened themselves up to opportunities.

These are the ingredients for a recipe of success in blogging.

The law of attraction covered in Lesson Five states:

> *"Determine resolutely to expect only what you desire, then you will attract only what you wish for."*

It bears repeating. Make others want and need you. Don't chase after them. Make them come to you.

And they will.

This isn't a philosophy of "build it and they will come." This is a belief that you are blogging your passion. This is a belief based in the law of

attraction, that if you focus your energies on your passions, your interests, and are clear about your online identity, you will attract those with common interests and build a community. Put yourself first, then match that clarity by serving your readers, and you will grow and expand your reach organically, creating a solid web platform, your soap box. And others will be attracted to your energy and enthusiasm. These are the people you want to work with.

It doesn't happen overnight, but it could. It doesn't happen even in a year, but it could. The clearer your purpose, mission, and goals, and the stronger your online character persona identity, the faster the process.

Make a plan. Look at all the possibilities and consequences. Think further, wider, and narrower when necessary, to find your community and serve it by serving yourself. As the flight attendants explain, "Put on your oxygen mask first so that you may assist others better."

We've covered many of these topics in this Master Class workbook already, but let's work on a few of these topics a little more.

## Creating an Online Profile

Lesson Four explored character archetypes and offered a character inventory and list of goals to help you identify your online persona. It's now time to write your online persona's biography clearly establishing their qualifications for what you are blogging about.

People like to spend time with people who meet their character expectations, even if they surprise themselves once in a while. People want to be with others like them, but more. The best people in this world have friends who have much in common with them, people they assume are slightly better than they are, people they can learn from, look up to, friends who make them be better than they are.

I call these relationships the "lifters" in our community, the relationships that make us be more, achieve more, and feel supported in our efforts. These are the people we trust the most, consciously and unconsciously. This happens online with greater frequency than offline and in person.

People want to trust others so much, they lean into relationships and connections with online personas that make them feel good, encouraged, supported, and confident.

If you've come to trust someone, losing that trust comes with a penalty, often pain and distrust. Trust is a precious commodity. People come preprogrammed to distrust, and learn to overcome it with little or no information. It is always a gamble to trust, and we roll the dice daily on the web, trusting blogs, news, and social media sources.

Trust is defined as a person's willingness to accept their vulnerability by replying on implicit or explicit information. Trust equals an acceptable uncertainty in a relationship. Trust equals credibility. If you know enough to believe a person is credible, you tend to trust them and what they have to say.

When someone discovers an excellent article or information on the web, their second thought is often to not take the advice literally, but to question the source, a highly appropriate next reaction. The most common question asked after "how do I..." on the web is "What gives you the right to tell me?" This is where a well-written biography comes in handy on your site.

Well-written content establishes a sense of trust. To reinforce that trust, let's explore the areas of a blog or social media profile that conveys credibility, thus trust.

## The Online Profile

Every time you add a new social media channel or website to your portfolio, you create an online profile. The online profile is a description of your character persona, revealing just enough information to visitors about who you are and what you do.

Think of your online profile as your personal elevator pitch. You are telling the world you are worth knowing and doing business with.
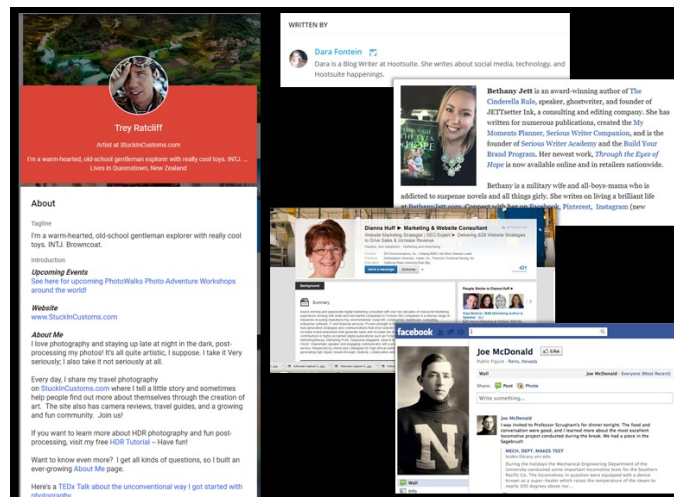
The key to writing a good persona is three-fold:

- It must hint at your online persona's character and personality.

- It must identify your online mission and purpose.

- It must answer the question: *What gives you the right to tell me?*

A well-crafted online profile establishes your personality in a few words as serious, humorous, professional, personable, artistic, a teacher, scholar, student, explorer, whatever your key personality traits. Reveal them through hints. Don't sell us on who you are, reveal yourself delicately, craftily, so we get it without a punch to the face.

What are your goals, your purpose, your mission online? Why are you online? Why are you participating in the social web? Out of peer pressure? Maybe, but likely with a specific goal in mind. Do you want to sell products or services? Establish a reputation and credibility as a writer, photographer, artist, business person? Do you just want to update your family on your activities and stay in touch? All are good reasons, but what are yours. You don't have to state "I'm in this to make money," or maybe you do. Choose your words carefully as all reveals who you are are online.

It must answer the question, that very big question: *What gives you the right to tell me?* This is the gold-standard question your About and other contextual and design elements must answer. How should I trust what you say? How do you know it? What are your experiences, your expertise, and why should I care about what you have to say or share? Answer that question and you have a solid start to your online profile.

Here are some examples:

> *I'm a desperate housewife. I live in the country. I channel Lucille Ball, Vivien Leigh, and Ethel Merman. Welcome to my frontier.*

This is the profile statement for Ree Drumond, The Pioneer Woman. What does it tell us about her?

It hints at her personality and character fairly accurately, a dynamic woman with a great sense of humor, boisterous personality, and solid Southern-style character. She is a desperate housewife, using the title of a

popular television show instead of an entire paragraph defining what that means. It also is a clue that she watches televisions and movies as she uses these modern colloquial references. She plainly states she lives in the country, echoed with the welcome to her frontier, describing the country in which she lives.

If you are looking for a good example of writing conflict, her bio is a great example. Lucille Ball on her ranch would be a whole series of sitcom romps through clumsiness and bad decisions, taking Lucy and Ethel literally on a ride. Before you even know what this woman is about, you see her. You see red hair, a big smile, an open personality, and someone great at falling over her own feet with panache.

Or do you see something different?

The Brads[20], Brad Colbow and Brad Dielman, are web designers in Cleveland, Ohio, who publish cartoons about their adventures weekly. Their two bios represent well their personalities and their goals.

> *Colbow: He spends part of his days wondering how to combine his two loves, comic books and easter eggs. The rest of his time he spends trying to design killer user interfaces.*

> *Dielman: Based on the real life front end development ninja with the same name. Brad's obsession with web standards and Apple products will one day ruin his life, but for now it makes him a great designer.*

Both clearly have a sense of humor, and they clearly state their goals, but can you tell the difference between the two men? Colbow is a contrast between the symbolism of comic books and easter eggs, and it isn't clear what that means yet, and Dielman is a man of obsessions, clearly someone who pushes the limits represented by the use of "ninja" in his profile.

Zhixin Lim of Odds and Ends[21] has been cited often as having one of the

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[20]  http://bradcolbow.com/about/

[21]  http://odds-and-ends.net/about/index.html

most entertaining bios online. His site's tagline is "My photos, my life, my way."

Here are the first questions and answers in a faux interview on his About web page to give you a sense of his persona.

> **You Are?**
>
> *The name is Zhixin Lim, which I've to admit, doesn't quite have the Bond-James-Bond ring to it. As to who I am, I could tell you but then I would have to kill you.*
>
> **Do people find your name weird?**
>
> *Well, I hope not! People do have a hard time pronouncing my name though.*
>
> **So, how do I pronounce your name?**
>
> *Here's yours truly giving you a martian-like greeting while pronouncing own name (over indistinguishable snippets of Star Wars theme for theatrical effect). If all things fail, just call me Zach.*
>
> **Hmm, so Zach, how old are you?**
>
> *I'm at an age that would raise eyebrows if said age is divulged. FYI, I celebrate my birthday on October 2 No, I don't mind anonymous birthday gifts.*
>
> **Do you work?**
>
> *Yes, I'm an actuary. When I was much younger, I was a columnist in the papers for a good few years. Had I not been so young and barred from entering clubs, being a columnist might have impressed the ladies more than being an actuary.*
>
> **Do you enjoy working?**
>
> *I genuinely do but I'm well aware that ultimately, my work doesn't cure cancer, put men on Mars, or kill Kony. For now, it's a brilliant distraction from my true calling as the despotic Ruler of Earth and Beyond.*

You sense his personality, and his unwillingness to be too serious about anything while implying total commitment to this process. It's delightful, refreshing, and an interesting way to reveal yourself on your site.

Whether you are a fan or not, Hillary Clinton's Twitter profile during the election was a well-crafted work of profile writing art.

*Wife, mom, grandma, women+kids advocate, FLOTUS, Senator, SecState, hair icon, paintsuit aficionado, 2016 presidential candidate.*

While doubtful that she wrote it herself, the word choices represent her interests, personality, expertise, and a healthy sense of self-deprecating sense of humor that many of us miss in politics today.

**Hillary Clinton** ✔
@HillaryClinton

Wife, mom, grandma, women+kids advocate, FLOTUS, Senator, SecState, hair icon, pantsuit aficionado, 2016 presidential candidate. Tweets from Hillary signed –H

As an experiment, consider using her example and boiling down your life into nouns that represent your online persona, your expertise, and your goals. These words may help you with the upcoming assignment.

## Assignment: Write Your Bio

Write your biography in one to two paragraphs.

Write in third person, not first.

Ensure it represents your blog topics and interests, and your goals, be them life or business goals for yourself and your online persona, or the goals you have for the site.

After writing, spend at least 20 minutes editing. Hone it down to ensure it represents your online persona's personality and characteristics, and that it says what you need to say to answer the question, "What gives you the right to tell me?"

# Tips for Writing Your Online Bio

You've written your first draft of the bio for your online persona. Let's now work on editing it, refining it to truly represent who you are, or at least your online persona, on the web.

Your bio serves an important purpose on the web. It tells the world who you are, how you got here, and what you have to share with the world. It defines your personality, skills, and talents. It identifies you as a resource. People will know you are the person to come to or the one with the answers to the questions they have on a specific topic.

Your bio will be used in many places beyond your About. You will use it, or a condensed version, on every social media profile you use to support your blogging efforts. You will use it on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, etc., so it helps if it is not just well-written and edited, but truly reflective of who you are on the web so you are a consistent personality across multiple platforms.

I keep three versions of my bio in a text file to copy and paste into a profile when I register a new site or social media identity. I have a long in-depth bio about three paragraphs long, typically a version found on my most popular websites. From that I've culled down a very short bio, typically a sentence or three for profiles with word or character restrictions. My third profile is my professional profile, a bio you may or may not need. It frames my experiences from a marketing and promotional perspective, and it is used when I guest blog or contribute to another website, or need for marketing purposes such as a keynote, workshop, or class.

You are not limited to three versions of your bio. Once you have your main one written for your site, you may make have many iterations that meet your goals and purpose on the web.

Here are more tips for writing your online bio.

### Brag. Too much.

A bio like this is your chance to toot your own horn, to brag about your accomplishments, to prove to the world you know what the hell you are

talking about and you have the scars to prove it. Risk a little, then risk some more as you share who you are with the world. Did you?

Too often we hide behind our humility, keeping our achievements to ourselves. This might be the only chance you have to throw back the curtain on your expertise and qualifications to celebrate where you've been and how you survived to get here.

Shout out your experience. Brag. Bang the drums. Blow your horn. Be clear and specific with what makes you uniquely you and how you were molded by your life's history, especially as it relates to your blog's topic and goals.

**Establish Trust**

To build a relationship with others you need connections, the characteristics that you value in yourself and others. Remember, trust is a person's wiliness to accept their vulnerability in forming a relationship relying on implicit and explicit information, that acceptable uncertainty one can live with when you have enough in common to look past the gaps.

What can you add to your bio to make people trust you?

If you are an expert on a subject, what can you say to define that expertise. To me, an expert is someone who's worked in a field, job, or hobby for at least three years, five is better, long enough to fail and succeed multiple times and figure out how to endure. Expertise is learned and earned. It is not someone who read about it online and has been doing it for three weeks. To me, expertise is longevity as much as education.

What is your qualification for expert?

Maybe you aren't the expert on your blog but the student. What could you say to establish trust with your audience and influence them to join you on your quest to learn more on the subject?

This isn't an easy task. It takes time and frequent refinement to find the words to answer the question: "What gives you the right to tell me?" Allow the answer to evolve over time.

## Leave No Stone Unturned (or Blank)

Teaching a college course on social media, I asked the students to write their bio in a single paragraph. The following came from one of those students and is used with permission with the name changed.

> *My name is Steve Jones. I'm 47 years old and live in Vancouver, Washington. I have a wife and a son and a grown up daughter in college. I'm in a graphic design college program.*

Tell me what you know about Steve.

Think about it. Look at the words. What do you know about Steve.

You know his name. Why did he start with his name? Is his name important to what he is doing? What does it say about him? Does it identify him as male? What do we know about the cultural significance of his name? He's from the Jones family? What does that mean to you?

He volunteers his age. He's 47. Is that important? Why would he include his age? Does it matter how old he is? What assumptions can we make about his age? Does his age mean anything to you?

He says he lives in Vancouver, Washington. That's a city just across the Columbia River from Portland, Oregon, a bustling corporate and industry metropolitan city. What does that mean? Is it important that we know he lives in what is often referred to as the bedroom of Portland? Why is where he lives significant? Is there something special to him, or to you, about Vancouver?

He explains he has a wife, son, and grown-up daughter. So he is a family man. What does that mean? What significance does it hold for you? What can you assume about those pieces of information? Is it important to know he has a family?

He says he has a son and grow-up daughter in college. How old is his son? How old is his daughter? What do we know from this information? Can we infer a relationship with these two children and their father?

He says he is studying graphic design in a college program. What can we infer from this information? How long he's been in college? The quality of

the program he's taking? Whether or not the topic is of interest to him or just another educational program in a long line of them? Does it say if he is earning a certification or degree in the topic? What do we know about him from that claim?

Did you find answers to these questions about Steve? Do you feel like you have a sense of him? That you know who he is and how he thinks?

You might have answered negatively to all these questions because you don't have information upon which to base your assumptions. Or you may have invented a whole biography about Steve, who he is, how he got here, and his whole life story.

Remember, trust is defined as a person's willingness to accept their vulnerability by replying on implicit or explicit information. Steve's bio is filled with explicit information, but also implicit information. We fill in the gaps with assumptions, often with our own stereotypical judgments and expectations on who he is based upon our experiences.

Trust equals an acceptable uncertainty in a relationship. Based upon the information provided, you may ignore the uncertainty, the gaps in the information, to come to trust Steve enough to establish a relationship. Or you may not.

Research has found repeatedly that where there is just enough information but little or no specifics, we make shit up. Seriously.

Here is my response to Steve's bio and life story.

> *Steve is a divorced man who lost his job and is now trying to rediscovery who he is and where he is going in life. He qualified through the unemployment programs for college courses, and he took something that looked quick and easy to do. He admits he's a lazy man, more interested in his music than in getting a college degree or job hunting. He used to be in a heavy rock band that found some fans in the 1990s, but too much drugs and alcohol ruined his life and destroyed the band. He cleaned himself up and got a blue collar job, now he's out of work and looking for a new angle. He lives*

*in Vancouver because he can't afford to live in Portland, and he is on his second marriage to a younger woman who wanted children, so he's playing parenthood for a second (or third) time and trying to be a better father. He hasn't been in contact with his daughter from the first marriage, estranged when she became a teenager and her mother didn't want anything to do with him as an addict, but he's proud of her and wants her to know that, so he mentioned she was in college. And he is proud. He hopes she will see this and contact him so he can finally tell her so.*

Wow, you say. That is some messed up assumptions about this boring 47 year old man in college.

Funny enough, I did this without knowing who the student was. When I finished, he stood up in class and identified him, tears rolling down his face. "How did you know?" I didn't. I know people and personalities.

When we don't have information, we make things up. We are creative spirits, and we don't like not knowing, so we fill in the blanks.

## More Tips for Writing Your Online Bio

Here are the things you need to consider as you write your bio, using Steve's perfect example.

**Name:** Your name may or may not matter to your blog's purpose and goals, or even your online identify. It is highly recommended that you use a human-sounding name and not a nickname like SexyChick69 as that encourages people to reveal your identity. Your name, though, may represent your personality or ethnic heritage, even your religion. Even if you aren't Jewish, a name like Cohen implies it. You may have had a distant relative in Russia so far back that the name means nothing, but people will still ask you if you are Russian if your name sounds Russian. Or Dutch or Spanish or Chinese or Korean. Either way, should the first thing people know about you be your name?

**Age:** I have a simple rule of thumb when it comes to admitting your age on the web: *Don't.* Your age is only important if you are eight and you just

got your medical degree, or you are a champion skateboarder at 99 years of age. A 12 year old champion skateboarder is expected. Being almost one hundred years old and that active is unexpected and tells an entire story. Make your age matter only if it answers the question of who you are and qualifies your experience (a veteran of thirty years experience).

**Residence or Location:** My rule on location is it doesn't matter unless you are blogging about the location or seeking customers in a specific location such as offering brick-and-mortar in person access. If you are blogging about your area's history, culture, or activities, location matters. People make assumptions about where you are from all the time. Where you are from or where you grew up can also serve as a distraction. I rarely tell people exactly where I grew up when I travel as the town is called Mukilteo. I have to stop what I'm doing and explain where it is, why it has that funny name, and then sit through polite trips down memory lane of their visits to the West Coast of the United States when they were young or in college, or on work assignments, and their memories of Mt. Rainier, Seattle, the Olympic National Park, all that green, etc, when I have only a short time to get the job done and move onto the next assignment or event. A little "where are you from" contextual talk is fine, but if it isn't important to your blog's purpose, it doesn't matter. It shouldn't be in the lead of your bio unless that is your blog's main topic and you are an expert on the subject.

**Family:** We all have family. They come in various shapes and sizes. Some are close, some are not, some just are, enough said. Is it important to your topic and goals for people to know what kind of family you have or how your family behaves or its history? If you are a therapist, marriage counselor, or parent blogger, then yes, your family is important to your identity. It defines you and your topics. If it isn't, drop it. It isn't anyone's business.

**Messages to Others:** Steve buried a message to his estranged daughter in his bio. Don't. That is his story, his personal issue, not reflective of his identity on the web. There are times when such messages are acceptable. If you are using your blog to research your family's history because you were adopted or specializing in adoption genealogy, then including a message

that you are seeking your biological ancestors is appropriate. That serves your goals. Otherwise, remove all hidden and indirect messages. Let your words define you, help others to understand who you are as someone they can connect to and build a relationship.

**Job Description:** My stating Steve is in college and in a graphic design program, too many questions were left unanswered. Has he always been interested in graphic design and now determined to get a degree to up his game? Or is this a new subject for him? What qualifications does he have for graphic design? Any history, background, experience? We don't know, so we are left to assume. Examine how you describe what you do. What blanks have you left in the description? What will others assume about what you do and what you know?

**Stop Selling Yourself. Reveal Yourself.** The web is stuffed to the brim with people over-selling themselves and their wares. Screaming at the world visually and audibly, demanding attention. Why are they demanding? Because they are like the crying baby on the airplane. We're learning to live with it, to ignore it. Rates are fluctuating, rising, that 60-90% of consumers have ad and banner blindness,

**Tease Us:** Make us want to know more. Make us want to know you. Make us want to point our browser back to you over and over again. Make us want to do business with you. Let us get to know enough of who you are, your online persona, to feel like we could be good friends or work together. Steve gave us nothing worth returning to, nothing to seek, no interest in learning more about who he is, how he thinks, what he thinks, and what we can learn from him. Give us a reason to come back, and we will, and often bring our friends along for the ride.

Be as implicit and explicit as you can, be specific and clear, about who you are and what you know and do to establish a sense of trust with your audience.

## Rewrite Your Bio

Want to know what I rewrote for Steve's bio?

> *A professional digital graphic artist specializing in web branding and logos, over the past ten years I've developed and designed 996 logos and brands. Yours could be number 1000. Feel lucky?*

It establishes his experience, expertise, and a sense of his personality. We know what he does, and what he likely doesn't do. There are many gaps in the information, but re-read it. Do you feel like you need to know more? Sure you do, but it isn't about filling in the gaps. You aren't making things up to figure out who he is. You feel a sense of trust. You feel interest. His description made you smile. You like him. You want to know this person. You are intrigued. You want more.

From here, this bio is easily expanded to specifics covering his specialty and what he will share on his site as he explores the topic or shares portfolio pieces.

It's your turn. Re-write your bio and blog purpose for your About. Align it with your online person more closely, letting us find hints that reveal you to us.

## The About Page

The "About" is a web page on your site required by web standards whether you are an individual or company. It is an essential part of your brand and identity online.

In WordPress installations, the About web page is created automatically, awaiting the user's edit to fill in the blanks.

The About web page serves two purposes.

**Describe the purpose and activities of the site itself:** What type of content is and will be published on the site, the topics covered, the answers provided, and how this site serves its audience. This description may include the goals of the site. Consider it the site mission statement.

**Describe the author(s) of the site and their qualifications:** This is where the answer to "what gives you the right to tell me" is given. List your goals, experiences, qualifications, and intentions for this site. Ensure that every word represents your online persona's characteristics.

You've written your online bio, your profile. That's part two. Let's explore a little more about writing your site's purpose and mission.

## Writing Your Site's About

The About on a site consists of two parts. We've covered the second part, the biography of the blogger. Now it is time to write the purpose and goals of the site.

Everything you write about now on your site originates from your online persona description, bio, and goals. It defines your site's purpose, design, and content decisions.

Consider your online persona as a filter. Shift through each decision with it. Does the outcome match your online personality and goals? If no, reconsider or toss it. If yes, how? Refine each concept and decision to best match the personality and character you wish the world to know and flock to, and align it with the design and content on the site. This is the only way you will reach your goals.

The site's About description or mission statement is used in the following locations online:

1.  Incorporated into your profile on social media and websites.

2.  Your site's title and tagline.

3.  The site's profile paragraph or statement, often found at the top of the sidebar to explain briefly the purpose of the site.

4.  Influences the site's design, layout, and structure such as a site on fishing as a hobby featuring fishing gear and fish.

5.  Filters out irrelevancies as you develop your site's content.

Say your goal is to sell your book. You've written a tutorial book on how to knit boxes for small items such as jewelry or gift-giving.

Your online persona is the soul archetype of creator. You are the maker of

things, the inventor, the creative spirit. For you, these boxes aren't just constructed objects but part of the knitter's spirit, conveying not only your designs but encouraging others to create their own fun knitted boxes that reflect their own personality. The gift that keeps giving, so to speak.

The creator is the artist, the innovator, the inventor, architect, musician, dreamer, the artist who examines our boundaries of reality and perception and pushes them back. The creator has an inexhaustible imagination, often ahead of their time. Galileo, Mozart, Einstein, these are their mentors, their ideals. Your fear is mediocrity, normalcy, staying the same. Your strategy to deal with this is to be an authentic voice in the world and have a pure vision of inspired creativity. You gain rivals easily, allowing them to challenge you to conform, but you resist. Your weakness is that the idea drives your passions, but procrastination and incompleteness piles up around you. You live by your impulses.

You find it hard to promote yourself, though you are at ease promoting everyone and everything else. Still, you come up with a bio that credits your twenty years of creativity working as a graphic designer by day, knitter by night. It took four years to produce this book at the insistence of your supportive husband, who you admit did most of the work, and now you want to promote and sell it.

Your site's mission statement on the About web page takes your expertise and hones it to highlight the goal of your site: *sell your book*.

The content on the site is designed to promote the book as well as your expertise on the subject of knitting, specifically knitting boxes. You have come up with a series of articles to keep the enthusiasm for knitting boxes alive by offering tips, techniques, free patterns, and answering questions about the process, some of which may be in your book. Each post is an opportunity to add "you will find more tips and techniques in my new book."

