

Beginner's Guide to Writing Online

A free guide for subscribers of [Michael's Newsletter](#)

By Michael Lin

Table of Contents

Why You Should Write Online at All	2
Each Article You Write is an Asset	2
Writing Builds Your Brand	3
Writing is a Test-Run for Entrepreneurship	4
The Missing Ingredient to Help You Advance Your Career	5
Mental Roadblocks to Writing	5
Fear of Criticism	5
Lack of Authority	6
Running Out of Things to Say	7
Topic Selection	7
1. What do people ask you for advice on?	8
2. What Can You Talk Endlessly About?	9
3. Curating Content You Consume	11
4. Reuse Your Past Content	12
How to Get Started Writing	12
Exercise for "Bite-Snack-Meal" Approach	15
Platform Choice	17
Regarding Newsletters	18
Editing Process	19
Distribution	20
My Writing Coach	21
Writing is a Game of Consistency	21
And If You Liked This Guide...	23

Find all my socials at <https://bio.link/michaellin>

Why You Should Write Online at All



Nathan Barry, CEO of ConvertKit once said, [*"Good Things Come to Those Who Write"*](#)

Writing online will change your life. **If I had one regret from working in corporate, it was not writing more on the side before I left.** And this is a sentiment that many other writers share. The benefits of writing are too large to ignore. They include:

Each Article You Write is an Asset

When I left Netflix, I felt very vulnerable because I didn't own any assets. As a W-2 employee, you're paid to build assets for others. But that means when you leave your job, the only thing you have to show from your work is your savings. And the reputation you build over the years fades as you lose contact with former colleagues. So it's important to not put yourself in a vulnerable spot like I did, and start collecting assets while you still have your paycheck!

Each article you write is an asset and a mini-product in itself. You create it once and it generates views forever. For example, in the graph below we can see how all the articles I've published on Medium so far have generated about 4,300 views over the last 30 days.

That's the equivalent of talking to 143 new people EVERY. SINGLE. DAY.

Find all my socials at <https://bio.link/michaellin>

Your stats

Audience stats

Click story below to view detailed stats

Learn more about using stats

4,334

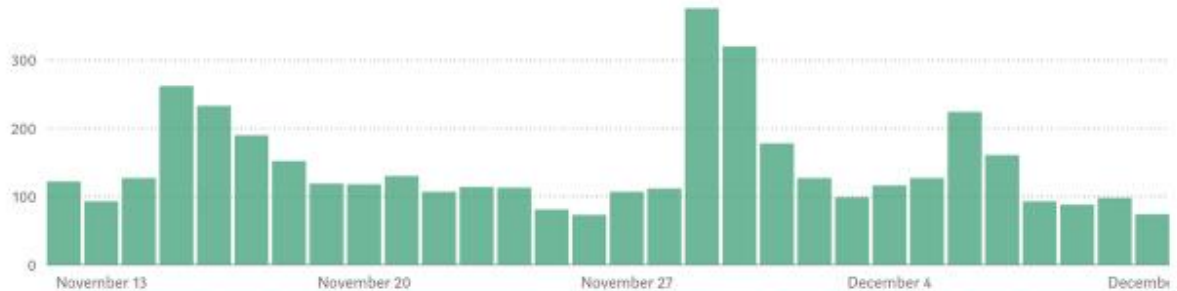
Views (30 days)

1,210

Reads (30 days)

49

Fans (30 days)



I've spoken to more CEO's since writing online than I have in the rest of my life combined.

Content creation is automated networking. If you talk to that many new people, you're bound to meet people who could change your life.