Your site's About might be:

> *Explore the creative art of knitting boxes with, Sally Sessions, author of the popular book, "Knitting in Corners: The Art of Knitting Boxes." Sally's innovative approach to knitting boxes is an exciting*

*method for improving your knitting abilities. This is your opportunity to move beyond one skein projects of scarves, gloves, and hats, and experiment with structural knitting. On this site she offers tips and techniques based upon her book on how to knit boxes for jewelry, gift-giving, coins, and other fun containers, even lunch boxes. The site offers free patterns, and the help you create your own unique knitted boxes.*

Simple, to the point. The first sentence defines the author's expertise and points directly to a link to a purchase point. The second and third sentences evoke a relationship by offering an innovative approach and opportunity to learn with an expert. It defines the content on the site. It says it will help the visitor learn more and be able to actually do something with that learning.

The third person voice uses words in line with the creator personality such as innovative, creative, improving, experiment, unique, and fun. Depending upon the person's level of creative spirit, it could be more or less dramatic in the use of language.

Write your site's purpose. Keep in mind the following:

1. It must include a call-to-action, an incentive to act, read, learn, respond, buy.

2. It must include you as part of the purpose, as the expert, teacher, student, sharer, whatever your character archetype requires.

3. It must include your goals, blatantly or subtly.

4. It must summarize the type and context of the content offered on the site.

## Assignment: Explain Your Blog's Purpose

Explain your blog's purpose.

What are you doing here?

What will you be posting?

Why?

How?

Who is served by this content?

As a reader, why am I here? What can I expect to find or learn?

What are your goals here?

Write your site's mission statement.

Write it in third person as in "The purpose of this site is..."


## Assignment: The Structure of the About Page

In this last assignment for Lesson Five, you are to create your About web page for your blog.

Write both sections in third person.

The structure is as follows:

1. The title of the web page is **About**. It is created automatically by WordPress, but must be added manually on other publishing platforms. The title is About, not About Us, About Me, About Lorelle, About The Site, or About the Company. It is the web standard that it be just the word About.

2. The first paragraphs are a description of the site's purpose, its mission statement. It does not feature a subtitle or heading, simply starts at the top of the web page.

3. The next section begins with a heading, a subtitle. It maybe created manually in the Text or HTML editor for your site, or by typing,

selecting the text, and choosing one of the heading button options such as h1, h2, h3, or h4, as fits the design and layout of your site's content. The title of the heading is **About the Author**.

4.  The next paragraph or three is about the author. Keep it specific and concise, reflecting your online persona's personality, experiences, expertise, purpose, and goals.

5.  Optionally, you may add one or more photographs of yourself, your company, you at work, or other supporting imagery. Align these properly within the text.

Go to it. Complete your About following the above structure.

## Assignment Review

How did you do? Was it easy or a challenge? What was the hardest part of the process? What was the easiest? Why?

The answers to these questions further hone your online persona as well as your site's purpose and goals. The areas of ease are a sign that you are comfortable, safe with these concepts, with those aspects of your online character type and mission.

Then areas where you faced frustrations, examine these closer. Why? Is it because it was too close to the truth and fear raised its ugly head? Or because it didn't feel right? It just isn't what or who you want to be online? Then take a step back and look at your online character again. Re-examine your site's purpose and goals. Maybe you need to go through the previous chapters with a fresh perspective on who you want to be when you blog. It's a good sign if you do. It means you are serious about this process.

Was it easier to write in third person rather than first? Maybe you wrote automatically in first person, then re-read the assignment and had to redo it in third person. Was that a challenge or easier?

Review your About. Ensure both sections answer the critical question a reader wants answer when they view that page: "What gives you the right to tell me?"

# The Avatar

The avatar on the web is our physical representative, the graphic image that represents who we are, what we blog about, and defends our credibility, hopefully creating trust. It is found on our blogs and social media platforms. You might even include it on your printed business card.

In 2011, CNN's Defining America project explored online self-portraits of Americans[22] through their avatars on social media, and offers tips from some experts, including artists specializing in designing profile images for the web.

> *A profile picture conveys a sense of identity, and nowhere is this more apparent than on Facebook, which even has the word "face" in its name. Inspired by the tradition of scholastic facebooks designed for students to identify each other, the site began as a place where college students could put names to faces and vice versa.*
>
> *Whether you're searching for a new friend or reconnecting with an old pal, photos help bridge the gaps between individuals, says Meredith Chin, manager of product communications for Facebook. They also help distinguish one John Smith from another.*
>
> *Chin recommends using a photo of yourself if possible. However, it's quite common to see people post photos of an inanimate object or their dog.*
>
> *"Being able to see someone's face is really important," says Chin. "It's also a big part of expressing who you are."*

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[22] http://www.cnn.com/2011/TECH/social.media/06/30/profile.pictures.irpt/index.html

As part of expressing who you are, the avatar, profile image, or gravatar (globally recognized avatar from Gravatar.com) is a part of your online identity. It is often the first image people see of you.

The findings from researchers at the University of York's Department of Psychology[23] from analyzing a thousand faces to identify the facial ticks and features to make that good first impression are amazing. They found 65 different features that affects a person's perceptions for approachability, dominance, and youthful attractiveness (will this person make a good partner or rival). The mouth was the key to successful approachability, followed by the eyes for youthful-attractiveness, and dominance was judged by the eyes, eyebrow height, cheeks, and skin value variation and saturation.

## Tips for Making a Quality Avatar

- The image must represent you, your online persona, personality, character, purpose, and goals.

- The image must match people's expectations of someone of your online persona, personality, character, purpose, and goals.

- It should represent you, your face, or be a logo for your company. Avoid photos of pets, children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and other people in the image. If you do not use your face, choose something eye-catching and clearly identifiable.

- Preferred framing is the head shot (head and shoulders) or bust shot (head-to-waist) portrait.

- Match your facial expression with your online persona and personality as smiling, frowning, angry, or concerned. Smiling (and showing your teeth) will always be more successful than other expressions, but a laughing smile always scores lowest in the research for competence and influence, and research found that flirting expressions just do not work.

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[23] http://www.pnas.org/content/suppl/2014/07/23/1409860111.DCSupplemental/pnas.201409860SI.pdf#nameddest=ST1

- Maintain eye contact. Look at the camera. And squinch[24]. If the eyes look away from the camera, the viewer follows them, often right out of the photograph. What they find may not represent your goals. Connect with the viewer by looking at them.

- It may include something quirky such as colored hair, a colorful background, a funky prop, something representative of your personality and purpose, but keep it simple and the focus on your face.

- Wear clothing that matches your personality, persona, and purpose. Want to appear professional, wear a suit. Want to be funky and outrageous, dress accordingly. Wear dark-colored clothing to highlight your face. Remember, clothing talks.

- Make the background matter. If the background is visible, let it reflect your purpose such as a farmer in a field or a historical romance author at a castle or on a horse.

- Ensure the image is in focus.

- Remove all distractions such as bright spots, reflective highlights, dark blogs, and out of focus areas that detract from the key focus on you.

- Set the camera at eye level. Do not hold it over your head or below your waist and photograph down or up at your face. It's abused and considered forced, though if you are young and female, appreciated, often by the people with whom you don't want to do business.

- Illuminate your face from the front. Avoid flash or studio photography. Avoid fancy photo effects. Use natural light and make it "real."

- Use the Rule of Thirds methodology in photography, placing the most important object (your face) in one of the crossing corners of the image divided equally into nine blocks like a tic-tac-toe board. In other words, keep the eyes or smile just off center.

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[24] https://peterhurley.com/news/2013/who-knew-it-really-all-about-squinch

- The image must be viewable and identifiable at 500 pixels width and 16 pixels width.

There are also many "do not do" tips for creating a successful avatar beyond not including pets and children.

- No nakedness, cleavage, and private parts.

- No underwear.

- No alcohol in the image. No bottles, no wine glasses, etc. Unless you are blogging about that topic.

- Nothing hiding the eyes like hair, sunglasses, glare, or shadows.

- Nothing you will regret later.

You are not restricted to only one avatar on any site or service. You may change it at any time, to update it or make it reflect a new direction or focus, or even to represent a meme. You may also have a different avatar image for each social network and site, though consistency is appreciated by most fans.

Photofeeler.com is a free online app that analyzes your avatar and provides what they describe as unbiased feedback as the analysis is done by an algorithm created by researchers. Consider testing your image through their service to get another opinion on if it is the right image to represent you online.

If you are uncomfortable taking your own portrait, or unsure if you can capture one that really represents you, then consider hiring a professional to photograph you or create an avatar. Trusting an expert may be helpful.

## Design Your Brand Organically

On August 16, 2005, I officially started site ID 72 on WordPress.com as one of the early alpha and beta testers on the service. I'd spent some time considering what I would do with this new site. I had several others that were doing just fine, and this was just a test site, I told myself. Eleven years later, I may still tell myself that, but it has become my brand and my identity and shaped my career.

*Lorelle on WordPress* was named to match the other testers using the same format, Matt on WordPress, Alex on WordPress, and so on. We even had a Not-Matt on WordPress for a while to differentiate between Matt Mullenweg, the co-founder of WordPress, and another Matt on our development team.

A week later, we were running from Hurricane Katrina barreling down on us on the Gulf Coast. The storm was Category 5 when we loaded up our truck and trailer, our home on the road, and headed north then east. The hurricane followed us inland, killing many along the path we drove to Atlanta, and doing more extensive damage there. The flooding came right up to the top step of our 5th wheel trailer as we huddled inside with our cat as the winds rocked the trailer and lightning struck trees and blew out power all around us.

The site was developed during the recovery period, during the two week wait to return to the Gulf Coast where we were working temporarily, and throughout the next year of recovery and intermittent electricity and Internet connections. When I wasn't working on the site, the WordPress Codex, and my own client work, I was helping with clean up and recovery all along the coast from New Orleans to Mobile, Alabama.

With what remained of my quirky sense of humor, I spun the WordPress logo into a hurricane. We only had a few WordPress Themes to choose from and the best one for my site was not well designed. There was no visible difference between posts on the front page and other multiple post pageviews, so you couldn't tell where one post ended and another began. I added a signature to sign-off, representing the end of a post, so I added a signature on top of the word WordPress as a quasi-logo. I stumbled into the color, liked that it wasn't quite blue or green, a rich teal, and called it a done design. We were exceptionally limited with what we could do in the early years on WordPress.com. Today, anything is possible.

When I finally met Liz Strauss of Success-blog.com at a conference she and I put together with the help of Terry Starbucker in Chicago, SOBCon, she said, "I knew it was you. You are wearing the color of your blog." I hadn't even noticed, but I was indeed. For the next few years, Liz and I traveled together to conferences all over the country and into Europe and she'd

point me out in the crowd and say, "You'll know Lorelle when you see her. She always wears the color of her blog."

Thus, the color of my site became a part of my identity, my brand.

I told you all this because I have extensive graphic design experience. I've designed hundreds of logos, brands, and websites, yet I allowed my own to use little of my expertise. It was always an afterthought, and yet, it became my most powerful brand, a lesson well-learned. Today, I use these same organic techniques to help others with their own online identity, branding, and logo. And it works.

## Design Decisions

Think of your website's design as a painting. The clean slate, if you will, is the site's canvas, called the WordPress Theme in WordPress terminology. As a blank slate, free of content, it is the canvas upon which your content is painted.

Think of your content as the paint. It could be straight lines, curves, swirls, or any type of paint strokes and colors that combine together to paint visual images such as words, paragraphs, photographs, graphics, and video.



If you start with a vibrantly designed canvas, what happens when you add content, your paint, to the canvas? It often competes with it. The quieter your canvas, the more likely the content you paint upon it will stand out and be recognized and read.

The two much complement each other. The two create a bond, a trust, between each other. Soft words against a harsh background may clash as they struggle against each other. Harsh words against pink flowers may

lesson the impact of the fierce emotion behind them.

Does this help with your website design decisions? Maybe.

When people select a design for their site, they do so with best intentions but surface information. They want a green and yellow color scheme. They want the one with the flowers or the banana in the header art. They want the one with the beautiful photograph of a house in fog. That matches the mood they want to set on the site.

These are all the wrong reasons to select a WordPress Theme or site design.

Each of these design elements, the colors, the flowers, banana, house in fog, all are easily modified or removed with a few clicks. No technical ability required. And if every design element can be changed to something that matches your personality and purpose, does it matter that you get the design with the frog and not the flowers? No. Why? Because you don't care about the pretty. You need to care about the architecture.

So what do you look for in a site design?

The bones.

Look at the structure, the architecture.

We all need a place for our stuff, especially that upright grand piano from the 1880s and the giant antique dining table your grandparents gave you. The stuff you are going to put into your home tells you more about what you need in a home than the color of the walls. Say you want a Victorian designed home with three bedrooms upstairs, two baths, the kitchen in the back of the house with a large dinning room in the center for the table, and the living room in the front of the house where you can put the piano along the inside wall of the main entry hall. Now you have a home with a place for your stuff and your stuff has a place. That's what you look for. A place for your stuff, to quote George Carlin.

Site designs come in wide and narrow columns, one, two, three, even four columns wide. The best designs are still vertical. No matter how wide our monitor screens may reach, a well-designed website fits within a vertical format, idea for the ever-increasing mobile access.

A typical website comes with a header for the header art or text, a content area to the left or right next to a narrower sidebar area, followed by a footer area at the bottom of the page. In fact, there are four to six layouts to choose from. Some have taller headers, some have tiny headers. Some have a huge footer, some don't even seem to feature a footer. Some stretch the width of the screen, others squish their content into the middle of the screen.

Whichever one you choose, from within that skeleton canvas are adorned the elements on the design, then you paint upon that canvas with your published content.

Next, think of each of the design and content elements constructed with pixels. A pixel is a small area of illumination on a monitor, and one of many that make up a digital photograph or image. If you enlarge an image beyond its physical size, you will see tiny squares or rectangles that make up all the colors and textures of the image, similar to the old newspaper photographs made of dots. These dots make up the resolution of your computer screen. The higher the resolution, the smaller the dot or pixel. You might not see them with your eyes but they are there. Every pixel on a site represents a color, an image, text, every contextual and design element.

I tell my clients and students that *every pixel matters*. Each does. Each represents who they are, what they are, and their goals. Each represents an expression of self. Each represents an opportunity for a relationship, a connection with the world around them. Make every pixel matter. Make every pixel count.

Ten years ago, I was the keynote at a real estate barcamp on web strategies. At the end of the informal conference, I was the host to a website competition we called "Blog Idol" for the sold out audience. Attendees submitted their sites anonymously for review and rating by four judges. Toward the end, they found their winner. I could tell it was a paid template, not original, and the judges loved the clean lines and the excellent use of stock photographs on the mortgage advice and consultation site. Showing off the winning site again, I scrolled down the front page and a moving figure caught my attention.

"What's this?" We all looked. It was a degraded animated graphic of a college graduate dancing in his graduation gown, hands waving over his head as money rained down on him, completely out of context with the rest of the site's design and presentation. People frowned and shook their heads. It was horrible. Ugly.

Now that the competition was over, I invited the site owner to be acknowledged and his site be used for a valuable lesson. He volunteered immediately.

Sitting in the second row, the contrast between the man and his site couldn't have been more dramatic. The site was crisp, clean, minimalistic, direct, and professional. Not to be stereotypical or judgmental, the site's owner was well over 60, obese, and wearing a white t-shirt stained with several meals. His gray hair was mostly missing save for the tangles near his ears, and he looked like he hadn't seen a razor for at least five or ten years. I think there was some lunch in there, too. I recognized the tomato sauce from the lasagna. His button down jeans were worn and faded, holes in the knees, and the stains matched the ones on his t-shirt. Among the relaxed but professional business attire of the attendees, he stood out.

"Sir, did you design this or buy this design?"

"I bought it, yup." He grinned proudly, a gold tooth shone among the black gaps of missing teeth.

"You added this dancing graduate, yes?"

"Yep."

"Why?"

"Cuz I liked it."

I thought about this for a second. "When people find you through the site and you meet them, are they confused? Do you often make a deal?"

"Yep. When I talk to them on the phone, they go for the deal. I get my best business that way. When I meets them, they usually don't bite. I thought that was weird. I don't know nothing about this web stuff, which is why I'm here today, and I learned a few things. Good meeting. Great food. Thanks."

I tread carefully. "While you are the winner today with a fabulous site, sir, I believe that a website should represent its owner and author. This site doesn't represent you, does it?" He grinned again and nodded.

"I recommend that you keep the dancing graduate. It fits you. It makes you smile. I also recommend that you throw away everything else on the site and rebuild it from scratch in and around the dancing graduate. This represents you. The rest does not. It is a template anyone can buy. It doesn't say 'this is me.' It isn't you."

He nodded, still smiling. I was right, and he knew it. The rest of the audience was stunned at my advice.

"Throw this away and make the site your own. Build it around everything that appeals to you. Clutter it up, make it colorful. Use your own words not the words of some copywriter who doesn't know who you are. You want to do business with people like you, right? Then make your site like you and you will attract people like you, who want to do business with you, and you will be happier."

The audience relaxed and applauded. I'd made my point and everyone was relieved.

I ran into the man a year later and he embraced me with a tobacco cloud hug. "Thank you, thank you, thank you!" He almost cried. He went right home after the conference and with the help of his adult son, they completely changed the site, building it around the animated graphic. His business quadrupled. He said he was doing so good, he thought he could retire in a couple years. I'd freed him from the prison of his website to be who he was and attract the right clientele that matched his temperament and interests.

That is the power of making every pixel matter.

This is why building a strong online persona character is so critical to your blogging success. The profile is your filter for every pixel on the site, from the color scheme and images to the words that represent who you are on the web.

# Design by Character, Goals, and Audience.

The three rules for choosing or designing a website are:

1.  It must match the persona's character.

2.  It must represent the persona's goals and intentions.

3.  It must serve audience expectations.

Let's explore two of the character archetypes used in Lesson Four as an example of how your online person, goals, and audience expectations dictates the decisions of a site's design.

## Designing for the Sage

The sage character archetype is our teacher, the thinker, expert, scholar, planner, problem-solver. Knowledge and education are her specialty, her passions, yet she is likely to lose herself in the minutia and fails to act, so vigilance against ignorance is constant.

What would her site look like?

There are no right or wrong answers, but there are some unlikely answers.

The key to designing for the sage, as well as for other archetypes, is *expectation*. Everything on their site filters through that concept, reinforced with the certainty that if she is to solve the world's problems, or at least offer up solutions, she has to keep the students in their seats paying attention. Her words and visual content might be forceful, angry, aggressive, even colorful, but she knows her audience.

*Her audience is just like her*.

She became a learner because she needed to learn. She needed to know. She needed answers. So she learned. She thought. She reconsidered. She investigated some more, and reconsidered more, studying the subject matter from all sides, finding holes, filling them, constantly studying, then spreading the lessons learned to other so that they may learn. She knows what interests her, and she knows instinctively what will interest her audience because they are her. Passionate about the subject matter. Eager to learn about it. Eager to discuss it. Eager to see varying points of view while moving away from ignorance to informed.

What would her site look like?

It would meet the expectations of those who came to learn. It wouldn't deviate. Deviation would be a distraction from the learning process. Oh, a little bit here and there to keep things interesting, but always on topic. She would turn everything in life into a lesson.

If her subject matter was children's education or information, the site would be childlike. Not childlike as in silly, but colorful, use fun language, and great visual aids.

You know what they want to teach the world, and they know who their students are, and they make decisions in the presentation of their material to keep butts in chairs and attention on the teacher. The site's design would match that intention mixed in with the visual representation of the subject matter.

## Designing for the Rebel

The revel archetype is the rule breaker with a passionate desire for revenge or revolution through disruption, shock, and destruction. They are the outlaw, misfit, iconoclast, anarchist.

What would a site by a rebel archetype look like?

Again, it would meet the expectations of those arriving on the site. Angry, passionate people would not expect a site with fields of flowers in a pastoral setting. They would expect solid blacks, bold reds, high contrast, and conflicting imagery, right?



For the most part, you would be right. There are a few sites by self-classified angry bloggers that feature purple, yellow, and other primary colors, but cautiously. Most use colors that traditionally represent anger and political resistance.

In the example of the *Angry Asian Man*, his canvas, the WordPress Theme, is clean, minimal, and high contrast black and white with a gray
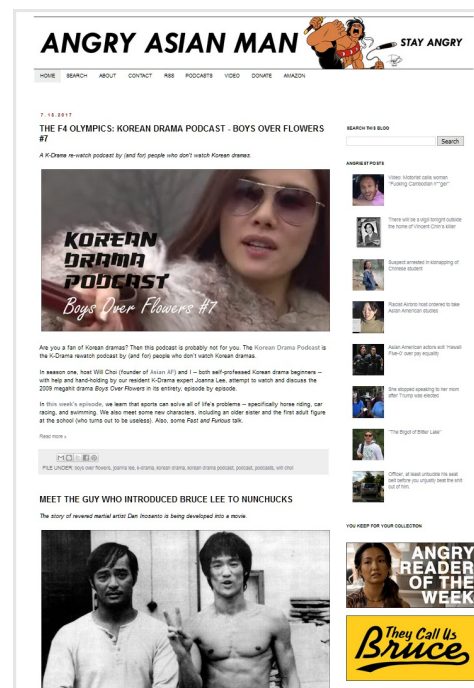
background. Others might have gone for a more complex design such as *The Angry People's Blog* selected with splashes of black paint on a gray splattered wall with a graffiti effect.

The author of *Angry Asian Man* made a deliberate choice to let his content scream out against a plain canvas.

## Design Choices by Character

This is not a master class on web design. There are plenty of tutorials and advice out on the web with phsychologial research into colors and emotions, symbolism, and so on to help you make that decision.

Trust your instincts.

And be patient with yourself and your choices. You will likely change your site's design at least three times in the first year, then settle into a design, often not because you like it, but because you've settled. DON'T.

Changing WordPress Themes is easy. Literally a couple clicks. Experiment. Try various looks and feels. The majority of WordPress Themes through WordPress.com and the official WordPress Theme Directory are well-vetted and free. A paid WordPress Theme is not a guarantee of value nor quality. It is a commitment to provide technical support. That is what you are paying for. Most Themes require little technical help if you work *with the Theme not against it.*

Until you have a good understanding of what makes a web design work, a bit of understanding of HTML and CSS, and web publishing and development experience, work with what you have. The more you try to force yourself upon a web design, the harder it will resist, and the more complex this process becomes. The more complex, the more frustrated, the less desire you will have to blog.

Be patient. Let yourself learn the process as you go before you impose your will upon your site. Let your online persona's character be a part of the
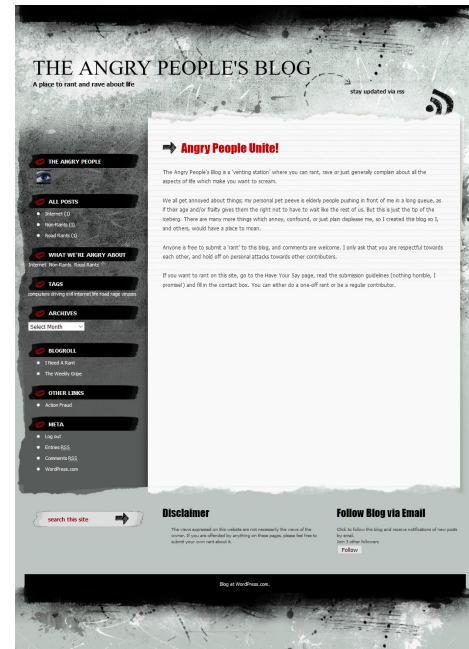
process, helping you make small decisions in color, format, structure, and design elements. This does not have to happen overnight. Be with it for a while and then make small changes, and see what happens. Constantly test the waters before jumping in and drowning.

Author Suzanne Collins has a terrible looking website when it comes to presenting a professional, clean, and beautiful to look at and read web design.

This hasn't stopped her from making a ton of money with her very successful Hunger Games series and the other successful books, scripts, and written works. A website's design doesn't dictate success, nor the number of fans.

In over 30 years experience in web design and development, I'm constantly surprised at how little a site's design actually helps a site's popularity. I've seen many sites I'd declare as the ugliest site in the world have thousands of visitors and fans daily.

Robert Scoble of the Scobleizer.com fame is a technology blogger. His first major claim to fame came from mouthing off to Bill Gate's face, who in turned hired him as the official blogger for Microsoft, giving him full license to wander the halls, get in people's faces, and blog about the Microsoft world without censorship, just a gentle nod to protecting proprietary information. His site was immediately popular with journalists and technology buffs as he spoke not only about the "next thing" coming down the track in computer technology, but he reported on the insider information of the growing industry, putting a human face on the technology startup world.

Robert's site was ugly. Seriously boring. He put header art at the top after people complained, using a picture of him standing in front of a tree because it was what he had. He didn't care what his site looked like. And neither did his readers.

The majority of his fans were tech folks. They used feed readers to access his site rather than viewing the site itself. It didn't need to be pretty. It needed to carry its message. People respected his lack of interest in the site design. Not only was it pitifully boring, his site was on the free WordPress.com service, considered at the time to be only for "lessor bloggers," as one critic commented.

After several years of listening to complaints about his design, and after changing jobs to Rackspace, and eventually branching out on his own, he worked with the team at WordPress.com to improve it. The site had a more brand feel to it while still staying fairly clean and minimalistic. Then he moved totally into social media about 2014, declaring the blog basically dead. That didn't last long, and he came back to his blog soon after. Today, it is back to its very minimalistic look and feel with one of the vertical mobile designs that require massive scrolling to get through the content. It features a sidebar with useless information such as a drop down archive by month (do you really remember which month he published that great article on cloud computing?) and a post calendar that highlights which days he published (and which he didn't), without relevant and helpful information like what he is talking about, promotion of his latest book, and other calls-to-action. He's returned full circle. The site design is an afterthought, a minor accessory to the brilliant editorial content he publishes on the technology industry.

Robert Scoble knows his audience and he serves them because they are just like him. They don't care what his site looks like. All they want is the content, the sneak peeks he provides into their industry.

Designing your site or social media channel must:

1.  Represent your persona's character.

2.  Represent goals and intentions.

3.  Serve audience expectations.

4.  Frame the content.

Remember the sage character archetype. Their desire is to find truth and they use intelligence and analysis to undersand the world. They seek knowledge to share. What would the website of a sage look like?

Let's use Larry Brooks' Storyfix o[25]. Larry may describe himself differently, but to the writers learning at his knees, he is our sage. If you want to dig deeply into storycraft, how to tell a story that sells, he should be your first stop.

The goal of all site designs is to first meet the expectation of the audience. What are the expectation for a visitor to the site of a sage?

1.  They want to learn. They want to be taught.

2.  To teach well, a sage needs to keep butts in the chair and minds engaged, right?

Larry does that through the use of colorful, fun language and great visual aids.

The site is designed with blocks of black, white, and gray, with a gray blue font in the titles that works dynamically against the black without screaming like red would do. It is calming yet powerful. The content is well

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[25] http://storyfix.com/

framed and focuses the attention right in the middle where the key content rests, waiting for eyeballs.

For example, his post called "A Return to Hardcore Story Craft." It isn't titled "A Return to the Art of Story Craft." He uses the term *hardcore*, an aggressive term that generates energy. A heading reads, "Let me state the complex in a succinct way." He doesn't use soft terms. He goes for the football coach sarcasm, implying: "Let me boil this down to the basics for you bone heads." Read deeper and you will begin to hear more of the football coach mixed with the salesman passing on the wisdom of the ages on how to write a great novel and get your book not just published but on the best seller list and made into a movie.

Linda Needham is a historical romance writer whose online persona is a mix of jester and lover. She is a passionate woman with a long life of acting, singing, and writing best selling historical romance covering medieval times to more recent history during World War II. Her original site was created in the early days of the web, and it featured the stereotypical pink colors and flowers, with a flourishing signature at the bottom of her posts. It looked dated, and was hard to read and hard to use.

We worked together to develop something fun and still along the pink color scheme (she insisted), that reflected not only her books but her passion for history and creativity. In the end, We styled her header art in deep purple, the color of the royalty she sometimes features in her books, used font in small caps with a graphic underneath that represented a sense of history and timelessness, and added a picture of her in a broad-brim hat in a circle. While it wasn't a logo exactly, the look felt

like one. We changed her social media icons to heart shapes and added a light purple wallpaper behind in the style of the French tapestries, and kept the design as minimal as possible to frame the stories, videos, and photographs she wanted to add to her site. Organically, it came together to create a brand without a log, while implying one.

I tell my students and clients over and over again, *every pixel matters*.

A good example is the site by author Rachelle Chase. A business woman, model, and erotica author, she chose an image of herself appearing naked and wrapped in a blue silk sheet for her site's first iteration. It worked. It represented her books and her goals.

When she became a regular television personality in San Francisco, she changed a few words and the image on the site. She switched the silk sheet for a photograph of her in a sexy, red dress looking like she was dancing or flirting. A flash of thigh, a laugh on her shining face. Without changing anything else on the site, the tone and personality of the site changed. Instead of sexy erotica, she was represented a vivacious, sexy personality.

Every pixel matters. Every word on the side, in the header, footer, even in the sidebar.

In this example on the left, what is this person talking about on their site? This is a tag cloud featuring the most popular topics on the site.

It is WordPress and blogging, right? Things related to WordPress. Arriving on this site, you might see this list and know in a second what this site is about.

In the next example, what is this site about?

The word *uncategorized* practically screams at you. What judgments and assumptions do you make with this word? Cluttered? Disorganized? Confused? Uncertain? Lack of confidence? Look at how just one word changes your impressions.

A well-designed site serves audience expectations.

This is where the theory of first impressions plays out. Upon arrival on the site, what are the first impressions? Where are they found? How are they generated?

On *Lorelle on WordPress*, it says right at the top of the page, "Lorelle on WordPress, Blogging, Social Media, and Web Publishing." The highlighted categories are WordPress, WordPress School, Blogging, and Blog Exercises. The tags, post titles, everything on the site says this is the right place if you are here to learn about these topics.

Author and writing marketer, Jeff
Goins[26], tells you what this site is about
right at the top in the title: *Goins,
Writer*. His profile paragraph states, "I
help writers get the attention their work
deserves." Every post title, category, and
tag backs this up. You know what he
does and who he is instantly.

Let your site reflect your online persona,
your goals, and your readers. And trust
that you know what works for you.

And be patient. The right look and feel
for your site will come with time, and
content.

Lots of content.

And remember,  your site or social
media channel must:

1.  Represent your persona's character.

2.  Represent goals and intentions.

3.  Serve audience expectations.

4.  Frame the content.

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[26]  http://goinswriter.com/

# Lesson Seven: What Are You Going to Say on Your Blog?

This section should be called "How to Write on the Web," but that section comes later. This is about the blogging process, which includes writing skills and techniques but also philosophy, psychology, instinct, marketing, and common sense. An upcoming lesson is about writing for the web and is stuffed with all the technical aspects of writing web-based content.

Understanding how to blog is about:

- Knowing your reader.
- Feeding your reader.
- Connecting with your reader.
- Building an online community.

I've covered knowing your reader in Lesson Five. Let's dive deeper into how knowing your reader helps you feed and connect with your reader, thus helps you build a community around your site of fans.

In the introduction, I quotes Liz Strauss. Her statement bears repeating.

> *A unique and outstanding blog is one so compelling and remarkable that it sticks with you. Days later you still want to tell folks to experience it. A unique and outstanding blog has an amazing impact on a reader. It is unforgettable to both the adult and the kid in you.*

**So compelling and remarkable it sticks with you:** Call this an ear-worm or brain-worm, you can't get it out of your mind. You keep thinking about it, mulling it over, placing it here and there like a puzzle piece in your mind trying to find a place to fit.

**Days later you still want to tell folks to experience it:** This isn't just a new thought but one worth sharing. We call this *water cooler content*, content that must be shared, must be passed on, typically during breaks at work. Think about how you feel with one of those famous NPR Driveway Moments hits you and you have to rush in the house or the office to tell someone about what you just heard. That's powerful content.

**It has an amazing impact on the reader:** Clearly, it had an impact. Not only does it stick around, digesting, but you can't wait to share it with others.

**It is unforgettable to both the adult and the kid in you:** This is the secret sauce. Think of some famous stories that is unforgettable to both the adult and kid in you. Did you think of the Harry Potter series? They touch both the adult and the child inside all of us. We all want to be magical, and we long to discover we have secret powers, and what we would do if we did have them. Harry Potter also taught us that risk makes life worth living, even though the consequences may be deadly, and that we must be brave in spite of it all, because that it what makes life worth living, and living well. Many consider these thoughts universal, no different from the reluctant hero archetypes found throughout written and verbal history. They appeal to the adult and the kid in us.

Not every post must have this recipe, but wouldn't the world be better if it did? Consider the goal of making everything you publish and shared online to make us think, make us want to tell others, and touch the adult and child inside.

# Blogging is Telling, Teaching, or Sharing

When it boils right down to the technical, blogging is telling, teaching, or sharing.

Each one builds a community and fan base.

Each is controlled by the author.

Each reflects the author's persona, passions, and interests.

What's the difference?

| Telling | Teaching | Sharing/Curating |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Original content. <br><br> Perspective/POV. <br><br> Sharing through storytelling. <br><br> Author controls reader's journey. <br><br> Attract like minds. | Original content. <br><br> Instructional/How To. <br><br> Sharing through education. <br><br> Author is educator. <br><br> Publish lesson plans. <br><br> Attract learners. | Publish non-original content. <br><br> Author as curator. <br><br> Content defines persona and interests. <br><br> Infotainment. <br><br> Attracts people with like interests. |

Most of us are sharers, curators of other people's content. We find things that interest us and we share them with others.

What we find defines our persona, telling potential fans where our values and interests lay. Many call such curation *infotainment*, providing information for entertainment purposes. And it attracts people with like interests.

What it doesn't do is really build a fan-base, a loyal group of supporters. As an author, you become a curator, sharing and resharing other people's content. What is missing is your unique voice and perspective.

Those who focus on the telling and the teaching become the source of those shared items. They let their voices be heard, they offer their opinions, values, even morals to the world, defining their persona.

We're attracted to those who reveal a little more than maybe they should to us online. We appreciate the intimacy. We applaud their life, and we want to know more.

## Connecting with Your Reader

Robert Scoble wrote the article, *Why Wall Street didn't believe Steve Ballmer (and what he can do about it)[27],* in 2006 that stuck with me over the years as a pure example of how to, and not, connect with your readers. Here is the part that lives with me over a decade later.

*You might have missed that Microsoft's stock has been in a freefall lately.*

*My friends have been asking me "why doesn't Wall Street believe Steve Ballmer?"*

*That's an easy one. Cause he didn't convince the grass roots influence networks first. Why have Google and Apple done so well in the last three years? Cause the grassroots loves them. That's the powerroot of the industry. Ideas here don't come from the big influencers and move down. No, they start on the street and move up. Anyone miss how Google got big? Not by throwing a press conference.*

*Ballmer should not listen to his PR team and instead should live the blogging way.*

*Huh?*

This should make most of you sit right up. Scoble is recommending not listing to the experts. His justification is powerful.

*Did you miss that I turned into an international news story that has gotten more attention than everything Microsoft announced at its big TechED conference this week?*

*How did I do that?*

*I talked with the grassroots FIRST. Against the advice, by the way, of a*

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[27] Web Archive: http://web.archive.org/web/20060619221336/http://scobleizer.wordpress.com:80/2006/06/14/why-wall-street-didnt-believe-steve-ballmer-and-what-he-can-do-about-it/

*lot of PR people..They all are wrong. I almost bought into it too...*

*It's a lesson I'll never forget again.*

*Journalists need sources for stories and they need to convince editors that stories are important to pay attention to.*

*What was going on this weekend? Journalists were emailing TechMeme around to their editors and saying "something important is going on here." How do I know that? Cause when the journalists were calling that's what they told me. They saw a blog mob and that helped them sell the story.*

*Analysts, on the other hand, also watch what grass roots are saying. The wisdom of crowds. It drives a lot of buying decisions...*

*So, why is Microsoft stock price in freefall? Cause Steve Ballmer didn't come to the grassroots and convince him that Microsoft's business strategy makes sense. We still haven't explained, for instance, to the grassroots why Windows Vista matters. Or why spending $2 billion on server farms will make any sense to them. Or why the Xbox is going to be profitable.*

*What would I do? I would show up unannounced at three conferences. BloggerCon, Gnomedex, and BlogHer. No PR team there to spin. No lawyers. No video crew. And focus on answering those three things. Windows Vista. Investments in server farms. Xbox profitability.*

*Just show up and let people on the grassroots get to know you and answer those questions over and over and over again (on Sunday I did about 40 interviews with everyone who was at VLoggerCon, no matter how small the audience they had). Answer their questions. Even the harshest stupidest Slashdot style questions.*

*Do that and you'll see the stock price go back up.*

Robert nailed it. If you want to connect with your readers, you need to go to them. You need to go where they are and be with them. Listen to them, talk to them, give them the information they want and need. If you come as you are without the fanfare, PR team, guys in suits walking around you, be one of them, they will learn to trust you, respect you, and listen to you.

Richard Branson is clearly a brilliant businessman. He is also one of the people. Sure, he lives well, has his own island retreat, but he understands how business works, and how powerful the "powerroot of the grassroots" in industry. He speaks like one of us, behaves most of the time like one of us, and when he speaks, it makes the news. Richard Branson has fans. Steve Ballmer had employees. Big difference.

Attend the conferences. Go to Meetups. None in your area, set one up. Talk to people. Let them talk to you. Listen. Pay attention. All the action is at ground level. It may look like control comes from the top down, but the world flipped upside down with social media. The people have a voice now. Listen.

## Building an Online Community

DB Ferguson of the *No Fact Zone*, a fan site for Stephen Colbert, wrote an outstanding article series for me on *The Art of the Fan-Based Blog*[28]. I highly recommend you stop everything and read each post in the series.

She starts the series with her criteria and elements necessary for a fan-based blog, and they apply to every blog that desires to build an online community.

- You need to cultivate your passion and understand what that passion really means in terms of building a fandom site.

- You need to understand your competition, the others covering your subject on the web.

- You need to create a game plan.

- You need content.

- You have to understand the laws and rules for copyright.

- You have to consider the social in the social online world of today and how to build a community.

- You have to take into consideration the crazy fans out there.

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[28] *https://lorelle.wordpress.com/2008/11/17/the-art-of-the-fan-based-blog/*

- There are a lot of connections you need to make and keep.

- You need to be clear about establishing your credentials as a legitimate fandom site.

- It will take some cash to get this going and keep it going, which is about continuing on for the long term.

A key ingredient in her recommendations is to look for opportunities to connect, deep, and strengthen the relationship between you and your readers. Sure, competitions, contests, and guest blogging help, but go deeper.

When the WGA Writer's Strike in 2007 brought many popular television shows to a halt, she and other fan groups formed a group called Fans4Writers to support striking writers and work as a team. She also said:

> *Another resource that I cannot stress enough is to reach out to other bloggers. It's a great idea to get involved in the "blogging fandom," blogs that specifically cater to bringing the newest knowledge to bloggers like you. It's great to have sources officially connected to the source of your fandom to be able to bring questions and issues. Bringing a multitude of people from different situations to help expand your blogging knowledge is an enriching experience for all involved.*

It isn't hard to talk to a blogger. Find their contact page and send them a note. Comment on their blog or social media platform. Interact with them. Build a relationship. When the relationship is solid and felt both ways, consider asking for help.

However, do NOT ask to guest blog, link or be linked to, or anything that does you a great favor and inconveniences the blogger. This destroys a relationship fast. Let them ask you. Let them invite you to guest blog. Let them take the initiative to write about you or include a link to your site on their blogroll or lists. Make them want you to be a part of their journey on the web.

Consider:

- Becoming a source or resource.
- Being entertaining.
- Giving them what they want, or what they don't know they want, yet.
- Making them want you.

## Assignment: What Are You Going to Say?

Your next assignment refers back to your list of topics, your categories.

Write at least 5 ARTICLE TITLES ONLY under each of the 3-5 categories.

Do not write the article, an outline, or even a summary. Titles only.

Five is a minimum. You may write as many as you wish, but try for five at a minimum per category.

## Assignment Review

Did you manage to come up with 5 titles for each category?

Did you struggle to find even five for one or more of your categories?

Did you have 25 for one and 3 for another? What does that tell you?

It tells me that you should start over and focus on the category with the most inspiration. Return to the first lesson and write down everything associated with that topic, and throw the rest away. Group those into 3-5 groups, and see what happens when you list at least five titles under each new category?

Feel on fire? Feel the passion? Head in that direction.

As an added note, if you managed to come up with 5 posts for each of 5 categories, that's 25 posts.

Publish daily and you have 25 days of posts. Publish twice a week and you've covered 12 weeks. One a week, that's 25 weeks of post content. Once

a month, that's 25 months of content.

Odds are that you could probably write 5-10 of those posts, now that you have energy in and around the topic, in one or two sittings. Give it a try. They don't have to be long, but make their point and move to the next. Write now, spread them out across time.

# Lesson Eight: Blogging is Storytelling

*"You may tell a tale that takes up residence in someone's soul, becomes their blood and self and purpose. That tale will move them and drive them and who knows that they might do because of it, because of your words. That is your role, your gift."*

*--Erin Morgenstern, multimedia artist and author, The Night Circus*

*"The purpose of a storyteller is not to tell you how to think, but to give you questions to think upon."*

*--Brandon Sanderson, fantasy and science fiction writer*

Blogging is storytelling.

Just don't tell anyone. It might put me out of business.

Storytelling and publishing fundamentals haven't changed.

As you should be now convinced that blogging is storytelling, let's explore storytelling techniques and apply them to blogging.

What are the basic elements a good story must have?

1. Hook/Opening.

2. Great characters.

3. Conflict/Change.

4. Show don't tell.

5. Positive resolution.

There are other criteria for a well-told tale, but these are the essentials. Without them, you would have a rather dry tale to tell.

## Hooking Readers

The literary hook has long been a fundamental in writing. If you want your writing read, you have to grab the attention of your reader immediately.

In traditional writing, the hook is the first one or two sentences, possibly the paragraph, that introduces the subject and grabs the attention of the reader. It pulls them in and makes them want to read more.

There are a variety of traditional writing hook techniques including the dramatic action hook, the question hook, the statistic hook, the quotation hook, and the anecdotal hook, a storytelling technique used in the Reader's Digest Magazine format for decades with great success.

*In medias res* is when a story begins at the midpoint. Use this with care. While your story may start anywhere it wishes, ensure your readers will catch up within the first or second paragraph, or they will click away immediately.

On the web, the hook is a combination of the post title and opening paragraph.

**Hook = Title + Opening Paragraph**

Let's begin by exploring a few bad post titles I've known.

## Bad Post Titles I Have Known

Post titles are not the time to be creative on your site.

Here are a few of the worst post titles I've known and experimented with over the years.

1. "Getting Paid Naturally"
2. "Naked Women"
3. "Why Write Right?"
4. "Horse Sex and What's Dictating Your Content"

The first was originally titled "How to Make Money with Nature Photography." I'd sold the article reprints many times with great success. On my site, I decided to be a little creative with the title.

And no one visited. I assumed it would be one of the most popular posts on my photography site. It wasn't. It was ignored. A year later I changed the title back to the boring How To title and within a couple weeks it became the most popular post on my site.

Two of my fellow bloggers published posts on mommy bloggers sharing their personal lives through their blogs. They both used the title "Naked Women" and the traffic to those posts went through the roof. When we checked their web statistics, their analytics, we found that these posts also had the highest and fastest *bounce rate*, the rate at which a visitor arrives on a web page and leaves. The turn around was in seconds.

Why?

No pictures.

The title didn't match visitors' expectations. Both agreed that the volume of traffic was nice, but it was also a time waster. The post was attracting people they probably didn't want to do business with, and eating up bandwidth at least one of them had to pay for on their site (back when we had to pay extra for exceeding a limit on traffic numbers) for the extra visitors. She changed the post title and things settled down. The US national conference, BlogHer, found her post and was so intrigued, they invited her to be a speaker, and her life was changed. The other blogger

left it the same title and used the increase in traffic numbers (and it continues to bring in steady traffic) to game her traffic count to get a better deal with advertising affiliates. They are legitimate numbers after all.

The title on writing was one of my articles exploring the most common content mistakes bloggers make. Again, it didn't attract clicks or visits. I changed it a few months later to "Spelling and Grammar Tips for Bloggers" and it went through the roof.

The point is clear. Use clear, specific, and helpful words to title your posts. Help the reader decide whether or not to click through from search engines or on a web page to read your post.

The last post title? I never changed it. Someday when we sit down over a cup of tea, I'll tell you the whole story. Or you can read about it in one of my other books. It's a great story.

Ah, another hook. Always leave them wanting more.

## Make Your Point in the First 100 Words

You have 59 seconds, 12 seconds, 7 seconds to make a solid first impression on your website.

By 2012, there were several research studies that claimed that a person, and a website, had 59 seconds to make a good impression and keep the visitor on the site. With more and more savvy web users online, research studies report that has dropped to about 5-7 seconds.

In those few precious seconds, your site must be clearly convey what it is about, is it readable, and does it answer the question. That information is conveyed mostly by the content, followed by the design.

The site title, post titles, and first 100 words convey that information. It must make it clear that this is the place with the answers. This is what you were looking for.

In blogging and marketing terms, you have less than 10 seconds to *communicate your value proposition*.

The first paragraph, those precious 100 or less words, must arouse curiosity, be action words, and generate interest through conflict. Or

answer the question the person is hunting for, desperately.

This is a fundamental writing technique: Tell us what you are going to tell us, tell us, then tell us what you told us. Some things never change, and this continues to be a valid writing technique even in blogging.
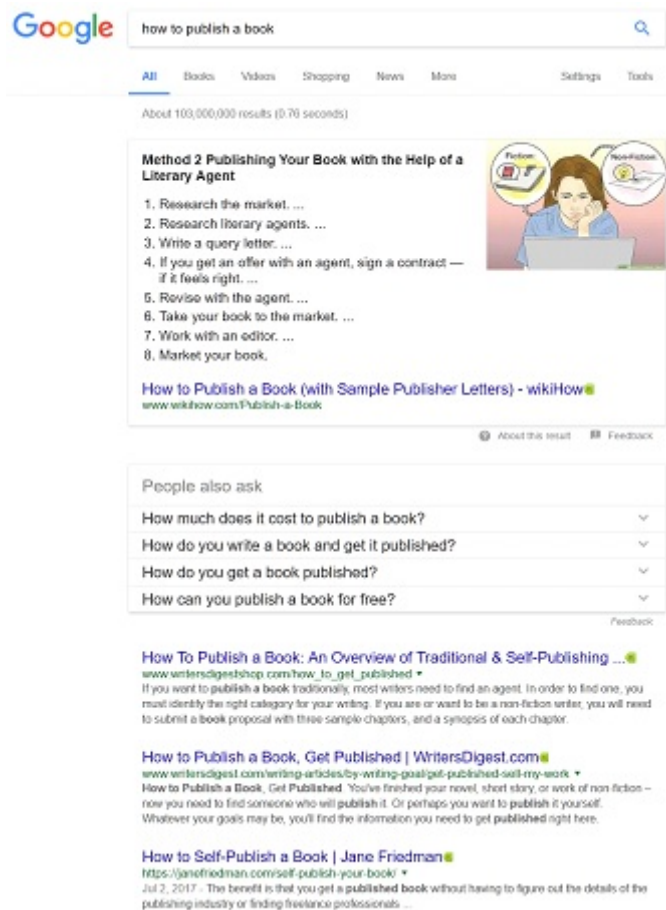
Why is this so important? The post title and the first 100 words are what a searcher sees in the search results. It influences their decision to click or not.