Writing Builds Your Brand

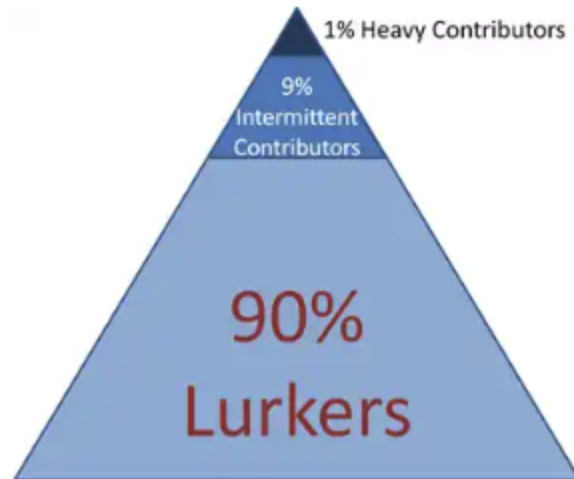
More people have realized that the biggest asset they can own is their brand. It doesn't disappear when you switch companies. And the larger your brand, the more opportunities it creates. People will reach out to you for partnership opportunities, you have easier access to other influential people, and even finding jobs is easier.

After I quit my job and wrote about my inability to become a PM at Netflix, I actually got a bunch of PM job offers at other companies right after. This all happened from writing online.

Furthermore, writing online instantly makes you a leader and authority in your field. On the internet there is a rule they call the "90-9-1 Rule" which states that:

- 90% of internet users lurk on platforms
- 9% interact with content through likes or comments
- and only 1% of internet users create content.

Find all my socials at <https://bio.link/michaellin>



So writing online instantly puts you in the top 1% of users online that create content for the other 99% to consume. That's incredible power!

It's no wonder that many writers end up going into venture and investing after due to the large network and distribution channel they've built. Notice how Lenny Rachitsky and Packy McCormick are both angel investors and newsletter writers, and Dan Shipper is also an AI scout for Sequoia. They all got their start in investing as writers.



Lenny Rachitsky, Packy McCormick, and Dan Shipper all pivoted from writing to investing (shown respectively).

Writing is a Test-Run for Entrepreneurship

Many folks try to go straight from a W-2 job to building a billion dollar SaaS. Having tried this myself, I recommend if you're interested in entrepreneurship, start by building a readership first.

Writing is a lesson in entrepreneurship. And **by writing more, you're creating a distribution channel for your future product.** Your readership is a channel for you to promote any future product you build. Plus it will teach you about the importance of:

Find all my socials at <https://bio.link/michaellin>

- Discipline and consistency
- Value creation
- Empathy for customers/readers
- The value of experimentation
- Story-telling
- Importance of distribution

The Missing Ingredient to Help You Advance Your Career

The higher up you move the corporate ladder, the more your work is about communicating and getting stakeholder buy-in. If people don't understand what you say, they won't be influenced.

So you'll find that by writing consistently, your career prospects improve as well. Your work emails get crisper, you speak more authoritatively, and can push your ideas forward easier than others. Writing helps you become a better leader.

Mental Roadblocks to Writing

From speaking to others who want to get started writing online, I've noticed that mental roadblocks stop people from publishing more. They include:

1. Fear of Criticism
2. Lack of Authority
3. Fear of Running Out of Things to Say

All of these mental roadblocks are false, so I'll debunk each one in turn.

Fear of Criticism

So many people are afraid of getting criticized if they publish online. I get it. Criticism is tough. But the way I see it is it's like being a chef. **You can be the best chef in the world and there will still be people who don't like your food.**

So instead of focusing on the critics, it's better to focus on the people who like your food. Otherwise they'd be missing out on the brilliance you have to offer the world!

Find all my socials at <https://bio.link/michaellin>



There are still people who don't like Jiro's sushi too, but imagine if he stopped making sushi because of those critics.

Furthermore, imagine the world with your articles, and a world without your articles. **The world would definitely be a worse place without your thoughts** - just think of all the people missing out on inspiration if you didn't hit publish! So it's almost as if you have a duty to reach your tribe of people.

Lastly, one tip I have is to **only read comments if it's from someone who already follows you and liked your article beforehand.** That way you know it will be positive. If it's just a lone comment without a like or follow, I won't even click because I know the comment will be a toss-up.