**Search Results**

In the screen capture, you will find the first page results of a search for "how to publish a book" on Google.

Google has experimented over the years with a variety of techniques to highlight the most relevant or popular content at the top of the search results list. It used to be human curated, then it was a mixture of human curation, feedback, and an algorithm, and today it is just an algorithm that selects the most relevant answer in its Featured Snippet. There is nothing you can do to force your content into that high-value spot except write the best answer to popularly searched questions, and attract as many visitors to the content as possible. It also helps to have a highly trustworthy site, but that's for another discussion later in this book.

Below the Featured Snippet are the search results. Look closely at the information.

The post title is prominently featured and contains a link to the post.

Underneath is the URL, the address of the post. In WordPress, the title part of the address is called the *post slug*. Notice the variations from the title. In WordPress, you may edit the post slug to change the words, or it will use the exact title. The post slug is another chance to offer words to answer the search question and influence someone to click the link.

The paragraph below that is the first 100 words or so of the article. If the words match the title, and help the searcher make a fast decision on whether or not this site has the answer, they will click. If they ramble on about this, that, and the other, taking a while to get to the point, they won't click. It is that simple.

Google has become our new table of contents. We make decisions based upon the information Google filters out of our posts based upon the terms we use to search for that information.



Look at the titles of these posts. "How to Publish a Book." Specific, to the point. They don't say "Find Success in the Written Word," or "Be an Author and get Famous."

Why? Because people are looking for the answer to their question, not a creative post title writer.

I know it is boring, but boring sells on the web.

## Social Media and Feed Reader Posts

The same applies to posts in your feed reader as discussed in Lesson Ten. The post title stands prominently in the feed reader, followed by the name of the site as a link, and the first 50-200 words, depending upon how you have the feed reader set up.

The same is also true in Facebook, Twitter, and other social web streams, with just a slight difference.

If the link to the post was created manually by an individual, the social media post includes whatever the person wrote to inform people about the post, and the link. The link pulls in the first image on the post, the post title, and the first 100 words.

If the social media post was generated automatically by WordPress or another tool, the post features the title, followed by the generated post image, title, and first 100 words.

Each method of promoting your posts relies upon the post title and the first hundred words, more or less, to make your point, prove your worth, and invite people to click through and read more. Put all your hook writing effort into those sections.

For more in depth information on how to write a good post title, see my article, "Writing Effective Attention Getting Headlines and Titles on Your Blog[29]" on Lorelle on WordPress.

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[29] https://lorelle.wordpress.com/2006/09/20/writing-effective-attention-getting-headlines-and-titles-on-your-blog/

## Assignment: The Opening Hook

In this assignment, there are two steps to write, and what you write is based upon the prompt that follows the instructions:

1. Write an opening sentence.

2. Create a clickable title.

Your prompt: **5 Rules for Success**.

*"If they don't get it, they won't click it. If they do click, and the content doesn't match, they won't be back."*

*Lorelle VanFossen, blogger, speaker, author, instructor, genealogist, WordPress evangelist*

# The Clickable Post

We've been exploring the clickable post title. Don't forget that the rest of your post must be clickable as well. In other words, it must keep the reader on the page reading, and help them answer the question or be entertained.

A clickable post has the following characteristics. It must:

1. Inform
2. Engage
3. Persuade
4. Be timeless

The first are the same elements any well-written article, essay, short story, or even a novel need. What does "timeless" mean?

Timeless content keeps people coming back to your site over the long term, not the short. It is content that serves your readers now and in the future.

When you write timeless content, it keeps being found. It answers a question, entertains over time, and keeps on giving. So many bloggers focus on topics in the hear and now, not thinking about writing for today and for ten years from now. Not every post must work ten or twenty years from now, but wouldn't it be nice if you had enough content to keep generating attention and visitors over a long period of time?

Timeless content is often referred to as your most popular posts or *click-bait*. The latter is often a derogatory term for content that attracts people to a site, but it is also a legitimate term for content that draws in visitors. Well-crafted content that keeps new visitors coming to your site is of great value as some of those visitors will return, helping you build a community in and around your site and content.

## Use Great Characters

*"It's not the broken dreams that break us. It's the ones we don't dare to dream."*

*William Schuester, teacher on "Glee"*

Even if you were not a fan of the popular television show, "Glee," that quote sums up the character of the glee club teacher, a man who still struggles with losing out on his own dreams of a musical career to become a teacher, and what motivates him to encourage his misfit band of students to dream bigger and better.

Good characters are essential to good storytelling. They:

- Connect with your readers.
- Put a human face on the story.
- Create conflict.

Readers Digest Magazine has been around for decades and continues to be popular to a wide range of ages. Why? Because of its format and timeliness of its articles.

Here is the basic format and structure of a Readers Digest article.

1. Start with a story.
2. Eliminate editorial commentary.
3. Provide facts, experts, sources.
4. Conclude with hope.

Sounds like a well-written blog post, doesn't it?

Readers Digest doesn't start with the facts. It starts with story, with interesting characters. So should some of your posts.

We all have interesting characters around us, people

who influence us, love us, argue with us, annoy us, and just hate us, and the feelings are mutual. Look for opportunities to include great characters in your posts.

If you write about someone often, a spouse, your children, grandchildren, or even fellow employees or friends, ensure you have their permission to use their name (in writing is the best legal advice), or use a pseudonuym.

A popular social media consultant and blogger calls his wife "Gorgeous." She loves it when they are at meetings and conventions and someone shouts out "Hello, Gorgeous" across the room. Another fellow blogger calls his spouse "The Ball and Chain," a perfect reflection of his online personality. I call my husband "Hubby," and people love it.



Credit: Sneaky Sam

While some bloggers refer to their children and grandchildren by number, or use other cutesy names for the characters in their life, depending upon your writing style and online persona, consider using a human-sounding name. This discourages people from being hurt, identifying themselves online, or encouraging others to investigate and identify them.

- Make your characters interesting and memorable.
- Use them to help tell your stories and make your points. Let them speak for you.
- Characters are a great opportunity for dialog.

In genealogy, we have FANs: *Family, Associates, Neighbors*. Who are the FANs on your blog?

As you develop your characters, real or imaginary, keep their character personas consistent. Make a list and identify their character archetypes. As readers become true fans, they will "just get" that "Susan always does things like that," or "That is just so Sarit." They will come to know the characters in your blog like old friends, just as we befriend television, movie, and book characters.

Characters on your blog may not be human. They could be Non-FANs. Non-FANs are books, manuals, websites, sources, and references. For years, the only decent manual for WordPress was the WordPress Codex. I helped write and edit it and became a senior editor on the wiki. On *Lorelle on WordPress*, it became a character. I'd find more and more ways to link to it, giving it life and visitors. Sources you admire can do that, so can buildings, homes, and animals. They become anthropomorphic characters.

Again, make your characters memorable, and let them do some of the heavy lifting of content on your blog.

> *"We are all storytellers. We all live in a network of stories. There isn't a stronger connection between people than storytelling."*
>
> *– Jimmy Neil Smith, Director of the International Storytelling Center*

## Conflict and Change

> *For good ideas and true innovation, you need human interaction, conflict, argument, debate.*
>
> *Margaret Heffernan*

A publisher friend of mine loves to tell potential clients, "Conflict sells. No conflict? No deal."

It's true. While we say we want peace and quiet, we perk up at the first sound of a debate in the apartment next door.

- Conflict engages.
- Conflict teaches.
- Conflict questions.
- Conflict argues.
- Conflict is interactive.

You might not think of conflict as blog material, but it is essential to

writing a good post. Conflict:

- Arouses emotions.

- Questions yourself.

- Questions your readers.

- Challenges authority.

- Gets personal.

The last point is a powerful one. We are naturally curious animals. We seek answers, we seek connections. When we read or see something, we seek connection, understand, the application to self.

When a blogger gets personal, a reader often things, "Oh, that's so me." Or they might think at first, "That's not me. I wouldn't do that." But in the back of their mind, the devil that lurks there says, "Oh, yes, you would!"

There are many sites for writers that cover in depth topics on how to write conflict. I recommend you explore this topic more to expand your blog writing skills. In the meantime, here are some examples of conflict you might not have considered for your blog posts.

## He said, she said; I said, you said.

This is an argument but a debate. A challenge.

These types of conflicts arise at work, in the home, among friends, and all over the web. What others have said about something often inspires me to take them on, blog a different perspective, or even challenge them on the subject. Through trackbacks, notifications of someone publishing a post with a link to your site, these people often visit to find out what you said about them, an opportunity to engage other bloggers.

"He said, She said" conflicts come in a variety of flavors including differences about styles, ethics, values, morals, gender roles, family or work responsibilities, generational differences, perspectives, communication styles, religious views, work ethics, work techniques, everything. "You told me to do it like this, so I did." "No, I told you to do it like that." "I did, but this is better." Bang, we have conflict. Great for dialog.

When you know there is a conflict, people tend to go to their corners to avoid conflict rather than duke it out. If you know this, you can be prepared and either offer up corners, or take them away from the reader with your writing.

It's psychology and philosophy at war. It's about negotiation and compromise, too.

Conflict is a chance to show others how you resolve conflict, too. It is a chance to show your values and morals through your online persona.

## Freedom vs Oppression

Any time you challenge rights, rights of speech, living, housing, education is a chance to take sides and explore freedom versus oppression. Think of the possibilities. Male vs Female. Gender issues. Politics. Race. Religion. Immigration. Education. Technology. Closed and open. Dark verses the light.

Such conflicts define your online persona, your character, your values and morals. They lend credibility and create trust with readers as they watch you struggle with moral and ethical issues.

## Not Enough

Not enough hope, food, housing, love, air, water, security, money, candy, oil, health...anything that is desired but in scarcity brings conflict to your blog topic, and another opportunity to reveal yourself, your online persona's character, values. It's a chance to get personal with your readers.



Knowing is not enough. We must apply. Willing is not enough, we must do.

Bruce Lee

## Ask Questions

Ask questions: Will he, won't she? Then what? Is it possible? How? Why?

Questions challenge yourself and your readers. What, where, how, when, and why are great starters, but go deeper. What are you really asking? What do you really want? Look for the conflicts in the decision process, reveal yourself through your self-directed questions.

I love rhetorical questions, questions that beg answers but don't need them from anyone because they answer themselves.

## Share Your Thoughts, Feelings, Experiences, And Knowledge

> *Teach us, oh, great blogger, how to live and function in this crazy world.*

The world is full of conflict. We don't know what to do next. We can't make a decision. It's too crazy, too chaotic. We need the voice of reason.

Use your thoughts, feelings, experiences, and knowledge to bring sanity to insanity in the world.

In this format, the conflict is outside the blog. You call attention to it, and offer choices for finding another perspective.

## Present a Problem, The Solution, and The Results

Problems create conflict, so help them solve them.

When readers follow along with the process, they better understand how it works, and why it works for you, which helps them figure it out.

Problems often have conflicts within conflicts, so guide your reader through your decision-making process.

## Make Them Think

If you make your readers think, you've succeeded in interacting with them.

If you make them share, you've succeeded twice over.

In 2007, I was given "The Thinking Blogger Award" by a fellow blogger. I

turned it down. They didn't understand the rejection, so I wrote a post that explained why I turned it down. I did so because I didn't think I qualified as a thinking blogger.

> *"A thinking blogger is one who will keep me thinking (and talking) about their words long after I've finished reading them...you know this person is living, and writing, their passion."*

They were so inspired by the challenge, and the fact that I made them think harder about what their award meant, they honored me with "The Platinum Thinking Blogger Award."
I accepted that one. I earned it.

> *"First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win."*
>
> *Mahatma Gandhi*


## Show Don't Tell

"Show the readers everything, tell them nothing."

— Ernest Hemingway

By your sixth grade, you should have learned how to write with show not tell in mind. It is another writing fundamental. Yet, so much blogging is telling not showing.

I found the words of Oliver Stone in his book, "*Seeing Voices,*" to explain this.

We speak not only to tell other people what we think, but to tell ourselves what we think. Speech is a part of thought.

Sometimes telling is showing. Speech is a part of thought, and by telling others, we tell ourselves what we think.

Still, if you have the opportunity, do more showing than telling in your blogging. Let's look at some examples of what to do and not to do.

## Ban Mind-Reading Writing

If they don't know what you are talking about, how can they know what you are talking about?

Seriously.

If you refer to a previous post, link to it in the reference. Don't write, "As I was telling you yesterday," and expect I can find yesterday's post easily. I may have arrived months after you published "today's" post, so link to yesterday's post so I can catch up.

## Don't Waste Our Time

There are many ways some bloggers waste our time with useless content and irrelevant or redundant writing, but a key time waster is not taking advantage of those powerful first 100 posts to convey your message.

A powerfully titled article drew me from my feed reader one morning. I spilled my tea I was in such a panic to get to the article. The title promised me the answer to a question I'd been searching for over two years. My rush to click through was greeted with this first sentence:

> *"I still have to take a shower, and I'm late for work, but I wanted to tell you about this because I think it's important, so I'll just rush this off before I jump in the shower and head to work and beat the traffic..."*

Don't waste words. Don't tell your readers things they really don't want to know. Get to the point and stop wasting your time and theirs.

## A Picture is NOT Worth a Thousand Words

Words may not do it alone, but a picture is NOT worth a thousands words when fed through feeds and search engines.

You must have the words.

Web technology is improving with image face and subject recognition, but it isn't there yet. We have to help it. We need to add words to explain what an image or video is, and tell people why it is worth their time to click, look, or watch.

## Make the Details Matter

Details add proof, specificity, and define the scene, characters, senses, plot.

> *Our journey began December 13, 199 Friday the thirteenth. We should have known better.*
>
> *Take 2 photographers, 4 cameras, a stack of field guides and maps, and a spoiled old cat. Mix them well in a 30-foot fifth wheel trailer, well greased. Add 2,800 rolls of film, 1 transmission, 14 tires, thousands of gallons of gas, 2 cracked windshields, 24 oil changes, 6 tune-ups, 2 sets of spark plug wires, 2 truck brakes, 12 hard drives, 3 motherboards, 1 computer monitor, and drive them 120,000 miles for 4 years.*

This opening shows you what happened without telling you. The details told the story faster than I could. I didn't tell you about being stuck 30 miles from nowhere on the Alaska Highway with a burned-up transmission, or the computer crashes that destroyed so much of our work, and broke our hearts. It's implied. And you want to know more.

The words are also keywords associated with travel and RV life, creating a strong impression of subject matter and expertise.

## Stimulate the Senses

Just as show and tell are fundamental writing skills, so is igniting the senses with great scene writing.



Look for opportunities to introduce all the senses in your storytelling. Tell us what you saw, how it felt, the smells, the tastes, the sounds. Add a sixth sense and tell us you could feel every hair on your body standing on end.

## Be Counted

If you have an opinion on something, stand up. Be counted.

People love people with opinions. It's another way to have a conversation with your readers.

It is also another way to reveal more of your online persona. Consider what she would stand up for, what she would protect and defend.

## Make Facts Matter

We live in a surreal time but that doesn't mean you have to join the crazy club.

Wild accusations and assumptions do not build trust and respect.

Use facts.

Use proper citations.

Back it up with truth.

Seriously.

There is an art to conspiracy writing[30]. Use it carefully.

## Make Me Care

When sharing, resharing, retwitting, reblogging came into effect, it was originally called the *Blog Echo Chamber*. One person would create fascinating content and others would share it over and over again, and the content would echo off the virtual walls. Be the should into the void. Let others be the echo, resharing your original thoughts and perspective. Even if you can't write well, the attempt to say it in your words is always appreciated and welcome.

I want to hear your opinion in your words. When you share, tell us why this was worth sharing?

Why should I waste my time?

Make me care.

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[30] http://www.blogherald.com/2007/11/19/i-want-to-start-a-controversy/

## The 3-Point Rule

Make no more than 3 points per post.

Have more than 3 points to make, make 3 or more posts.

Seriously, if you have 100 top priorities, you have no priorities at all. The same applies to points in a post.

Divide up your points in multiple posts and you might never run out of things to blog about.

## Move the Reader Through the Story

Make them want to scroll down. Think of your blog as a book. You want them to turn the page. On a site, turning the page is the equivalent of scrolling down.

Make each sentence lead to the next, each paragraph pulling them through the words. You may do this with words or do this with the visual presentation of your content.

We've covered some tips for hooking readers and writing well-crafted content. Let's explore how to visually move the reader through the story.

## Post Structure

A website consists of the site's design, the web design, and the content it holds. You can't do much to the site's design to improve the readability or viability of a post. That lies with what you put in the content area, the visual presentation of your content.

Words matter. Images matter. Headings or subtitles matter. What matters most is whitespace, an often over-looked design element.

The web is a crowded place. Every web page fights for attention through the screen to the visitor's eyes. Some sites feel like they have to shout visually to keep your attention. Smart web designers earned early that it isn't the noise that holds attention, but the silence.

The silence on a web page is called the *whitespace*, literally the white space between letters, words, sentences, paragraphs, images, the empty space within your site's design and layout.

To ensure that beautifully designed whitespace continues to hold your content well for the eye, we use web standards for post structure and layout for our content. Remember, a web standard is consistent, expected practices. By following the norms for post structure, you improve the readability and opportunities to make a good first impression on our site.

**Blog Paragraphs are Short**

In the image example, which would you rather read?

While novelists can make a paragraph last for six or more pages without losing the attention of a reader, writers on the web have learned that people have trouble reading big chunks of content on computer screens. They need that whitespace, place for their eyes to rest, space that breaks up the content into digestible chunks.

A well-crafted post opens with the strong first 100 words or so to fill search results, feed readers, and social media posts. It does not start with a heading, a subtitle. These often confuse searchers as the subtitle is often not helpful but some clever words presumed to entice the reader. They only get in the way.

After one to three paragraphs to introduce the subject, place a *heading*.

**Use Headings**

A heading is a subtitle in a post. Think of your post as an outline. Headings introduce new points, perspectives, or shifts in the topic. They also instruct, pulling the reader through the content, point by point.

Like titles, make your headings matter. Make them represent the content that follows, and meet expectations. Keep them concise and specific.

A heading is not text that is bolded. STOP THAT. Seriously. Use HTML headings. If you write in HTML (good for you), then use the appropriate heading such as h12, h2, h3, or h If you are using a Visual or WYSIWYG editor, write the heading, select it, then use one of the drop down styles to apply the heading, just as you would in a word processor.

NEVER BOLD HEADINGS. Let the heading web design do the heavy lifting. If you don't like, either change it in the CSS styles or change designs or WordPress Themes.
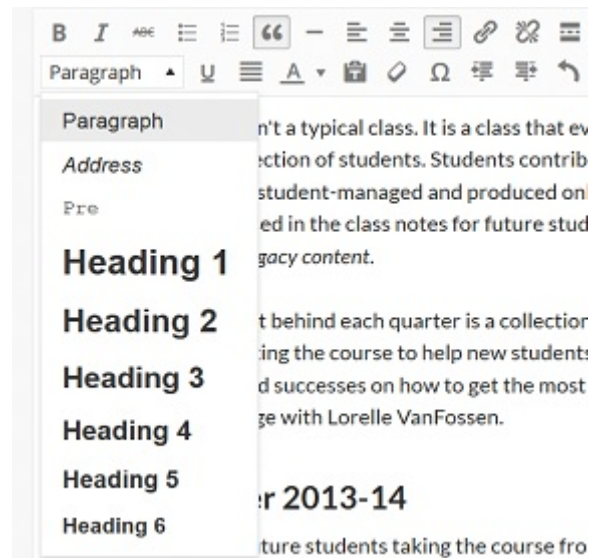
Add more paragraphs, then another heading if the article needs it.

**Add Images**

Adding images, keep the image sizes to the width of the content column or smaller.

Align the images to the center or right or left. Never just dump an image in there without alignment. It looks awkward sitting along the left margin with no text wrapped around it. By aligning the image to the left or right, leave enough room for the text to comfortably wrap around it. Aligning the image in the center, ensure the image is sized to the full width of the column. The text will stay above and below the image, and there will be less empty space on either side.

More tips on using images is found in the lesson on writing for the web.

## Use Lists

Lists pull the eye toward them, drawing them in. They pull the eyes down the page, forcing us to scroll and see the rest of the list.

Lists move the eye. If a list scrolls beneath the fold, below where the screen stops, you can't help but scroll down, especially if the list features numbers.

Web writing includes a wide variety of list making techniques, but the two core styles are ordered and unordered list. The unordered list is the bullet list, list items identified by a graphic circle, square, or other symbol. The ordered list is a numbered list, and may be numbers, Roman numerals, or other numbering styles.

Many bloggers are lazy with their lists, putting each item on its own line with no formatting to indicate this is a list. The visual elements of the bullets and numbers are what make lists on the web magic.

## Creating Links
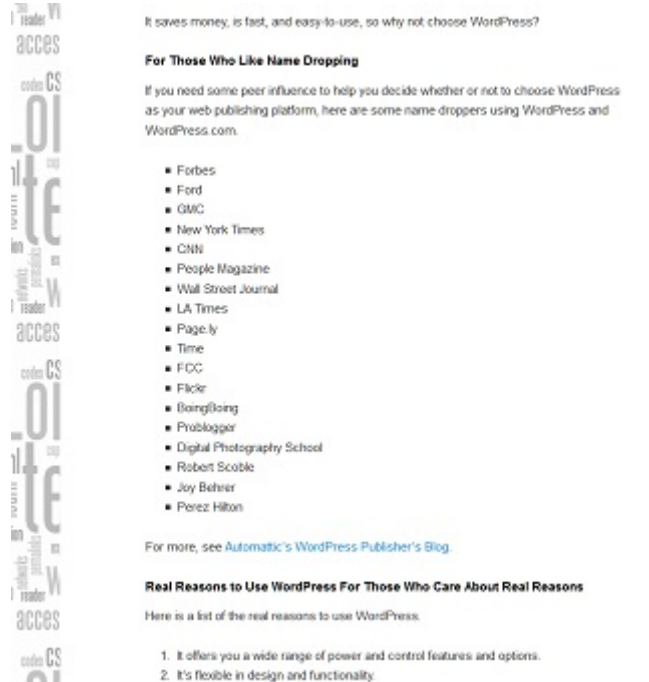
There are two types of links on the web: *external* and *internal*.

External links are links to web pages, sites, and other online references off the site.

Internal links are links to web pages, downloadable files, and media on the site. Examples of internal links are links to posts, Pages, categories, tags, authors, and downloadable media.

> *Link dumps are links just dumped into the content like this link https://lorelle.wordpress.com/2006/04/10/what-do-you-do-when-someone-steals-your-content/ to an article on how to deal with copyright violations.*

That link makes the paragraph hard to read, and it distorts it on the page.

Use your publishing platform's features for embedding links properly so they are a part of the content, readable, identifiable, and easily clicked.

> *If you would like information on copyright violations, read this article on <u>how to deal with content theft</u>.*

The screenshot example featured a video interview of Mr. T. I loved watching "The A Team" on television, and I hadn't heard anything for a long time about the actor known as Mr. T. I was intrigued. The post stated that he had done an amusing advertisement for a candy company, and I clicked the underlined name of the company. Nothing happened. I though it was me. I clicked again. And again.



This is *completely brilliant* marketing from Mars, Inc., and if you need an astrophysicist to sponsor (and you know you do), I'm here! I await your call for an endorsement deal.

In the meantime, allow me to express my undying admiration for Mr. T, and I hope you found these videos as amusing as I did!

They'd underlined the name of the company for emphasis, or some bad English teacher's lesson that all titles and company names must be underlined. Whatever the reason, it violated web standards and some international laws when it comes to crafting links on the web.

*Underlines are reserved for links only.*

Here are some other standards for links.

1. Links must meet user expectations.

2. Links do NOT say "click here" or "here."

3. Links must NOT force open windows or tabs without warning.

These are not my opinion. These are the laws. The World Wide Web Consortium, W3C, WCAG Web Accessibility Guidelines Working Group, Web Accessibility Initiative, US Section 508, Equal Access, and other Federal and international laws. Check them out to learn more about what you can and cannot do on the web with links, and stay tuned for the section on adherence to standards and laws in an upcoming lesson.

## Positive Resolution

*"There's always room for a story that can transport people to another place."*

*– J.K. Rowling, novelist, screenwriter and film producer*

We love heroes. We love underdogs. Our story history is filled with them. Few stories succeed without one.

Ending a blog post with a positive resolution makes us feel like this was worth reading. It makes us feel like this is worth sharing.

Help us get through the day.

Give us hope.

In a world of bad politicians, abusive mortgage rates, trolls, ransomware, and self-doubt, remember the following quote, and give us a reason to keep on keeping on.

*You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty.*

*Mahatma Gandhi*

## Assignment: Generate Content

Using all the tips covered in this chapter, write the titles and quick outline of 3 post ideas using:

1. Hook/Opening.
2. Great characters.
3. Conflict/Change.
4. Show don't tell.
5. Positive resolution.

## Assignment Review

How was the experience of considering a blog post from the perspective of a serious writer?

Did it change how you wrote? Did it change what you wrote?

Remember, a well-crafted post will inform, engage, persuade, and be timeless.

# Lesson Nine: Writing for the Web

In Lesson Eleven, we covered the art of storytelling with blogging. You learned that blogging is about storytelling, and storytelling is about telling a good story.

Blogging is also about writing. You may publish audio, video, podcasts, cartoons, or only photographs. But blogging is about writing, and learning to write on the web is different from traditional writing fundamentals. Related, yes, but also very different.

This is the section with the technical advice, techniques, and tips for the writing process associated with blogging. There are quite a few, so let's take them one at a time.

## The Blogging Workflow

Every project you do has a workflow, the step-by-step process of getting things done. A blogging workflow is unique to the blogger, but it generally resembles the following:

**Idea:** You have an idea worth writing, sharing, and publishing. The inspiration may come from anywhere. Jot it down in a location where you store your ideas, add it to your calendar, or act upon it immediately.

**Outline:** Depending upon the depth of the idea, create an outline. I call this the "brain dump." Write down everything you can think of that you would like to cover based on that idea. Later, you may cull it down to one or more posts, but get it out of your head before the thought is gone.

**Schedule:** Schedule a self-imposed deadline for research, writing, editing, and publishing the piece. Bloggers are often great idea generators, but not all ideas are worthy or ready for publishing. Sift through the concepts to find the right one to add to your schedule.

**Research:** Dig deeper into the idea. Have other people covered the topic? What do they have to say about it? Do you have something to add to the conversation? Is their coverage worth citing in your article? Maybe their articles will take you even deeper into the topic to find something they missed or even more important to cover.

**Writing:** The writing process is unique to each blogger. You may write on the run with your phone, sit down at a desk and write a thoughtful piece, or need the noise of a busy coffee chop or Internet cafe to find your writing mojo. Within the writing process is a more detailed workflow, a structure and pattern you use to take an idea all the way to publishing.

**Find Images/Videos:** Many bloggers want their posts to feature visuals, or require visuals in the form of images or video to help make their point. Finding multimedia for inclusion can be a great consumer of time for bloggers. Bookmark your favorite free or paid royalty free image sites, and learn how to search for videos and other multimedia efficiently to reduce the amount of time spent on the hunt.

**Editing:** The editing process is also unique to each blogger. You may just let it go as it is, and live with the consequences. Or you may be your own grammar and spelling cop and go through every word to ensure it is right before you hit publish. The editing process may also include links, adding images, proper citations, lists, and styles such as blockquotes and headings.

**Publishing:** The publishing process is much the same for all bloggers.

1. Scan the content for errors, spelling, grammar, missed links, etc.

2. Preview the post to ensure it looks "right," whatever that means to you.

3. Ensure all categories and tags are added.

4. Set the date for publishing in the future or hit publish.

**Monitor Social Media and Comments:** If your site is integrated with social media and will automatically publish posts on Twitter, Facebook, etc., then part of your job is done. If it isn't, then log into your social media channels and tell the world you've published a new post on your site, and include the link. Then monitor the social web and your site's comments for interactions and responses. If you are using WordPress, the WordPress mobile app will notify you immediately if their are comments. The same applies to mobile apps for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc. Any time you can automate or integrate automation into your workflow, do it.

**Revisit and Review:** At a later date, revisit the post to review it for updates, improvements, or changes. Not all posts need revisiting, but some might. If you have a post with timely information that needs an update such as a current and ongoing event or rule or law change, then go back and update the post. If you reviewed something and changed your mind, put that on the list to review. After you've been blogging for about a year or two, go back and revisit your most popular posts and ensure they reflect your improved writing and publishing skills, and that they still say the things you want them to say.

What is your workflow? Your workflow could be different, shorter, or even longer and more complex. It might include setting up photo shots or working with a graphics program to design artwork as part of your post. You may be working with a team that requires review of the content before publishing or additional material.

Outline your blogging workflow in as much detail as possible. Include all links to reference and resource sites to refer to later, especially if you get distracted and need to leave your site for a while. When you return, all the information will be there for you to reboot the process faster.

# What is the Perfect Post Length?

I'm constantly asked what is the perfect word count length for a post?

Do you know?

Think about it. What have you heard? How many words?

Two hundred? Four hundred? A thousand?

At most of my workshops and classes, participants tend to agree that 400 is the right number of words, though some insist it is 200.

The answer is complicated.

Research has repeatedly shown that if the writing is good enough, and pulls the reader through the post, they will read it to the end. It doesn't matter if it is 50 words or 50,000, people will read to the end if the story and post layout pulls them there.

In 2015, Orbit Media Studios surveyed[31] more than 1000 leading bloggers. They found the average post length was 900 words. This doesn't mean that every word of those 900 were read consistently, or read by anyone. It was just the average post length written.

Combined with other similar surveys, we've fund something more important than just the length of a post. The competition for attention online has split in two directions.

The short post still has a place on the web. Short, concise, to the point information, data, and link referrals continue to be appropriate for some content, especially the news.

Longer essays called "long form," are gaining traction as they offer deeper insights and evidence to back up a point or three.

According to Ann Handley, marketing expert and speaker:

> *To thrive in an over-saturated content world, you'll need to constantly write or produce content with depth. Longer posts, more substantive content that people find useful and inspired.*

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[31] http://www.doz.com/content/trends-in-blogging-2016

## How Often Should I Publish?

How often?

Regularly.

Daily, weekly, monthly, annually.

There is no right or wrong. I used to publish one to three times a day on Lorelle on WordPress. I felt guilty if I missed a single day. This lasted for almost 10 years then I had surgery and complications, taking me a couple months to get back, and it took even longer to get back to full stride again. I was terrified I'd lose readers.

When I felt strong enough, and brave enough, I checked my stats. The numbers were the same. In fact, they increased, just as they had been increasing fairly steadily for years. But I hadn't published much for months. It didn't matter. The same timeless content that brought in regular visitors continued to do so. Many kept coming back for more. New bloggers continued to link to my material, and new visitors, and old visitors, kept returning, finding new information within my archives.

I slowed down, took some time to re-access my blogging. I started more in depth projects and series. I took more time to reflect and consider my words before publishing. I came back to blogging with a greater passion, clearer focus, and more positive attitude.

Once you have enough content to attract visitors, and keep them entertained and coming back for more, take the time to reflect upon what you've done and find a way to do it better, just as Ree Drummond, The Pioneer Woman did on her site. Find what is working, and focus on that. Lean into that. See where that takes you.

It doesn't matter how often you publish, but search engines like frequently updated sites.

Just do it consistently and regularly.

## Write like kinda sorta like you kinda like talk

*I lk yr blg.*

*Ur my BF.*

Your writing should give the illusion you are speaking directly to the reader without including all of the stutters, ums, and likes we hear in every day conversation. Don't write like you have a dictionary or thesaurus sitting next to you. Do match the writing style with the content.

The average reading age on the web has shifted from 6th grade to 10th grade in ten years, but always write to the reading level of your audience.

Remember, your audience is you. They reflect your character persona. Write as if you are talking to yourself. Use words that reflect your industry, genre, and intelligence, as well as your verbosity.

## The Editing Process

The editing process is a critical part of the blogging workflow. I've talked to many bloggers over the years about their editing process. Here are some of their tips.

**Read out loud:** Many bloggers believe in reading their posts out loud before they hit publish. "When you say the words, you find mistakes. When you hear them out loud, you find even more."

**Preview posts:** Preview the post in its front-end view, as it will appear on your site when published and viewed by a visitor. Stepping away from the post editor, you actually see the post as it will appear to others, and you may find mistakes, redundancies, huge paragraphs, poorly aligned images, broken links, and all types of problems you might not catch in the editor.

**Read backwards:** Read your post backwards to change your accustomed view. By scanning the words in reverse, your brain sees the words and sentences differently, helping you catch common mistakes.

**Keep a list of your most common mistakes:** We all make mistakes, and many we make frequently. For instance, I type very fast and often hit the space bar faster than I should on small common word like "he t." There are also many commonly misspelled words like "separate" and the famous "there, they're, and their" homophones. I keep a list of common mistakes on the wall of my office and in a notebook near me that I refer to often to remind me to look for these errors.

**Edit for brevity:** If you can say it with fewer words, do it. Look for run-on sentences, huge paragraphs, and rambles and tighten them up. "Slash and burn" as one blogger called it. Sometimes you need to write more to say more, but usually we need to write less to say more.

**Watch for redundant redundancies:** This is one of them common writing problems for bloggers. Either they repeat themselves to over-emphasis a point, or writing so fast they don't realize they are repeating themselves. Many redundancies are common in our language such as saying something is "absolutely essential." Essential is an absolute, so let it stand alone. Other examples include absolutely necessary, anonymous stranger, bouquet of flowers, grow in size, fuse together, yellow color, mutual cooperation, made out of, hollow tube, general public, kneel down, knowledgeable experts, new innovation, mix together, introduced a new, evolve over time, end result, now pending, reply back, same exact, old cliche, vacillate back and forth, write down, total destruction, and small size.

**Continuity:** Continuity is the flow of a thought or process in order, in a sequence. Jumping around from thought to thought, point to point, idea to idea, is exhausting for the writer as well as the reader. Look for continuity errors, references to past posts that require links to connect story lines and concepts, references to topics that might be new and add a link to help people understand the concept, and for jumping points and thoughts. Use the 3-point guide to help keep the post on topic, and use the other points for more posts.

**Make lists:** As discussed earlier in this book, lists are powerful tools to pull the eye through a post and convey step-by-step instructions. Look for sequences in your paragraphs to break them into lists. If you find yourself

writing a list of things in sentence form, consider breaking them out into a list. Experiment with different types of lists. I've featured a variety of list-making techniques in this book to inspire you.

## Use Nouns and Synonyms

Keywords, keywords, keywords.

Blog for a few weeks and you will start to hear people talking about keywords, keywords, keywords. "To be successful, you have to use keywords." "To make money with your site, test your keyword density."

This is all just too complex a topic. Here is better advice.

Use nouns and synonyms.

> *"It's wonderful. You should be using it. I use it. She uses it. He should be using it. It will change your life. Tell your mother to use it. Your father. Your grandparents. All your co-workers. The world will be a better place if we all use it."*

What the hell am I talking about?

Insert any noun into the same paragraph and read it out loud.

> *"A phone is wonderful. You should be using phones. I use a phone. She uses a phone. He should be using a phone. Phones will change your life. Tell your mother to use a phone. Your father. Your grandparents. All your co-workers. The world will be a better place if we all use phones."*

It might sound funny at first, but on the web, it makes complete sense.

When you encounter a paragraph similar to that (and I hope you don't), you scan it. We scan first before we read, be it in print or on the screen. What do you see. You see the word "phone." If you wanted information on phones, you would know you are in the right place.

We were taught in early school to use a noun at the beginning of a paragraph, then use a pronoun to represent it in the rest of the paragraph, possibly even the whole page.

On the web, it doesn't work that way. Nouns and synonyms help the reader know what you are writing about and increase the keywords in your content.

A keyword is simply a word that people use to search for something online. The more you use the nouns and synonyms, the more likely your web page is to turn up in search results for that term or phrase, and the more likely someone is to say, "This is the right place with the right answer."

## Blog Writing Isn't About Distracting Bolds

Blog writing isn't about distracting bolds or nuisance italics.

I tell my students to consider anything that changes the color, shape, size, or consistently of standard letters on a web page as spices in a recipe. Too much spoils the whole dish.

In other words, never do anything that interferes with the reader's ability to read your words.

First, avoid bold abuse or ping pong writing.

Bold abuse is when words or phrases are highlighted in bold or italics for unnecessary emphasis. The eye tends to jump from bold or italic word or phrase to the next one, never reading the words in between. Your eyes, and thoughts, ping pong around the web page, not sure where to look or settle.

There are web standards for using bold, italic, and capital letters.

- Changing fonts mid-*sentence* is for s i l l y teenagers.

- Changing font colors is for silly teenagers and over-eager marketers.

- Changing font sizes is for silly teenagers and insistent marketers.

- *Italics* are for *foreign* words, *titles*, and *emphasis* as in *air quotes*.

- **Bolds** are for **shouting and technical writing instructions**.

- ALL CAPS IS SCREAMING.

- **BOLD AND ALL CAPS IS CRAZY.**

- ***BOLD ITALICS AND ALL CAPS…***

Means it is time to call in the guys in white coats with a straight jacket.

Funny, but true. People don't trust bloggers who abuse fonts, emphasis, and capitalization. What do you assume when you see someone's written in all caps? Most people think that.

One of the hardest expressions to convey are "air quotes," things we say today with one or two hands pulling down two fingers in the air to represent quote marks. They add emphasis to express irony or satire. We didn't need them for the first thousand or so years in the evolution of English as a written language. We wrote snide, snippy, editorial comments without any visual change to the words, and were still able to sound like air quotes.

Can you read irony in the following sentence?

"Oh," she said. "You think you are so funny."

Do you need to read:

"Oh," she said. "You 'think' you are 'so funny.'"

No. You don't. The words convey the meaning without the quote marks. If you feel you must add emphasis to the words to change their meaning, put them in italics.

"Oh," she said. "You think you are *so funny*."

The harder you work to instruct readers how to read your words - well, it is exhausting. Put your effort into writing better.

## One Space After a Period

Beginning in the 1970's, it became the norm to type one space after a period in a sentence. Some people haven't gotten the message yet.

Typing teachers taught two spaces after a period for decades, yet typesetters typically removed the extra space as their fonts accommodated an extra space on the period. Typography researchers found that the whitespace after a period did not improve reading, and in some studies was found to hinder reading, especially for those with common eye disorders such as dyslexia.

With the advent of the modern computer, you can type as many spaces as

you like after a period and only one will appear in the published content on the web.

Save a few keystrokes, and your fingers and hands, and use just one space keystroke after a period.

## Punctuate Properly

I was having lunch with well-known columnist on computer technology, John Dvorak, a few years ago in San Francisco. We were talking about grammar and punctuation one day, you know, like people do. Don't you? Anyway, I was whining about the grammar police being so know-it-all with their "you didn't spell it right" comments on my blogs and around the social web.

"Oh, I love those people."

"What? They are annoying."

"Yes, but I love them. I love it when someone stops long enough to tell me I made a spelling mistake or screwed up my grammar."

"Really? Why?"

"Because I know they read my whole article carefully. They had to in order to find my mistakes."

He convinced me to respect the grammar and spelling police.

Yet, I still believe you should edit, edit, edit, edit your work to ensure you have as few mistakes as possible. Don't give anyone a chance to find fault with your work. They will. Don't give them a chance with careless grammar mistakes.

I'll let you in on a little secret. The Grammar and Spelling Police are *everywhere*. Seriously.

One of my favorite emails that I still have saved today came from a fan telling me that I should consider rewriting my About web page due to duplicates and redundancy. She told me I should find a good editor, which made me wonder if she was looking for the job.

**LOW Contact Form**

Mary V — Nov 12 (5 days ago)
to lorelleonwordp.

Name: Mary V
Email: mvangela@gmail.com
Comment: You might want to consider rewriting your About page (or finding a goodeditor). Duplicates galore. Rephrase.

For instance you employ "Lorelle is also..." over and over and over. Count how many times.

Respectfully,
MV

What I enjoyed most about the email is that she typed "goodeditor" as one word. Sure, it's a slip of the hinger, but so are most spelling mistakes.

With the growing capabilities of automatic spell checking and auto-correction in word processors and smartphones, I have to share with you one of my mother's first text messages to me.

*"I hate iPhone spell check. It's shut."*

## Write Backwards

In school we are taught to write using two formats: standard essay and newspaper triangle.

The standard essay model is to have a beginning, middle, and an end, and to tell them what you are going to tell them, then tell them, then tell them what you told them. Familiar?

The newspaper triangle, more properly called the *inverted triangle*, is commonly used in newspapers and magazines to start with the meat of the story, the most important elements, and move the details, the little details considered less important to the reader, to the bottom. The theory is that most people scan the news and want the most important information first before they decide if it is worth reading. "Bury the lead," the critical points, and readers will skim right over the story.

Both of these are excellent writing models for blogging, but consider the *reverso poetry* technique for another style of blogging.

The reverso poetry technique is often used by poetry teachers with

children and adults to teach them poetry when they claim they don't know how to write poetry. It works by having the person work from a prompt, a concept familiar with them such as "family." As they think about their family, or a person in their family (or favorite pet, place, event, etc.), they are encouraged to jot down the first words or phrases that come into their mind. After 5-12 lines, they stop and read it in order. It often sounds fine. But reverse it, read it backwards, and suddenly the boring list becomes poetry.

The same technique works in academic and creative writing to mix things up, a technique called reverse outlining[32]. Write an outline, jotting down the ideas as they come to mind that you wish to write about. Then reverse the order, writing the outline from bottom to top. You will often find a common thread that runs through the outline points. Or you might find that you've considered the subject to a point where you wrote the real point of the paper at the bottom, after all the ideas had gelled in your head. You may not wish to leave your outline in the reverse order as you write, or maybe you do. Or maybe this is a stepping stone to a new outline structure, more focused and less redundant.

Experiment with this. Write out a post as you would normally. Then read each sentence or paragraph in reverse order. You will often find the most powerful content is at the bottom. Consider moving it to the top.

## Finding Multimedia to Share

One of the greatest time sinks in blogging is finding an image, video, or other multimedia to include in a post. The greatest of these time suckers is finding the gratuitous image.

The *gratuitous image* is a term for an unnecessary image to accompany your article to be eye-catching and improve your chances of being selected from among search results. Once search engines realized that these were being used to manipulate people into clicking through to an article that wasn't relevant to their search, they stopped using images in search

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[32] https://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/ReverseOutlines.html

results, or did so only with trusted websites. Just as web users have banner or ad blindness, they have become accustomed to the gratuitous image and ignore it.

People are smarter on the web than they used to be. They notice gratuitous images and find them annoying. They can also spot stock photos, photographs with models clearly staged, and find sites using them untrustworthy. Social media platforms such as Flickr or Pinterest have taught people to appreciate the organic images, the creative use of imagery, often done by the blogger, to visually convey their message. Users also appreciate self-made videos, even with shaky hands, if it helps to tell the story.

Hunting for an image means finding an image that represents your topic, provides some inspiration and information, but also catches the eye in the battle for eyeballs on social media.

The most common types of multimedia shared online are:

**Photographs:** Photographs come in every shape, style, and subject matter. Users appreciate images made by the blogger over more stylized and practiced staged stock images. Photographs are used to make a point, educate, inspire, motivate, and accessorize a post. Photographs are displayed as a single image, a clickable image that displays a larger view of the image, or in a slide show, gallery, or album with other images. There are many services offering free, royalty free, and copyright free images for use on blogs and social media. Flickr members may allow their images to also be used. Always check the licensing and usage permissions and copyright before using any photograph or image.

**Video:** YouTube now rules the world. They aren't the only host for videos, but its monopoly makes it the single largest media channel in the world. There are millions of YouTube videos easily embedded in your posts with links, and with your digital camera or smartphone, you can be a star in your own video for free.

**Graphics:** Graphics are often referred to as images, grouping graphics and photographs together. Graphics maybe cartoons, hand-drawings, artwork, animated gifs, graphs, charts, mind maps, or any other non-

photographic artwork. Always check the licensing and usage permissions and copyright before using any photograph or image.

**Screenshots:** Screenshots are captured images of a computer or mobile device screen. These are usually used in tutorials, demonstrating how to do something on the computer or phone.

**Screen Capture:** A screenshot is a screen capture, but the term *screen capture* or screencast is used to denote a video of a computer or mobile device screen, showing the action of a mouse or program on the computer. These are usually used in tutorials.

**Slide Shows:** Slide shows from Microsoft Powerpoint, SlideShare, or other slide saving and storage services are used to present a workshop or collection of data or images for educational and informational purposes.

**Infographics:** An infographic is a collection of related data information presented in a highly visual, poster format. When designed properly, these are invaluable for quickly conveying complicated data in a simple format. It is also an art form and requires some expertise to summarize and graphically present such data.

As with all multimedia that you haven't created, check the licensing and usage permissions and copyright before using and publishing.


# Links

I explored the various types of links in an earlier lesson. When it comes to links, I could do a twelve-week college course on nothing but hyperlinks.

Here are a few more things you need to know about links on the web beyond compliance with web standards and not leaving link dumps around the web.

### Shortlinks

Shortlinks, sometimes called tiny urls after one of the first sites that offered them, are an abbreviated alternative to a full URL (web address). A link shortening service such as tinyurl.com or bit.ly enable users to paste in a long URL to generate a short version such as bit.ly/lorelle that

redirects to lorelle.wordpress.com.  These are redirect links. The information is stored in the link shortening service's database and when the link is used, it redirects the user to the appropriate address. Some social media services such as Twitter (t.co) feature their own automatic shortlink service.

If you must use a link dump in a post, especially with social media posts, use a shortlink. It isn't perfect, but it helps improve the readability.

**Blogrolls**

Considered deprecated and archaic today, blogrolls are lists of external sites the blogger offers to encourage readers to visit. Blogrolls have gone through many trends, fads, and changes over the years. The simple unordered list of "Recommended Sites" rarely encouraged people to click.

Why?

First, readers began to ignore such lists. They were links to site titles and possibly names that meant nothing to them. There was no context, no persuasive words to explain why they should click these sites.

Second, blogrolls were abused. Some bloggers charged promotional fees to add sites to their link list. Others thought of it as a way to link to many sites and increase their ranking in search engines. Neither worked and were considered bad form and manners.

The best way to create the effect of a blogroll is to use one or more of the following options:

- Create Resource or Reference web page (Page not post in WordPress) with a qualified list of your personal recommendations. Group the lists into clearly labeled categories as fits your blogging topic. Explain why each site is a resource or source for supplies or more information. Convince us to click.

- Blog about a site or web page you recommend. This is the most powerful way to recommend another site or resource. Tell your readers why this site, service, or web page is important to you, how you use it, why you use it, and why they should give it a try.

- Create a very short list of recommended sites, no more than ten

sites, and feature it in the sidebar with a title that clearly states these are your recommendations such as "Recommended Reading" or "Related Sites." The longer the list, the more likely it is ignored. Shorter lists have an increased chance of encouraging clicks. If your publishing platform has the ability to generate random link lists such as the Links Manager in WordPress, consider randomly changing those ten links with each page load to ensure a sense of fresh information in the sidebar.

## Incoming Links

Incoming links are links from external sites that link to your site, specifically a web page on your site. The site linking to yours calls such a link a *referral link*, which comes into your site.

Incoming links to posts and Pages enable trackbacks.