Lack of Authority

So first of all, **you don't have to be super experienced to start writing.** Sometimes the most experienced people don't even make the best teachers because they forget what it was like to be a beginner. So not being the equivalent of Dr. Fauci in a field could actually be an advantage as it makes your writing more relatable.

Second, experience is relative. You should just write as if you're writing to your former self from just a year or two ago. I'm sure your past self would've found your ideas now very useful. And those are the readers you're trying to reach anyways.

Third, there are so many people who have way less experience than you, yet likely have a bigger following, just because they were fearless about publishing. Consider Aadit Sheth for example, a student in the UK who has over 200k+ followers on Twitter. He's also still in school

Find all my socials at <https://bio.link/michaellin>

and set to graduate in 2023. **It's likely that you probably have more life and work experience than he does, yet he was able to amass a huge audience of over 200k+ followers.**



You likely have more work and life experience than Aadit, and he accumulated over 200k+ followers. You can too!

Running Out of Things to Say

I was afraid of this for a while as well. But I encourage you to try and mine everything you have to say out, and see if you run out of content or not. **You'll realize there's more to talk about than you think.**

After months of consistent weekly writing, I realized I'm not even close to running out of things to talk about, and have enough content to last at least another two months. In fact by writing more, you'll realize the one essay you wanted to write about might be too long and is actually worth three or four essays instead. **You have more to give to the world than you think.**

And with that said, let's discuss topic selection.

Topic Selection

I've always found it strange when people tell me that "they have nothing to write about."

The issue is never a lack of topics to write about. **The issue is not having enough time to write about everything.**

Find all my socials at <https://bio.link/michaellin>

Here are some initial questions to help you figure out topics to write about:

1. What do people ask you for advice on?

The advice that people ask you for is the world telling you what content to make. Easy questions people always ask include:

- How you got your job (and why you left it)
- Is graduate school worth it?
- What parenting is really like?
- Advice for your younger self?

These are all questions people ask, and to fully explore each of these topics alone could be the subject of several different articles. To take one of these examples, you could easily write a short essay on “How you got your job?” where you discuss:

- How you got your job
- Learnings from getting this job
- How you would recommend people who want to apply and get this job now

Or for parenting:

- Discuss what you didn’t realize about parenting before having kids
- Why you decided to have kids
- The joy and sense of purpose that parenting brings

Essays are really just a long-form way of answering questions. **Consider what questions people have asked you before, and try writing a long-form DM answer to that question as your essay.**

How to Quit Your Job (the right way)

3 things to consider before leaving your job



Quitting is on everybody's minds right now.

[This article](#) was an answer to a question people often ask me about how to prepare to leave their jobs.

2. What Can You Talk Endlessly About?

Everyone has something they can talk, rave, or rant endlessly about. This is a natural source of content for you to write about.

For example, a lot of people watch sports. These sports fans could just write articles on every single game they watch with their summary of what happened, who was good and bad, and what adjustments need to be made the next game.

In fact, this is what a student at my alma mater UC Berkeley does. This guy goes to so many basketball and football games and just writes reports on each one, and has amassed a newsletter with over 3,000 other similar fans.



Live Updates: Cal Men's Swimming and Diving Kicks Off Its Championship Season

The Golden Bears are seeking a 6th-consecutive conference title

CHRISTOPHER ZHENG

22 HR AGO ❤️ 3 💬 2

The author just [writes his takes on all the college games](#) he watches.

You can do this for any hobby or pastime of yours. I even saw this article by a K-Pop fan where they wrote an article about how K-Pop has changed them for the better. You can do the same!