## Trackbacks

I teach my students and clients to think of trackbacks as mini letters of recommendation. Trackbacks are incoming links from post to another, generating a trackback comment on the incoming linked post or referral post from the referring post. Trackbacks are clearly identified in the comments queue with ellipses (…) in parentheses at the beginning and end of the comment.

Trackbacks are powerful tools. They announce to the blogger that someone is talking about them, or at least mentioning a post of theirs. The trackback includes a link to the referring post. Check it out. What did they say? Respond via the comments to them. Thank them. Continue the discussion on their site about your site and what you said and why you said it. This is an excellent way to build a relationship.

*Do not respond to a trackback on your site*. Recently, I had several clients frustrated with a lack of response to their response to trackbacks on their site. I explained that as the recipient of the trackback, it is a notification that someone is talking about your content, not part of the discussion. The discussion happens on the referring post. Respond there, not on your site. A trackback is an invitation to visit the other blog.

Trackbacks work across web publishing platforms such as WordPress for sites with trackbacks enabled. WordPress enables trackbacks by default, and the user can choose to leave the default or turn them off. Trackback spam has been a plague for many years, causing many to turn trackbacks off. However, comment spam far outweighs the number of trackback spammers, so this accomplishes little except to make the user feel like they have a sense of control. Modern spam filtering systems do a tremendous job preventing all forms of site spam, so trust them and keep trackbacks open.

## Referral links

When you link to another post, you are creating a referral link. When others link to your posts or site, they are creating a referral link, which becomes an incoming link to your site or post.

## Requesting a Link

Links are precious, valuable, to bloggers. I consider linking to someone's post or site an honor, and my choice.

Do not contact a blogger to request they link to your site. Unless they have made an open offer for link requests, it is considered bad manners to request a link. Make them want to link to you by establishing a relationship with them, or creating content worth linking to.

Along the same lines, do not contact a blogger to recommend they add links, especially links to their site, in their content, blogrolls, link lists, etc. Such marketing ploys are not just bad form but scams. These scams come in many forms though a site's contact form as kind requests to "update your out of date list with new articles" or "I know you would really appreciate this fantastic content that so complements yours." Nope. Either ignore them or respond with no and leave me alone (in kind words, though sometimes the insistent ones need harsher terms). If someone knocking on your door at 3AM begging to use the phone because their car is broken down outside makes you nerves, such requests should make you feel the same. I think of link requests as modern telemarketers. Discourage link requests.

Only link to those you trust, those with whom you have a connection, a relationship, a source. Make those links matter, to you and your readers.

### Asking Permission to Link

You do not need to ask permission to link to a web page or site. Let me repeat that for those who still don't get it. You do not need to ask permission to link to a web page or site. EVER.

You need permission to use their content unless their copyright policy states Copyright Fair Use terms and conditions. You do not need permission to link.

Links are free. Links are welcome. Links are messages that tell the blogger their content matters. Make it matter and link away.

## Writing Tools

There are many writing tools a blogger should consider as part of their workflow tools. The following is just a sample of the options available.

### The Text Editor

Every blogger should have a good text editor program on their computer. You may or may not use it daily, but you will at some point in your blogging experience.

A text editor is a word processor stripped down to its bare essentials. It permits the typing of words and code without the embedded styles found in modern word processors. If you wish to write code such as HTML, JavaScript, PHP, or other web programming languages, you will require a text editor. A good text editor is one with features that help you write code.

For almost twenty years I've used NoteTab Pro for Windows from Notetab.com. Their mission is "Get more done in less time" and it does. It includes libraries for web programming code, an extensive and growing list of utility macros and code, and is exceptionally powerful and versatile.

One of the most powerful features I use is the Paste Board feature. Once enabled, all text copied from any other program is saved to that document. I can copy links, quotes, and sections from web pages over and over again across multiple web pages to gather research material and links, then switch to NoteTab sitting patiently in the background and start editing,

writing my post, using the links I've copied, the quotes, and notes to flesh out my article quickly and effeciently. Combined with the CoLT Firefox Extension[33], which offers a variety of ways to copy links as HTML anchor tags or link dumps, most of the work to write a post in HTML is done for me. Any time you can save a few keystrokes, do it. NoteTab Pro helps me save dozens of keystrokes every day.

Other popular text editors include Notepad++, Sublime Text, Vim, TextMate, Code, Atom by Github, Emacs, Text Wrangler, and Komodo Edit. Each has its own set of unique features. Experiment to see which works for your needs. See "WordPress School: Text Editors[34]" for more information.

## Scrivener

Scrivener by literatureandlatte.com is an excellent tool for writers of all types, including bloggers. Many popular bloggers, from tech bloggers to marketing bloggers, use Scrivener to keep track of all their posts, publishing and unpublished. It is very helpful for those who often publish article series.

Scrivener is not a text editor, but it feels like one. It is also not a word processor, but it behaves much like one. Technically, it is a pre-production writing program, allowing authors to develop story lines, plots, novels, or other writing collections for publishing. One of its best features for bloggers is the ability to organize your thoughts and ideas.

I use NoteTab Pro to collect links, quotes, and research notes. I copy them into Scrivener to start writing my posts. I have a Scrivener project file for every blog I publish with, and sometimes, if I'm working on a huge series like my WordPress School[35] ongoing educational series, I dedicated a Scrivener project file just to that project. I also use it for books like this one.

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[33] https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/colt/

[34] https://lorelle.wordpress.com/2015/03/21/wordpress-school-text-editors/

[35] https://lorelle.wordpress.com/2015/01/24/welcome-to-lorelles-wordpress-school/

I can title posts in text files in Scrivener by date or topic, or by title, allowing me to keep track of what I've published when or outline my posts in a specific order. Change my mind? Instead of select a huge batch of content, cutting, and moving to where I want to paste it in - then the phone rings, I get a text message, a client emails with an emergency, or the cat jumps on me, and I've lost my place and track of what I was doing. With Scrivener, I can modularize my content into any size chunks or sections I wish, and move them around with a single click and drag, just like in your file manager.

I can see my posts on a per post basis, reading each one through like it is in a separate file, or use the corkboard to look at my content as if on index cards or sticky notes, or as an outline.

I've talked to many bloggers and writers using Scrivener, and taught several workshops on using Scrivener. Like me, many are finding that their blogging has not only improved, but is more efficient. One blogger told me that Scrivener made her blogging seamless, "I go from idea to post in no time." Several others reported that Scrivener actually helped generate more ideas. "I see connections between topics I didn't see before." I enjoy using it for the same reasons.

There are many tutorials onling by bloggers and writers on how to use Scrivener for writing and blogging, and many video tutorials. Literatureandlatte.com offers a free trial for the inexpensive yet powerful writing studio program, and includes an interactive tutorial to guide you through the process. I can be intimidating at first, but once you get the basics, your blogging heart will sing.

**The Word Processor**

Blogging with a word processor is like driving an old clunker car. It will get you there, but you may suffer along the way.

If you are familiar with a word processor, use it. If it works for you, fantastic.

The biggest problem with blogging with a word processor is that it embeds fonts and other codes into the content that you cannot see. Write something in a word processor, copy it, and paste it into the visual editor

of a web publishing platform, and many of those codes come with it, changing the fonts, font sizes, colors, and other style codes you likely do not want.

I wish we lived in a completely drag-and-drop and copy-and-paste world. We are getting closer. You may now drag images from your computer's file manager directly into the Visual Editor in WordPress and it will automatically upload it, if your web browser supports it, but the same still isn't true for content from a word processor, including images. WordPress and others are working on it, and until they do, you must take a few extra steps when publishing word processing content.

To remove word processing embed codes in WordPress, either paste the content into the HTML or Text Editor, or use the Paste from Word button on the toolbar in the Visual or Modern Editor.

For me, it is another thing to remember, so I work almost exclusively in the HTML or Text Editor, and write in Scrivener or NoteTab Pro text editor. Saves a few steps.

NOTE: Some word processing programs offer features to publish directly to WordPress and other web publishing platforms. Experiment with these. Some work well, others are still a bit clunky and require extra steps beyond a quick copy and paste from Word button. See what works for you.

**Note Takers and Organizers**

Evernote, OneNote, and other web, software, and mobile app note takers and organizers have evolved well to integrate with social media and web publishing platforms.

Many bloggers keep their ideas, research material, and links to websites in Evernote or OneNote, and use these to write and publish posts. Both of these programs work across multiple computer platforms and allow you to quickly publish to WordPress and other platforms when you are ready to post.

Check out their tutorials and videos and experiment to see which one will integrate easily into your blogging workflow.

## Revisit and Review

Revisit and review is a blog maintenance task. I assign revisit and review tasks to myself on my editorial calendar to remind myself to clean up posts on my site.

Start revisits and renews when you have been blogging about six months. You should then have enough content, and know what you are doing, to revisit old posts and give them a fresh look and edit.

Start with your most popular posts. They are the gateway to your site, bringing in new traffic all the time.

Do they still say what you want them to say? Tighten up the grammar a bit, and make sure the words reflect the online persona's personality that's developed over time.

Check the links. Are they still valid? Remove the ones that don't seem to mesh with the topic as well as you thought. Add new ones that help make your point better.

Add internal links to your other content, now that you have some. As this is a popular post, ensure visitors will find their way deeper into your blog.

Check spelling, grammar, images, everything to ensure this looks its best and speaks well for the content on your site.

Next, check your site stats and see which posts are getting the least love, the least visitors. Is there something you can do to spice them up? Fix the title to make it more appropriate to the topic? Work on those first 100 words to ensure people will know what this post is about.

Then pick a random post. Any post. Give that a good go over to ensure it still represents you fairly and well.

Schedule revisits and reviews every few months to make sure your content is not just updated but speaks well of you.

## Automate Everything You Can

## Write in Batches, Publish Across Time

Write like you are blogging as the companion on Doctor Who. Write in batches, publish across time.

Take advantage of time in your week to sit down and knock out two to ten posts, if you can. In time you will. You will learn how to write great blogging prose in no time.

Write several posts in one sitting. Edit, then publish them so they will release across time.

Write five posts and you have five days of content, or five weeks of posts if you publish once a week.

Work ahead. I like having ten to twenty posts waiting their publishing date to release so I can do other things while my blog works for me. By the time post 15 releases, I should have another batch in the works to add to the list of scheduled posts.

On some of the sites I manage for other people, I use their multi-year calendar to publish announcements of events, regularly scheduled news items, and other bits and pieces that don't require much change month after month or year after year. On one site, I have three years of content already written and scheduled to publish automatically. Anything added in the in between times is welcome and necessary, but the boring stuff is already done. We can focus our energies elsewhere.

**Zapier:** Zaps are utilitarian programs that connect online systems together as tasks. You may use the hundreds of tasks available, or create your own. Zapier allows you to set and schedule tasks such as automatic backups and redundant workflow tasks. For instance, you can set up a zap task to send any email from a specific person or with a specific title in your Gmail inbox to make a copy in Microsoft OneNote as a backup. If you create a note in Evernote, you can use a Zap task to make a copy in Google Docs. Or add subscribers to your MailChimp email service account to a Google Sheets spreadsheet. There are Zaps to tweet your new WordPress

posts to Twitter and Facebook automatically, or publish a post from Evernote to your WordPress site. There is even a Zap to post new YouTube videos in a WordPress post that match a specific search string. Explore Zapier to find Zaps that will make your blogging experience easier and simpler.

**IFTTT:** IFTT is the acronym for "If This Then That," a powerful task tool on the web. Similar to Zapier, IFTTT runs Applets as tasks to do this when that happens, whatever "this" is. You can track your work hours in Google Calendar, add a weather report daily to your calendar, sync photo uploads with Dropbox to Google Drive, automatically synch Gmail emails with receipts, orders, and invoices in a Google Sheets spreadsheet, launch Google Maps navigation 15 minutes before your next meeting with directions, backup new texts on your Android device to Google spreadsheets, add a new photo to Instagram and automatically use it to make a new WordPress post, and so much more. There is an entire category of tasks just for blogging[36].

## How to Find Something to Say

> *"Open your mind to new experiences, particularly to the study of other people. Nothing that happens to a writer—however happy, however tragic—is ever wasted."*
>
> *– P.D. James, "5 Bits of Writing Advice"*

Finding something to say is easier when you know who is talking. This is part of the power of having a clearly identified online persona. The persona defines your desires, goals, fears, strategies, and weaknesses. The persona defines character, voice, and presentation.

Consider the persona the filter through which all things pass. She helps you make decisions. Does this fit her personality? Does it serve her desires? Does it trigger one of her fears or tests her strengths and

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[36] https://ifttt.com/search/query/Blogging

weaknesses? Is it aligned with her strategies? Would this really interest her? What about it is interesting? What would she say about it?

Everything is fodder for the blogger. Literally any topic could be stretched and twisted like taffy into something worth sharing. Yet, we still struggle with finding something to say.

## Look Around You

The first step in finding something to say is to look around you. Seriously. Stop everything right now and just look around you. What do you see?

I did that. Here is a photograph of the top of my desk as I write this. At the very bottom is the edge of my Kinesis keyboard. Between my computer monitor and my keyboard is piled all these books and odds and ends related to the different projects I'm working on.



Can you find any story ideas in that mess?

I did. I counted twenty stories. Twenty boring story ideas. Boring because they were surface inspiration. I hadn't turned on my creativity hat yet to dive even deeper into my imagination. If I did, I bet I could find 40, maybe even 80 stories in just that single photograph.

Look around you. Do you have a book laying open? What is it? Why did you pick it up? Why did you stop reading? What is it about? How does it help you? What did you learn from the book so far? What did you think you were going to learn? How is the writing? Like the pictures? Keep asking questions until you find an answer that triggers an idea.
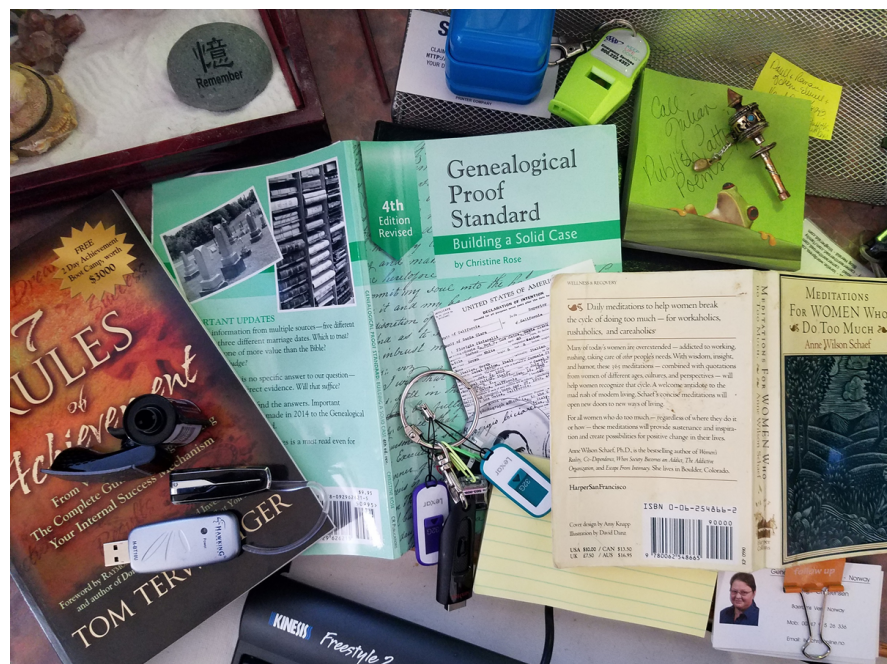
Look at the plant in your window or on the end table. Why did you pick that plant? What do you think when you look at it? Does it trigger a memory? Was it a gift? Or something you just picked up at the grocery store one day and the thing decided to live, surprising you? That's a story there. Not the grocery store bit, but what else in your life have you "picked up" and it surprised you, behaved in a way you didn't anticipate? The fact that it lived in spite of your penchant for killing plants may trigger a memory of a pet that died no matter what you tried to do to save it, or a favorite car that you drove into the ground, until the cost to maintain it exceeded your ability to drive it. Or a relationship you didn't think would last that did, and the lessons you learned from that experience.

Now I have my creativity hat on.

That's how this works. It isn't about the grocery store, or the plant. It is about what it means to you, what thoughts run through your mind when you let your mind wander on a topic. Turn on your own creativity hat and see what gets you charged up.

## Share Your Progress

Many people set up a blog at the start of a project or life event. They just found out they have a disease or cancer. New baby born. Just married, New job. Writing a book. Building a house. Hitting the road full-time, or just taking a vacation.

Share your progress with your readers. Share your struggles, interesting experiences, fascinating characters, and your journey.

Don't fear sharing too much. Sure, you may tease your readers, but don't hold things back because you feel like you are sharing too much. Share too much. The more personal, without violating your privacy, and the more open your online persona is when sharing stories, the faster you will attract an audience and build a community.

Let people know you. Let people see you, in your worst, and your best.

## Pay Attention to the News

Are you paying attention to the news? Lately, when my radio alarm goes off in the morning, I get up faster because I want to turn it off

immediately. There is just too much drama and trauma in the news.

Yet, you will find me stuck in my feed reader reading what others bloggers in my industry are publishing, and checking out the news in my industry on a regular basis.

Whether it be current news stories or industry news, there is much fodder for bloggers.

Industry news is often a good source for blogging material. What's new, what's changing, where is this thing going to go? What companies are the leaders in the industry? Which are challenging the top companies? Why? How?

Feel free to talk about your industry, the business or genre that represents your topics. Do you have an opinion on what is happening? Do your readers need to know news about your industry and competition?

Dick Eastman's Online Genealogy Newsletter[37] is practically an online magazine for the genealogist. He publishing not only tips, tricks, and techniques in genealogy, but also industry news and updates, covering everything from the latest record release announcements on various genealogy sites and services to news about and from the latest genealogy conferences. He monitors all the news in his industry, and now receives press releases and announcements directly as he has become the source for all genealogy news.

Reading his blog for many years, I'm always fascinating in how he can cover the same topics over and over again in a fresh and engaging way that keeps you interested, and coming back for more. That's an important skill in a blogger because there are many days when its the same news, different day.

The current political situation has served many bloggers with a seemingly never-ending source of material to comment on. So much of the news impacts us personally in a variety of ways, giving us an opportunity to let our opinions be known on health care, privacy, immigration, racism, security, economics, and even what defines manners and etiquette in

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[37] https://blog.eogn.com/

politics.

Beyond the headlines you will find thousands of story ideas. I discuss using a feed reader later in the chapter. Consider adding news and websites you return to often for news and inspiration.

## Prompts

I hated writing prompts. Battled with them, actually. I resented being told what to write.

Then I learned the truth about writing prompts.

*Don't write about the writing prompt.*

That's right. Don't write about the prompt. Write about what the prompt inspires.

I gave an example of this in the section earlier on looking around you for inspiration, but let's explore this further.

The prompt is "apple."

Are you going to write about a favorite apple experience? Picking apples as a kid? The color of the apple's skin compared to the white meat inside? The taste of an apple. How you prefer to eat an apple? How to use apples in cooking?

These are all surface thoughts about an apple. Turn on your creativity hat and go deeper.

Red. It's a red apple. Do you like the color red? Why? Does it mean something to you? Maybe it is the symbolism of the color red. Red is the color of danger, emergency, warnings, fear, anger, blood. Red is the color of roses and other flowers as they bloom in Spring bringing color back to the world after the dark, cold days of winter.

There are Apple computers, apples for teachers, an apple a day keeps the doctor away, there are plenty of metaphors and saying about apples. Have a favorite?

> *My grandparents lived in Eastern Washington surrounded with apple and cherry trees. Several times a year we would travel across the Cascade Mountains for a visit, filling up on all the apples and cherries we could pick from their trees. When the North*

*Cascades Highway opened up, we'd drive what we would call "The Fruit Run." We'd leave pre-dawn and head north over the mountains and swing through the Methow Valley to the Wenatchee Valley, stopping at every fruit stand we could find along the way. We'd fill the car with more than apples and cherries. We'd get peaches, apricots, plums, and berries of every shape and form. We grew much of our own food, but one look at the beautiful beans, beets, carrots, onions, and potatoes the size of a loaf of bread, and we'd add a box or three of each to the trunk. We kids would start munching the fruit as we came through Entiat heading toward Wenatchee. My parents would always ask if we needed the bathroom in Leavenworth before crossing the mountains, and we'd explain that we just went a little bit ago. By the time we crested Stevens Pass, the hunt for a bathroom was on. I swear my parents learned where every pit stop was on the way down from Stevens Pass. The ripe fruit had done its job by then, and we didn't call it "The Fruit Run" for nothing.*

An apple can trigger that memory, but it can do more. That's my surface scratch at the prompt. If I go even deeper, I can use all my senses.

*I picked up an apple at the grocery store today. Red Delicious, the sign said. Grown in Eastern Washington. I remember the sweat poring down my back as we'd climb the trees to pick the fruit ourselves, the bite of the horse flies, the itching bumps left by mosquitoes.*

*No one had air conditioning in their cars in those days. At least not in Washington State where the temperature on the west side of the state rarely rose above 80. We'd hang our arms out the window to direct the wind racing by into the car to cool us down, singing songs and shouting our favorite lyrics out into the hot desert air. I'd smell the sick sweetness of the mix of ripe fruit, rotting faster from the heat inside the car.*

*I recall the excitement of seeing grandma and grandpa step out of their metal single-wide mobile home and spilling out of the car to be first for a welcoming hug, then feeling awkward and uncomfortable as we all ran out of things to say beyond "How was the trip?" and "How are you doing?" to which we answered both with "Fine." We'd stand around, shifting our weight back and forth until they'd release us to climb the trees or go across the street to the park and playground as the adults would go inside for a cup of coffee and brownies.*

*I remember the hollow-eyed look of my grandfather. A tall, slender man, gray from buzz crew-cut top to military boots, his smile rarely reached his eyes. It wasn't until years after his death that I learned how he'd grown up in a baby orphanage, abandoned by his mother in Portland, Oregon. He lied about his age and entered the military early, fell in love and married the first woman who paid much attention to*

*him, then how he watched her die, possibly from his own neglect, spending months away from the family at sea in the Marines and Coast Guard, and dying of heart disease and obesity. My father was only 12 years old at the time, and grandfather was still a young man himself. He married almost immediately, a woman who'd served time in the military herself for many years and no experience with children. They stayed together until his death, so I can assume they were happy enough. Today, I remember his eyes as haunted, and I presume I know why.*

That's where an apple takes me. Where did it take you?

Look at the subject. Consider it from all angles, be it a thing, a quote, a sentence or paragraph from a story, a poem, or even a few random or related words.

What comes immediately to mind? Why? What triggered the thought?

Then dig a little. What does it make you think about? What emotions rise up? Do you go to a place? A memory? A time?

Why. Always ask yourself why or how.

Deeper yet, jot down the thoughts, emotions, and look for senses. What do you see? Hear? Feel? Smell? Taste?

Look at the words. What do they trigger? Go through the thoughts, emotions, and senses again.

Where is the story? Keep hunting. You will find it. If you give it a moment or two to find its way to the surface, it will rise up and surprise you, taking you in directions you never considered before.

As you write for the web, keep reminding yourself: *How would my online persona write this?*

Share Other's Stories and Wisdom

Bloggers do not blog alone. You are surrounded by others in your industry and outside of it, covering your topics and talking about things completely different. Study them, learn from them, and blog about them.

Promote the work of others, even your competitors. There is room enough for everyone. If you play nice and play well with others on the social web, they will return the favor.

Find wise tidbits to share from them. My fellow bloggers blogging about blogging, web publishing, and social media, astound me with their fresh insights and perspectives on blogging. I find new ways to think about what I do and how I do it daily, seeing it through their eyes. Share that. Share their wisdom and the lessons you learn from them.

Whatever the topic, if it excites you, it will likely excite your readers.

## What Do You Wish You Knew?

My mother tells me to learn from her mistakes so I don't have to repeat them. There is great wisdom in that. It still doesn't stop me from making her same mistakes, but I have avoided many with her examples.

What do you wish you knew about your topic before you got involved with it? What wisdom can you share with others considering following in your footsteps?

What will save time, money, and energy for others? Some sage advice in on this subjects is always welcome.

What makes this easier to do? What makes it fun?

What makes it hard? Why do you not recommend this to others?

What keeps you passionate about this subject?

Make a long list of all the things you wish you knew before you engaged in this subject matter, and you will have a wealth of blog topics.

## Mind Mapping

Mind mapping is a visual charting technique used to represent hierarchical information such as jobs, tasks, processes, steps, and even blog content ideas.

I think of mind maps as visual outlines. They may not resemble the structure and order of an outline, but their usefulness as a visual thinking tool allows the mind to find connections and build relationships between items in new ways quickly.

Below is an early mind map for a new blog I'm building focusing on genealogy. While I thought the site would focus specifically on learning

genealogy, it soon became obvious that my interest lie in modern technology associated with genealogical studies. Once I realized this through the mind map, future versions dove deeper into that arena, helping flesh out the original thought into a viable site with specific and related content.

Experiment. On a blank piece of paper, write the name of your site in the middle. Then add a circle or block shape with the categories you listed in Lesson Three on taxonomies. Add post titles from the assignment in Lesson Seven. Add a few more. If an idea pops up, add another block or circle with a line to its connection with the other content, or let it stand alone until you find something else to tie it in with.
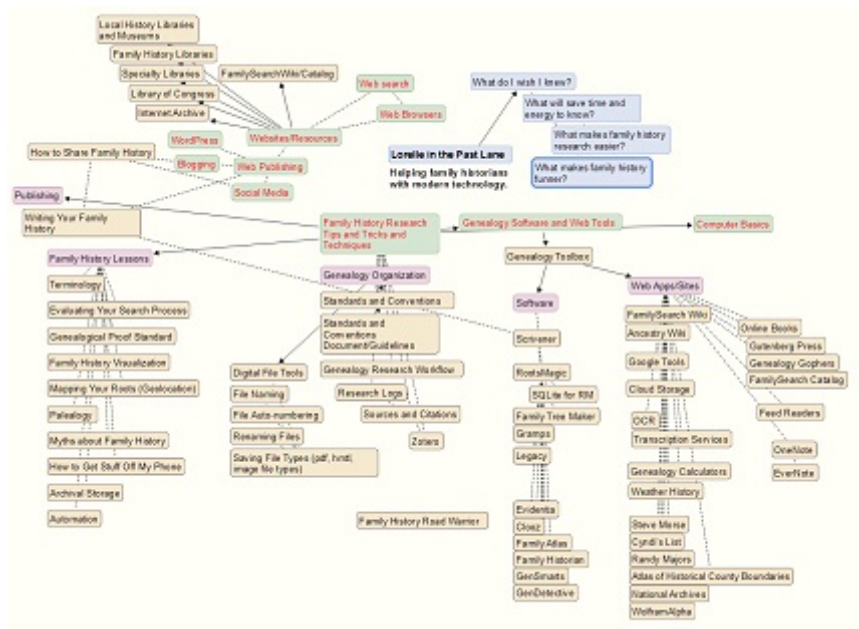
Let the process evolve organically. I've worked on mind maps for a few minutes or a few weeks, poking and prodding it, expanding it onto a big whiteboard, or using a program such as Scrapple, XMind, FreeMind, or one of the other free or paid services.

See what happens. I will often discover more through mind mapping than any outline or other brainstorming technique. If you are highly visual, you will love this process.

## Write Article Series

Writing an article series is similar to writing a single article or post, but it comes with a few more responsibilities.

Readers love article series. It gives them a reason to keep coming back to the site, and it also allows the author to cover a subject deeply.

Article series do not have to be educational. Storytelling is often made up

of many stories that come together as a whole to reveal a bigger picture of a life, an event, or your thoughts and beliefs.

The key to an article series is the connective tissue of each post in the series. One post leads to another, often increasing the information or the level of information as the reader slides into the post content and learns at each step.

A typical five post article series consists of:

1. **The Introduction:** I'm going to write about this and this is why.
2. **The Tools:** What is needed to get this done?
3. **The Tutorial:** How is this done?
4. **The Gallery:** Here are images of finished products.
5. **The Resources:** Here are links and references for more information on how to do this and to do it yourself.

A three-post article might combine the introduction, tools, and tutorial, then showcase the gallery of finished examples, then list the resources and references in the last post.

Then there are article series that never end. I have many of those, article series that started out as three or five posts in the series, then expanded as I received more feedback from readers and found even more to say on the subject. I call these *ongoing series*.

### Article Series Titles

Ensure your readers can easily identify articles in a series by using a strong, specific, and concise title, then reusing it.

For example, a post on learning how to tat, a lace-making technique I enjoy, would start a series on learning how to tat with a title such as "Learning How to Tat." The second post in the series might be "Choosing the Right Tatting Tools," but I'd amend it with "How to Tat: Choosing the Right Tatting Tools." The third article would be "How to Tat: Selecting Your Tatting Thread." And so on. At a glance, the reader sees that this is a series and can scan the front page for others with the same prefix title.

### Connecting Articles in Series

The key to publishing a series is connecting each of the posts together as a single grouping. This is done by a series of links.

In the opening paragraph or two, mention the previous posts in the series.

> *"In the <u>first post</u> of this series I explained why I enjoy the 17th century art of tatting. Next I shared with you the <u>types of string and shuttles</u> I enjoy working with. Today, let's explore the various types of patterns…"*

If someone comes into the series at a midway point, they can easily jump back to the beginning. Or if they've been enjoying the series, they can easily go back to refresh themselves with the previous points you've made.

Within the post content, if you refer back to a previous post's example, link to it again. Help people follow along with you no matter where you take them.

At the bottom of the post, create a heading with the main title of the article series such as "Learning to Tat." Then create a list of the posts in the reading order with properly formed links.

Each new post adds a new link to this list. Edit the previous posts and update the list to include the new post in the series.

This list at the bottom of the post becomes a mini-table of contents, connecting each of the posts in the series together.

## Rants and Rages

A blog is a common platform for a good rant or rage. It is a creative outlet and sometimes we are at our most creative when we are emotional.

Take care. Use your blogging platform as a place to more good than harm.

I teach students and clients to use a one-day cooling off period before hitting publish when blogging emotionally. You can always get right to the point of publishing, and save it as a draft and walk away.

The process of writing a rant or rage can be healing. It's a release, cathartic. Use that. Then wait for your mind to settle, your thoughts to come to a wiser, peaceful place, then review and edit your words.

The art of the rant post or rage post is a skill, a craft. Eloquent diatribes and tirades are the literary equivalent of a blog rant. A good rant is interactive, often energizing readers to respond in favor - or against. You must be ready for either reaction, and prepared to either defend yourself or let yourself be swayed to another point of view.

A good rant expresses real and sincere passion, a right that has been wronged or a wrong that needs to be righted. It is often empowered by a sense of helplessness, raging against a system out to get you. When you feel powerless, emotions often flare. You want to be heard. You want revenge. You want change.

Some rants are defense mechanisms. You've been caught doing something you shouldn't, or accused of something you didn't do, and the accuser left you no room to defend yourself, so you take to your blog to tell the world of your innocence, or at least your defense. These protests of innocence are often viewed as weak willed by readers, but if crafted well, it can be the outcry of the falsely accused.

Here are some basic steps and things to consider after you've finished writing a rant, and calmed down enough to edit for publication.

**Check emotion at the door when editing a rant:** Look at your rant clinically. See it through the eyes of your readers, those with a possible vested interest in you and your subject matter, but possibly not your point of view. What will they see? How will it make them feel? Edit subjectively rather than emotionally to ensure the words convey your meaning without doing harm to others.

**Know your subject matter:** Blogging out of ignorance is bad enough. Ranting out of ignorance makes you more the fool. People are smart. Your readers are smart. They know things. Trust their wisdom and ensure you rant and rage with intelligence, concern for your fellow web citizen with evidence you've done your homework. Show proof you are in the right and justified.

**Use facts and figures from solid data:** There are too many vague research studies and quasi-data sources online today. Stand your ground with solid data, facts, and figures. Backup your points and perspective with

facts, not conjecture. If you don't, readers will hold it against you as they have access to the same search engines you do. And they will search for proof. Give it to them first.

**Pick your battles:** Just because a car almost sideswiped you as you drove home from work is not justification to go rage-rant on crazy drivers. Pick your battles carefully. Rage against issues that matter to many people. Rage against local, national, and global issues. Sharing your personal battles as a rant comes off whiny rather than powerful and world-changing. Go for the big targets.

**Pros and cons:** There are two sides to every issue, sometimes four or ten sides. Explore them. Consider the alternative points of view in your rant. Show readers that you've given the alternatives a fair shake and still found them wanting. Admit some make valid points, but be clear about which side of the fence you land on with this issue.

**Target vulnerabilities:** Even the strongest laws and positions have vulnerabilities, walls that need shoring up, rules that need breaking or at least remodeling. Go directly for the throat, the vulnerable position. Don't hold back. Let them have it where it hurts. Look for errors in their perceptions, logic, and rules. Finger-point. Take care in pointing directly at a person and go for their job, their company, or the rules and regulations that got your back up about this issue.

**This is not personal:** An effective rant is not personal. You may target an individually professionally, but not personally. That borders on law-breaking, crossing into the territory of defamation and libel, a place you don't want to go.  A rant is your opportunity to let your online persona's personality and character shine, to step out from behind the curtain and reveal themselves. By exposing yourself online, you open yourself up to a response. Be prepared. Be ready. Don't take it personally. Take it professionally.

**Use powerful language:** During your initial rant, you will likely use strong language, swear words, action words, aggressive verbs and adjectives. Keep some of these as suits your online persona's character and personality. Go for sarcastic language, irony, play with satire, paint a picture of the wrongs done to shine vividly in the reader's mind.

**Use backstory judiciously:** We don't have to know what outfit you were wearing or the color of your shoes, or his eyes as he accused you of wrong. Too much detail, too much backstory, the reader is lost or exhausted by the time you get to your raging point. Give us enough information to set up the scenario then get to your point.

**Blame the responsible:** One of my rants is how people blame WordPress for things that the publishing platform has nothing to do with. If you didn't update your site or active security defenses, it isn't the fault of

WordPress that your site was hacked. It is your responsibility. Over 95% of all WordPress rants are human error, often by the person raging. Know your target. Be certain, don't assume. Be specific, and careful at who, what, and where you point your energy.

**Offer a solution:** Set up the problem, rage out the inequalities, the struggles, the ridiculous nature of the situation, then offer a solution. How can this work better? How can this improve? What will make the world a better place?

**Encourage action:** If you want change in the world, tell people how to take action. What can we do? What's next? Tell me where to go and how to effect change. As a reader, I want to help you help change the world. Tell me how.

## Blogger's Block

Like writer's block, blogger's block is the inability to come up with something to blog about, something to share.

Many claim that writer's or artist's block is real, a known phenomenon that strikes at the very psyche of an artist. Others claim it is a myth, an excuse to procrastinate and avoid the hard work that it takes to create art. I've been at both ends of this debate.

To be blunt, artistic blocks are psychological self-sabotage. Ernest Hemingway is famous for identifying the scariest thing he ever encountered as "a blank sheet of paper."

Creative blocks are generated by anxiety and stress, the head games we play inside our brains to get in our way. There is no clinical diagnosis, and you won't find it listed in the DSM except under medical terms such as anxiety, paranoia, ADHD, depression, analysis paralysis, motivational deficit, psychomotor deficiencies, and perfectionism. We tend to call the symptoms brain fog or fade, frustration, inability to focus, lack of inspiration, stress-induced anxiety, and good old "drawing a blank."

It begins in a slippery fashion. You are bored. Nothing seems to get your juices flowing. You poke around and suddenly, it feels like it is too much effort to even look at your feed reader or cruise around the web looking for

ideas. It's all too much, too complicated, too stressful. It's not worth it. A few days later, everything becomes a bit foggy, hazy in your eyes and in your mind. It's hard to make a decision to blog. You used to enjoy it, but now it is hard work. It's complicated. It requires too much of you. Before you know it, days roll by without a creative thought, then weeks, possibly even months.

How do I know? I've been there.

Usually, my problem is that I have too much to blog about. This in and of itself is a stress-induced anxiety. I have so much to share that I don't know where to start. I don't have a starting point. I don't know how to organize my thoughts and ideas I into a constructive outline, giving me the first place to step on my creative path. I lock up. It's overwhelming. Too confusing. Too frustrating. Too hard to make a decision, so no decision is a safe starting place.

How do you break through it?

You work through it.

First, action will always be better than inaction. Take a step. Then another.

Second, stick to the basics. In this section, I explored the blogging workflow. I recommended you write down your blogging workflow, listing all the steps you take from idea to publish on your site. If you haven't done that, do it now.

Look at it. What is the first step? Collect and store ideas. Go to your idea list.

Don't look for ideas that inspire you, that generate excitement. You aren't ready for that. Choosing such a topic will soon overwhelm and frustrate you as you aren't ready for emotional engagement. Select something easy, something mundane, possibly even uninspiring.

If you haven't written an outline, start. Note down all the things you could write on the subject. It might be difficult if it has been too long since you blogged, but keep at it. Give yourself plenty of quiet time to imagine, to brainstorm. Write down anything that comes to mind, even the stupid thoughts. Just let it flow.

Put these in some semblance of order. Then reverse them? Rearrange them until there is some coherency in the thought process, the things you wish to say on the subject.

This doesn't have to be a long diatribe. It could be a three sentence post. It could be a 3,000 word essay. It doesn't matter. Keep it simple and write out what you want to say until you are done.

Then edit. Continue through your normal workflow. It won't feel exciting, it won't feel inspiring, but it will be blogging. Keep moving forward.

When you are ready, hit publish.

Rinse and repeat.

Find another innocuous topic. Do the same thing. If you've run out of time today, make an appointment with yourself tomorrow, or the next day, but do not let more than two days go by. You haven't finished retraining your brain.

Blogging has a built-in reward system. Publishing is its own excitement, sharing is another. Interactivity is a social activity and activates dopamine and serotonin and other reward-oriented hormones that bring pleasure. Until you reactivate the pleasure centers of your brain with the process of blogging, you won't feel pleasure in the activity, or any activity.

Here are some more tips to avoid or break-through blogger's block.

**Use prompts regularly:** Whether or not you publish the results of a prompt, use them regularly. Many professional writers don't plunge into their writing every morning. They will often use a prompt to get their creativity neurons working every morning, then plunge into their writing. When the effort to generate creativity becomes a habit, it is much harder to break.

**Eliminate distractions:** We live in a noisy world, even if we are a Luddite at technology. We are often surrounded by family, friends, work, and all the distractions of modern life. Pay attention to them and begin a process of limiting or eliminating them from your blogging work area. Make an appointment with yourself and advise the others around you that you are not available from 1PM to 3PM. Don't answer your phone. Don't

pay attention to text messages. Don't check the weather or the news. Make you come first for a change.

**Research, research, research:** When I have little bumps in the creative process and begin to procrastinate, it is usually because I don't know enough yet about the topic. Dive deeper into your research. Follow a tangent and see where it leads. Restate the questions. Ask yourself over and over again what your readers want to know on the subject. Have you found the real story? Go deeper.

**Mix things up:** Do something different. Change writing locations. Tackle a subject you haven't done before. Look at a topic from a fresh perspective. Interview an expert. Record a video instead of writing a post. Do what you normally do in a different way to spice things up a little.

**Take a break:** Taking a break isn't the same as blogger's block. Stepping away from your blog for a few days, maybe a week or month, with a specific end-date in mind, a vacation of sorts, is a great way to refresh the mind and body. Blogging is hard work and we all need a break once in a while. Just make sure you are doing this as a constructive, well-planned decision and not just because you are bored.

**Maybe you aren't blogging on the right topic:** In researching blogger's block over the years, I've found that many bloggers give up their blogs and lose interest because they weren't blogging on the right subject. They lost focus because it wasn't the right topic, the right perspective, and the didn't have the right motivation. Start fresh. Find your passion. Don't force yourself to write about something you have little or no interest in, or a topic led by greed. It doesn't serve you well. Look inside you and find what gets you going in the morning. What do you enjoy doing? Ask yourself what is it you could talk about every day for the next 5 years and not get bored. That's what you should be blogging about.

## Blogging on Multiple Topics

There are many successful sites that cover multiple topics and subject matter, but not many last long. Sites that try to do everything often end up doing nothing well.

Blog consultants recommended niche blogging from the very beginning.

Niche blogging is a blogger specializing in a narrow topic or area of interest. A web development blogger may cover everything associated with web programming and development, including web design, but a niche blogger in web development might only focus on WordPress, social media programming, a specific web programming code, or other small area of interest. Becoming an expert on a specialty, many bloggers earned quite a reputation as an expert on the subject easily, especially if there was little competition on the subject.

Keeping your topics narrow and focused can be a good thing, it can also get boring and limiting. On *Lorelle on WordPress*, I became famous as the WordPress blogger, covering everything WordPress. But WordPress is more than just itself. It is blogging, web writing, web publishing, social media, programming, code, interactivity, communication, artistry, and so much more. It is whatever you put into it. I wanted to spend more time writing about what people put into WordPress as part of their usage of the web publishing platform, so I slowly added categories covering web writing, social media, and the act of blogging itself. By expanding my topics just a little, I remained a niche blogger for that site, and became a consultant, developer, trainer, and desired teacher, workshop leader, and keynote speaker at web and corporate conferences and conventions around the world. It helped to expand my market reach beyond the shadows of just WordPress.

I've worked with many clients who decided to change their main blog focus and topics, often switching away to a completely different subject matter, and those who wish to combine their diverse interests into a single site. It is a challenge, but can be done.

If the change is dramatically different, I recommend creating a new site. If the change is related, then the blogger must educate and bring his readers along on the new journey. Some will fall away, but others may remain, and even more will be gained as people discover your new interests.

Combining diverse topics is often harder. When the subject matter appears to be completely unrelated, the blogger is the continuity, the glue that holds them together. I worked with a blogger who wanted to combine their love for fast cars, chocolate, and coffee together. We worked for days and

finally found a connection between them all: *luxuries*. Each of these are common yet they are also luxuries, expensive habits for refined tastes. With that word in mind, finding the relationships between the three subjects was easy. It was about spoiling yourself. With a site design to reflect luxurious spoiling, and the new filter on the content, he thrived blogging on the three subjects for many years.

The only mixed topic blog I could not pull together, and I tried for almost a year, was business executive management training and lawn bowling.

"Are you blogging about the management of a lawn bowling team?"

"No. I'm sharing our stats and team events."

"Are you covering business training from the metaphor of a lawn bowling team?"

"No. I want to share all my training programs that I wrote and developed over the past 40 years as a consultant to corporations."

Not much I could do with that. It took a while to convince him to create two separate sites, extracting the management training material from the lawn bowling stats and game updates, but it finally worked.

If you choose to cover multiple topics on your site, find the relationship between them. They maybe closely related as blogging and WordPress were for me, or unrelated. Find that connection, and you may find new territory and audiences to reach.


## Learn to Use a Feed Reader

A feed reader is a web or software tool, or combination of both, for reading many websites at a time.

1. Feed readers bring the news to you.
2. Speedy and efficient content browser.
3. Ability to quickly scan and determine what is read-worthy.

A feed reader is a modern newspaper or magazine. It is called *pull technology* as the user controls the information pulled to them. On the

website, it is known as *push technology* as it is pushing the information out to feed readers and other aggregate tools and sites.

Feed readers are one of the most powerful tools in the arsenal of a blogger. With a few clicks, you can quickly scan the latest news and posts from your favorite sources, keeping up with the industry, competitors, and world around you. Most feed readers include easy-to-use features to quickly share or blog on a topic from within the feed reader.

All modern websites offer feeds, often referred to as their type: RSS, XML, and ATOM. Until a few years ago, most sites prominently promoted them along with their social media channels, symbolized by an square orange icon with curved lines in a quarter circle.

There are many feed readers, all similar but each with its own look and feel and various features. Feedly.com is one of the most popular feed readers, though Flipboard and AP Mobile come installed with most computers and mobile devices are feed readers that turn the sites you follow into a personalized magazine. Other popular feed readers include WordPress.com Reader, Pocket, Nuzzle, and Buffer, which includes a feed reader but is mostly focused on social media tracking and interaction.

From within your feed reader, simply add or search for sites you wish to follow. The feed reader searches the site for the feed file and brings the latest posts into the feed reader. Most feed readers offers categorization and tags, and I highly recommend you start early by grouping like sites together under a specific category.

You can quickly scan all the latest posts at the same time, or individually by category grouping. Click on the image or post title in the feed reader to read the web page in the feed reader. Click the title there or the "View Web Page" link to access the web page by loading it in your browser. Once you read a web page, the post title turns gray indicating "Read." When you refresh the feed reader, it drops off the list. It is still there, and you may access it by changing the filter to read all read posts. This way, you only see the latest unread posts.

Get to the end of the category or list and mark them all as read, and you are ready for the next batch of incoming posts to arrive.

## Aggregation Sites

Feeds are also used by aggregation sites that use programming to access website feeds and pull their content in as their content. If done illegally, without the permission of the site owner and displaying the content as if it is their own (even with a referring link), this is called *scrapping*. It is a copyright violation and highly frowned upon.

However, done right, making it clear to the visitor that this is referral content by using post titles and extracts and giving clear citation and links to the sources, and either receiving permission or having enough creditability that the blogger welcomes the inclusion, that site becomes a *curation site*, popular for providing a one-stop source for curated content access.

Popular aggregation sites include popurls.com, alltop.com, blogengage.com, bizsugar.com, and Druge Report, which includes original and curated content.

Most aggregation sites also offer feeds for their curated content. I include many of their categories in my feed reader, bringing aggregated content into my aggregator program, expanding the information I review daily.

## Feed Terms

There is often confusion over the terms, and they change as blogging trends shift.

**Feed:** The file feed readers, aggregators, and aggregation sites use to pull content from a website into their own frameworks.

**Aggregate:** A whole formed by comping several individual elements, often to form a group, class, or cluster.

**Aggregator:** An aggregator is a feed reader. It is programming that aggregates content from diverse websites for reading within a one-stop web, mobile, or desktop application. The terms are interchangeable.

**Aggregation Site:** A site that uses aggregation programming to collect the latest posts from websites, typically highlighting only name of the site and author, post title, and a short excerpt of the web page content. These

sites are also known as curation sites as the sources of the content is typically curated by a human, though the content usually isn't.

If we were to be technically accurate, your streams on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media channels are feeds. A form of aggregate programming pulls the information into the stream based upon your curation, your choice of individuals or company's content you wish to see in your stream. These companies will often inject other promoted content into your stream, but you are the curator, the controller of what you see in your social stream.

NOTE: If you are using WordPress or another web publishing platform with Pages and Posts, please note that Pages, the WordPress term for pseudo-static content that exists outside of the reverse chronological flow of your post content, are not included in your feed files. Only posts. Posts hold the most recent, timely content on your site, therefore feeds aggregate these into feed readers.

If you add or update a Page, you will not see the information in a feed reader. If you update a post, the changes will not be found within a feed reader. If you publish a new post, the information will appear in the feed reader.

## Set Due Dates and Deadlines

However you generate your ideas, your list of post topics, there comes a time when action will speak louder than your thoughts. You must move toward publishing.

Set due dates, self-imposed deadlines for articles (posts) and article series.

I have used every type of calendar system there is, honestly. All work for a while, but the three most successful methods are the appointment book, a wipe-erase wall calendar, and a mobile calendar.

## The Appointment Book

I love using the People System Uncalendars[38]. Consider this an experienced free endorsement. All of their products, from the uncalendar to the note taker are invaluable to my blogging workflow. An uncalendar is one without dates so you may start at any time rather than waiting for the school year or New Year to begin. People System's Uncalendar comes with primary colored blocks in addition to the scheduling areas for notes, reminders, nags, and even note-taking. The ability to easily customize these to my needs makes them the perfect scheduling tool.

I begin by mapping out the process of each article on my People System Uncalendar with various deadlines:

**Which Size Uncalendar Should You Use?**

I've used both the half-size and full size (8.5x11") uncalendars by People Systems and both work. When I'm traveling extensively, I stick to the half-size as it is lighter and travels in just about any normal size purse, pack, or briefcase. When I'm working on a project at home, I use the full-size uncalendar as it offers more room for notes. Experiment with both sizes to see which works for you. They come in coil-bound and 3-hole punch versions, too.

> **Outline:** This is the deadline for an outline of the article idea. Not all articles require an outline, but if I'm working on an in depth analysis, report, or tutorial, I set this deadline to get a jump on the topic.

> **First Draft:** This is the deadline for the first draft. Again, not all articles require an outline or first draft, but if they do, I set a deadline for it. This gives me time before publishing to let it sit, and my mind to clear, then return for a final edit before publishing.

> **Final Draft:** If the article requires a first and final draft, I set the deadline. It is typically a week to a day before the publishing date.

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[38] uncalendar.com

**Publishing Date:** This is the date I propose publishing the article. These are always flexible, but if I'm keeping to a schedule, I don't like pushing this date around. If I've promoted an upcoming article, I need to keep this appointment with myself and my readers.

**Revisit and Review Date:** Not all posts require a revisit and review, but some do. If the post contains timely information that is updated such as an ongoing news story or a change in technique or laws, I will revisit the article and update the information. Sometimes a tutorial or technique becomes dated and requires review and update. For such articles, I flip forward a few days, months, or even a year or two, and add the title of the article and a note to revisit and review it.

Ryder Carroll created the Bullet Journal[39], a simple technique of using symbols and organizing tasks, projects, and events, and even your notes, in a simple and efficient format. There are a wide range of other YouTube videos and web tutorials to help you keep track of your blogging tasks and deadlines.

## The Wipe-Erase Calendar

For many years I would buy a two-sided vertical wipe-erase calendar covering six months at a time. The price added up, so like the Uncalendar, I finally found an undated wet and dry erase vertical wall calendar for all 12 months by SwiftGlimpse (direct or Amazon.com). They come in various sizes, horizontal and vertical, from moderate to huge wall size, and you can also find many smaller 1-6 month calendar sizes. I can quickly add the months and dates each year and get planning, erasing the events a few months after the fact and add next year at the top and keep it going perpetually. You may also wish to use a whiteboard with tape outlining the weeks or months.

At a glance, I can quickly see my schedule and set deadlines accordingly. My husband and other people I work with can quickly check my availability, and, as my husband says, help out when I'm at my most busy, or stay out of the way as I fly past.

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[39] bulletjournal.com

I put my most important deadlines on this calendar, and I recommend you do the same. If you live in a date book, then highlight critical dates in there. If you are highly visual, a wall calendar like this will help you stay on track and stay focused.

**The Mobile Calendar**

Once I have my major deadlines figured out, they go into my Google Calender. Google Calendar and iCalendar are vital to our modern lifestyle, keeping us on track through alerts on our smartphones. Both will also provide alerts on your laptops and desktops if installed properly with notifications enabled.

When life gets busy, I appreciate the beep and notification that reminds me to stay on track with these mobile calendars.

There are a variety of mobile calendar apps and task lists to help you stay on track. Experiment with them and let me know what works for you. I'm always looking for new ways to tighten up my blogging workflow.

## Adherence to Standards and Laws

*Ignorance of the law is never an excuse.*

*They will get you anyway.*

> **This section is under construction. Pardon the dust and thanks for your cooperation.**

There are many local, domestic, and international laws regarding web publishing. Most are in agreement. You cannot commit cyber crimes, you must disclose any form of compensation and endorsement, you must obey defamation and libel laws, and do no harm.

Many of these laws apply to any business. Having a website is similar to having a virtual business, even if you aren't selling anything. The laws still apply.

## Respect Trademarks and Copyright

*When you respect the work of others, it tends to make the world a nicer place to publish.*

*Polices and procedures are not about control and limitations, but about ensuring that nothing is missed and quality is maintained.*

*Noted blogger, Paul Boag, Boagworld*

Before you freak out and start adding every terms of service known to humanity, relax. The policies you are required to include on your site are few, and they are dependent upon the topics you cover and how you cover them. You only require 4-5 policies, which maybe published on a single web page titled policies or legal.

- Copyright
- Privacy
- Disclosure
- Liability
- Comments
- Contributors
- Accessibility
- Links

- Terms of Service
- Reprint Permissions
- Social Media
- Content
- Disclaimers
- Event/News Posting
- Advertisements
- Endorsements

## Required Policies

The following are policies that are required by web standards and international law for most websites, including personal sites.

1. Copyright
2. Liability
3. Disclosure
4. Privacy
5. Comments

I offer extensive free information on various site policies on lorelle.wordpress.com, so I'm only going to cover these five policies in brief.

## Privacy Policy

> *This section is under construction. Pardon the dust and thanks for your cooperation.*

- Protect self:
    - Never publish email publicly - EVER.
    - Know difference between personal and private info.
- Protect readers/audience:
    - Protect their information (data collection/release/sharing).
    - Protect underage.

## Disclosure Policy

Disclosure is required when you, as a blogger, are compensated in any way for publishing content on the web.

A disclosure is a policy statement that clarifies if you are, or are not, compensated. If you are using ads on your site, working with affiliate networks, have a store (virtual or brick), offer coupons, write reviews or comparisons, or represent an employer or agency, you are required to have a clear disclosure statement and a link to that statement on every post with an endorsement, as well as in key areas on your site.

Understanding the US FTC laws and guidelines on disclosure are a bit challenging as the laws are vague and the FTC relies upon recommendations[40] they call guidelines. While other countries have more explicit laws and specifications, in the United States, the guidelines stat:

- A link to your disclosure statement or policy must be in the header, sidebar, or footer navigation as well as in the specific post, be in on a blog, Twitter, Facebook, etc.
- The disclosure must be noticeable and appear before the link.
- Hashtags such as #affiliate" or #disclosure will not work.

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[40] http://marketingland.com/ftc-disclosure-guidelines-affiliates-merchants-need-know-184719

- Your disclosure statement must be understood by "a significant minority" of consumers with clear language, and convey the relationship without another click for more information.

The FTC is clearer about what defines compensation to trigger the requirement of disclosure. If you receive compensation in any form, financial, products, services, or experiences, you are required to disclose, whether or not your review or commentary around the item is positive or negative, or even if the product or service is free.

The one thing the FTC is most definite about is that any mention of a product or service "could be considered an endorsement." Think about this for a moment. If you are writing a recipe that calls for a specific brand of molasses or peanut butter, the mention of the brand is enough to qualify as an endorsement. Just finished a great vacation and tweeted out "Thanks WXYZ Cruise Line for the best vacation EVER," you've just endorsed then in the eyes of the FTC. While they are fairly lenient about such editorial commentary, and certainly can't keep up with tracking such unconscious endorsements, if you link to their site, you have likely crossed the line into endorsement and require disclosure.

In the United States, cyber crimes, protections, and violations are determined by the federal government as well as state governments[41].

Organizations covering cyber crimes and Internet laws that should be on your radar include:

- Adult Internet Law[42]

- Electronic Frontier Foundation[43]

- Internet Society[44]

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[41] http://www.ncsl.org/research/telecommunications-and-information-technology/state-laws-related-to-internet-privacy.aspx

[42] http://adultinternetlaw.com/

[43] https://www.eff.org/

[44] http://www.internetsociety.org/

- American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)[45]

- Internet Governance Forum (UN-DESA)[46]

I've included a screenshot of the slide on this topic from my workshop. It lists just a few of the many international laws that apply to the web and web publishing. This list doesn't include all the court cases that make law. It is just the tip of the iceberg of the laws a blogger should know as they must work within these laws.



## Copyrights

The international copyright laws state that once content is in a *fixed* format, a permanent state, it is copyrighted by its creator. It is then up to the copyright holder to determine how their artwork or content may be used.

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[45] https://www.aclu.org/i

[46] https://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/

A copyright holder may decide to give their rights way. Anyone may use the photograph, image, design, music, video, or words anyway they wish. Or, the copyright holder may decide to restrict all access to reprint, share, or use their art in any form other than for their own purposes.

It is up to the copyright holder. Unfortunately, we can't read the mind of a copyright holder, thus we need a copyright policy to clarify things.

A copyright policy states clearly how the art maybe used, either given away, used freely with a proper link and citation, or never touched by anyone other than the copyright holder. This policy or statement is considered a copyright or usage license, the permissions given and required for use.

CreativeCommons.com made an attempt early in the life of the web to create standardized licenses for content and artwork. Their copyright licenses continue to be in use and have been fairly well tested, so I recommend you use their copyright wizard to find one that serves your purposes.

**Copyright Fair Use** in the copyright laws states that others are permitted to use a portion of your work as long as they provide adequate citation and do not use the entire work, just an element of it - in their words, not enough to impinge upon the financial gains such a work would bring the copyright holder. What does that mean on the web?

Jonathan Bailey of PlagiarismToday.com and I came up with a standard that is now generally accepted. A web page's content may be used within Fair Use if it is about 400 words or less and not to exceed 20% of the content. This is vague on purpose as it gives us, the copyright holder, some leeway in pursuing copyright violators.

How do you apply Fair Use to images? This is more complex, and totally up to the copyright holder. For myself, you cannot use any of the images on my site for any reason, however, you may take a screenshot of a web page containing an image as long as my site's branding is identifiable, and there is a proper link and citation credit to the web page. For others, they don't want anyone using their photographs or images, and others don't care. Once again, it is up to the statement in the copyright policy to inform

potential users of how they are permitted to use your content.

State your copyright policy on the required copyright policy page or your list of site policies. Be very clear and concise, and as specific as you need to be to state what is acceptable use of your content. Include all photographs, graphics, images, video, etc, as well as the words, specifying how each it permitted use without explicit permission within Fair Use, and how much is acceptable to use.

**What Do I Do If My Content is Stolen**

"Content theft" is a lay term for *copyright violation*, when your content is used without your permission. In my popular article, "What to Do When Your Content is Stolen," I wrote that it isn't a matter of "if" but "when" your content is stolen, and laid out step-by-step instructions on how to handle the issue.

In summary, they are:

**Don't panic nor seek revenge:** Copyright violations are a part of the web. Don't take this personally. This is not an attack. This is likely the work of a person ignorant of the laws (rules we are taught in school: *don't copy other people's work)*, or someone intent on using your content for their own money-making means. If the former, you are dealing with an individual who needs a gentle slap and reminder of the rules. If the latter, you are possibly up against someone using a list that includes your site or randomly hunts for sites to scrap, use content through feeds without permission. Either way, there are methods for dealing with both.

**Contact Them:** Through a comment or their contact form, send them a note specifying the page with the copyright violation, and ask them to either remove the content immediately or edit the work to a properly cited excerpt with a specific number of days, typically 3-7. You may threaten a penalty or use fee, but usually people respond without a financial threat. If they do not respond and the content is still on the site, contact them again. If they continue to not respond, identify their web host through a WHOIS.org lookup, and check the web host site for reporting copyright infringements through the DMCA forms required by US laws, or the copyright reporting laws for your country. It is a requirement that all web

hosts must investigate and comply with copyright violation requests. It is then up to the web host to contact the offender, and possibly shut down the site if they find the copyright offense justified.

**Contact Search Engines:** Search engines are also required to offer and comply with DMCA requests for copyright violations. Search through the support areas or do a search engine search for the DMCA form for Google, Yahoo, Bing, etc., to report a copyright violation is the direct contacts and web hosts do not comply. Provide a few months time for them to act, not a couple of days.

**Contact Advertisers:** While advertisers rarely have sway directly with site owners or web host, if they receive enough requests about a member of their advertising network violating copyrights, they can take action to terminate their agreement, thus hurting the offending site's financial income. Ads on US and most international sites are required to have a feedback link or link to their advertising network. Or you can check the source code of the site to identify ad networks and affiliate programs.

Again, be calm. You are not alone. Millions of bloggers have been the victim of copyright violations. This is not personal.

For more information, forms, and help, visit PlagarismToday.com.

### What Can I Do With My Content After Publishing?

It's your content. Do with it what you wish.

That's easy to say, and presumptuous, but it is also the truth. It is your content. And you may do with it what you wish.

I'm often asked by bloggers what they can do with their content after publishing it.

You may sell reprint rights to magazines or newsletters. You may gather it together and publish a book. You may even delete your site and walk away. As the copyright holder, it's up to you.

By publishing your work elsewhere, such as in a magazine or newsletter, you are giving permission and license for use of your work. You are not giving your copyrights away. Or you shouldn't. Your artwork, images or content, may have the potential to be used repeatedly for income-

generating reprints.

The only time this becomes an issue is if you wish to republish the content and the publisher requires the content to be original and exclusive or first rights. This means that the content has not been published elsewhere. Such sites and publications are often looking to buy the rights to your content. Read through their terms of service and agreements thoroughly and make all attempts to keep your copyrights.

> ***This section is under construction. Pardon the dust and thanks for your cooperation.***

# Lesson Ten: Digital Marketing and Monetization

*Success is neither magical nor mysterious. Success is the natural consequence of consistently applying the basic fundamentals.*

*Jim Rohn, Author*

Engagement, ROI, author's platform, curation, content management, analytics, digital marketing, open graph, mashup, meme - these words are intimidating. They sound so foreign, so serious, so professional, above our pay grade.

> **This section is under construction. Pardon the dust and thanks for your cooperation.**

When you boil down blogging and social media to its very essence, you will find that the fundamentals are still at work. Nothing has changed. We've just created new terms for old concepts.

Social media is a virtual pub. It is the picket fence neighbors gossip over. It is the barber shop, the hair salon, the town water pump or laundry mat, where people would congregate and share the stories of their day, spiced with a little gossip from around the community.

It is where people go to share information and news.

And you thought it was something new.

The earliest newspapers featured "Society News" or local gossip, featuring a sentence or two about who was seen with whom, gossip about visiting family and friends, and a few rumors and dirt going around about a certain someone. I think of them as the early bloggers.

> *"In blogging, you are not going anywhere no one has gone before. You are traveling a well-worn path of inspired innovation and creativity."*
>
> *– Lorelle VanFossen*

In this lesson, we dip our toe into the the concept of digital marketing, a fancy term for promoting and selling your goods online. And we return back to the concept of online personas and archetypes.

Research and experience has found that the web works best when it connects with people on an individual bases. Since the early 1900s, advertising's approach was a shotgun blast of pellets sprayed across a wide demographic with the hope of hitting a few people who would buy. This was the one-to-many approach. By the 1980s, a typical mail campaign was considered very successful if they reached a 3% return. Most considered themselves lucky with a 1% return. In fact, the multi-billion dollar email spam industry relied upon those statistics for success. They would send out millions of emails, and all it took was 1% to bring in enough revenue to keep them all not only in business but investing in growth and expansion every year.

By 2006, the web world of marketing was shaken by the power of the citizen journalist and activist online. Individual voices held sway, reaching thousands, even millions, with little or no expense through their blogs.

Here are some examples:

Chobani Yogurt disrupted a mature and controlled yogurt market in the United States and worldwide through innovative use of social media and blogging. It was a little American yogurt company in New York about to be closed by Kraft Foods in 200 Hamdi Ulukaya purchased it, and soon after

started taking advantage of social media for their marketing. By 2012, it became an official sponsor of the US Olympic Team, by even then, they were becoming a household name due to their outreach and entertaining posts on social media.

> ***This section is under construction. Pardon the dust and thanks for your cooperation.***

## Mailing Lists and Subscribers



Let me introduce you to Sophie Tucker, The Last of the Red Hot Mammas. Famous in the early 1900s, she came out of vaudeville into Hollywood, becoming president of the American Federation of Actors, which later become the actor's trade union known as the American Guild. She introduced white audiences to their first exposure to jazz. She was a rule-breaking singer, comedian, and actress. There is even a Broadway musical based upon her life.

Why should you know about Sophie Tucker? She was a master of social media.

Social media in 1920?

Oh, yes. Remember, social media is nothing more than the modern term for the earliest form of marketing: *word of mouth*.

She collected mailing addresses of everyone, from audience members to stage hands. When she had a concert schedule set, she would get out her box of cards and envelopes and start writing. She'd mail out hundreds of hand-written

announcements and invites to fans telling them she was coming to town. Save the date and bring all your friends, she'd tell them. And they would. She'd pack out concert halls, nightclubs, every stage she could get her feet on to belt out her songs and keep them laughing and crying in the aisles.

Almost a century later, mailing lists still work.

There are three types of mailing lists for bloggers.

**Email mailing lists:** This is a collected list of emails for mailing directly to your fans, those who sign up for your mailing list.

**Newsletters:** Newsletters are formatted emails, often in the traditional newsletter style, with highlights of current or upcoming posts, events, and exclusive content for subscribers.

**Site subscriptions:** Site subscriptions are mailing lists directly tied to your website. Subscribers are notified by email when you publish a new post. The email contains the title, and the first 100-200 words, and invites them to click on the link to see the rest of the post on your site.

> *Marketing is no longer about the stuff that you make, but about the stories you tell.*
>
> *– Seth Godin, author, entrepreneur, marketer, and public speaker*

***This section is under construction. Pardon the dust and thanks for your cooperation.***

## Monetization

Monetization is the process of earning revenue from an asset or business, though the term has become synonymous with blogging and websites, even social media.

It is your master plan to make money with your site.

Before you begin planning your get-rich scheme with your blog and social media, you must have the following:

1. A clear and specific online identity.

2. A marketable brand.

3. Content.

> **This section is under construction. Pardon the dust and thanks for your cooperation.**

## Digital Marketing

The rates of ad-blindness is almost 90%. We don't look any more. We don't respond. We don't trust them either. Almost half of all users find them "completely intolerable" according to repeat research studies.

Ads that don't match the site's character or purpose are considered clutter and a poor reflection of the blogger's decisions and influences.

The average US Internet user is exposed to over 2,000 banner ads a month. Not only do they suffer from over-exposure, they can't even remember the ad they saw a few minutes later.

Reports range from 3-8% of users account for 85% of the clicks on ads. The estimated average of the click-through-rates on ads is less than .05% and dropping. Why? We don't care, they don't meet our needs, they are ugly, intrusive, and they interfere with the process of finding the information we want and need.

No matter how many tricks marketers use to get eyes on ads, people aren't responding. The moment users figure out this is another ploy to get their attention, it stops working. Advertisers try another method, people figure it out, expect it, and ignore it. It's a bait-and-switch program that works for a short time then fails.

Let's take the example from several studies that found endorsement articles[47] increased the likelihood of a click-through to advertisers faster

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[47] http://neilpatel.com/blog/your-ads-are-getting-ignored-5-smart-strategies-to-overcome-banner-blindness/

and better than a banner ad. Within a short time, studies reported that nearly half of those who read a story only to discover it was an ad or endorsement lost trust in the website. Less than 20% felt it was okay to offer such content. As a result, many such sites lost traffic and credibility. If the author was up front that this was a paid endorsement, the trust level rose a bit more, though people tended to skip such articles given a chance. Such notices are required by US and international laws for disclosure *at the top and bottom of the article.*

*Interstitials*, the technical name for modern pop-up ads that appear between you and the content, often covering it up with a gradient screen to force you to pay attention, are illegal. During the formation of web standards and laws for web accessibility and access, rules were put in place to ban all pop-ups, moving images, and anything the distracted or interfered with the user's experience on the web page. For a few years, web developers obeyed the rules, and fought for advertising income with louder and bolder ads, and failed. By 2012, when the US federal laws finally went into effect after a ten year probationary period, interstitials started to become a plague. Called interstitials, welcome pages, overlays, and other non-pop-up terms, these annoying features are still pop-ups in disguise.

Many claim interstitials increase ad-response, yet when you dig into the true stats, they don't. At first, users learned to look for the X and links to close them, then they turned away often before accessing the content. Many wise bloggers won't link to sites with interstitials, especially if that is the first thing a person sees upon arrival. Since the ads are generated using AJAX, a form of JavaScript programming that doesn't require page re-loads, many analytics programs tracked the visit to the page as including the time spent on the page when it was in fact spent on trying to figure out how to get past the ad and giving up, leaving the site, and often not returning. Today's smarter analytics tells us that interstitials don't work as advertising.

Where there is some benefit in the use of interstitials is for mailing lists, subscriptions, and access to free material. Met with a form, people tend to fill in the form automatically, by habit. Many do it without much thought, handing over contact information automatically, even if they don't want

nor need to be on another email mailing list. If the interstitial promotes free content, classes, or other material, they are more likely to respond.

Studies also report that interstitials and ads work on well-known, established source sites like newspapers, magazines, and long-time popular sites. They don't work on new or younger sites, so work your way up to advertising. Get a handle on content generation and serving your readers before you start smearing your site with advertising. Learn the ropes, learn the laws, and by the time you get to monetizing your site, everything will be different.

> ***This section is under construction. Pardon the dust and thanks for your cooperation.***

## Build a Trustworthy Site

A trustworthy site in the eyes of search engines, specifically Google, is one that meets the following criteria:

- Consistent and fairly steady published content.

- 2-5 years of life.

- A fairly steady flow of traffic, not a high level but a stead level.

- Many incoming links from other trustworthy sites.

- Links to other trustworthy sites.

What makes a site trustworthy to readers? Consistent:

- Content.

- Character/Persona.

- Writing voice and style.

- Topics.

People appreciate consistency and are throw off by switches in topics. Mixing things up once in a while is fine. Going right off topic for long

periods of time will drive readers away. It confuses them. It makes them question your purpose and goals. Don't give them a chance to change their minds about who you are, what you do, and how you do it. Stay focused and on track.

If you change topics, shifting away from some topics, emphasizing others more, that is natural. Do it gradually. You don't have to tell readers of the change, but slip into it naturally, and they will slide with you.

People instinctively want to trust you and your content. By serving consistent, related, and relatable content, it is a start in the right direction. Follow through on quality content, social media interactivity, and you will slowly build a reputation online as a source, a trusted individual and blogger.

# Lesson Eleven: Get Interactive

Get interactive. Encourage comments.

Comments were the gold standard for an active and interactive site a few years ago until social media became a place to share and rarely respond. Monitoring and responding to comments became a full-time job for many.

Liz Strauss gave me excellent advice on how to respond to comments. "It is a myth that you have to respond to every comment," she said. "You don't. You just have to make them feel like you respond to every comment."

How do you do that?

> **This section is under construction. Pardon the dust and thanks for your cooperation.**

People pay attention to your responses, your comments, on your site and on social media. Done right, they assume you are talking to them, not just to the person you responded to in another comment. You do this by:

1. Responding as if you are talking to a group not just the individual.

2. Use the royal and inclusive "we."

3. Refer to those who lurk or are awaiting a response. "As many of you can appreciate…" "Let me answer this so everyone understands…"

4. Be extremely gracious and polite at all times. Always thank them for responding.

Other ways you can get more interactive on your site is to use video, create podcasts, write article series, run campaigns or contests, start memes, and get social yourself.

Set an example. Don't click like. Show them how it is done by being interactive and responding to blog and social media posts.

## Write with Conviction and Passion

The Number One Rule in blogging:

*There are no rules.*

If you have the passion to be heard, we'll forgive missed spellings and grammar.

> *Great stories happen to those who can tell them.*
>
> *Ira Glass*

## Content with Intent

I call the best blogging technique, "Content with Intent."

I believe that if you want to get someone's attention, show them something they've never seen before, or show them something in a way they've never seen before.

Other than strange things in the deepest depths of the planet, we've seen just about everything here. Unless you have clear photographic proof, video is better, of the Sasquatch, we've seen it all, and what we haven't seen is often featured on the cover of the National Enquirer.

Since it is a challenge to show people something they've never seen before, it is up to you and your unique perspective to show us something in a way we've never seen before.

Show us with words. Show us with images. Show us with your unique personality and character. It is you that makes blogging uniquely yours. Show us how you see it, and the world around you.

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