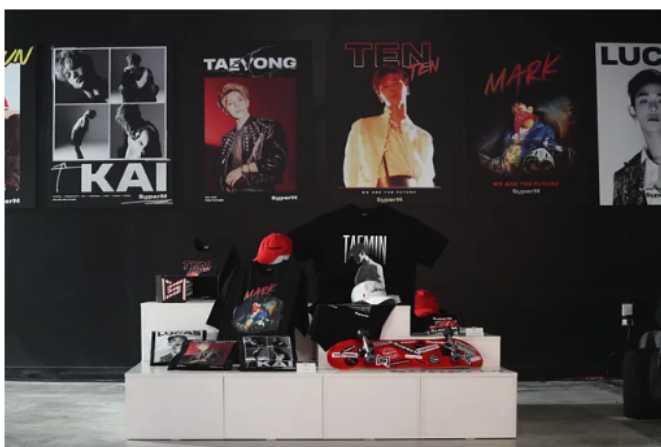


Melissa

Sep 22, 2020 · 5 min read · [Listen](#)



4 ways K-pop has influenced my life



Your hobbies are an [endless source of content](#). Consider writing how your hobbies have changed you as a person.

Some questions to get you started:

Find all my socials at <https://bio.link/michaellin>

- What are your hobbies?
- What have you learned from this hobby?
- How has this hobby changed the way you think?
- How has it been a positive influence in your life?
- What experiences and stories do you have to tell from this hobby?

Each of these questions could be the subject of an entire article!

3. Curating Content You Consume

You probably consume a lot of TV shows, podcast, books, articles, and social media posts every single week. Instead of only consuming content, try curating for others instead. **So if something resonates with you, bookmark it, take notes down on the key points, and write a summary article about it.**

Even professional writers do this. For example, notice how Lenny's article here about "how things go viral" is just extra analysis on top of what he read in a book called "Hit Makers".



Note how Lenny even wrote an article with his analysis of a book he read. You can do the same!

So a formula for this is to:

1. Take a recent show, podcast, book, or any content that resonated with you.
2. Explain what your biggest takeaways were.
3. How will you apply those to your life?
4. Were there examples in your life where you found the author's point to be true?

Find all my socials at <https://bio.link/michaellin>

5. Were there any parts you disagreed with, and why?

4. Reuse Your Past Content

You're likely sitting on a lot of articles and content already. So if you need somewhere to start, I highly recommend going through your past emails, presentations, or documents. Take the scripts from those, clean it up a bit, and turn those into articles.

One example is Michael Galloway's talk at PlatformCon 2022. He could easily just turn his script for the talk into an article.



Galloway could easily convert this talk into an article.

How to Get Started Writing

The tl;dr summary of how to get started with writing is an approach that I call a “Bite-Snack-Meal” Approach.

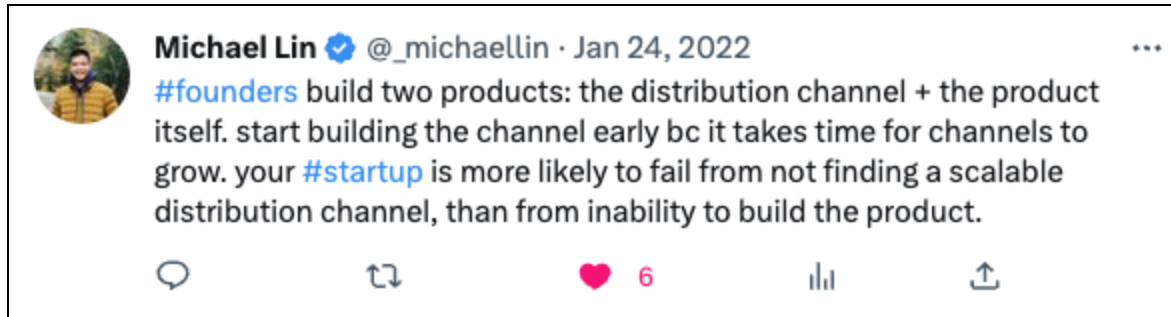
With this approach you follow these steps:

- 1) Use the questions in the section above to figure out a topic to write about.
- 2) Create a very short one or two sentence summary of your take on a topic and make this a Tweet (bite)
- 3) The next day try to make this a Twitter thread or longer-form LinkedIn post where you go into an extra few reasons why your take is true. (snack)
- 4) The next day try to flesh out this thread and turn it into a full article. (meal)

That way, you've actually created 3 pieces of content - a Twitter post, a Twitter thread, and a long-form article from a single topic.

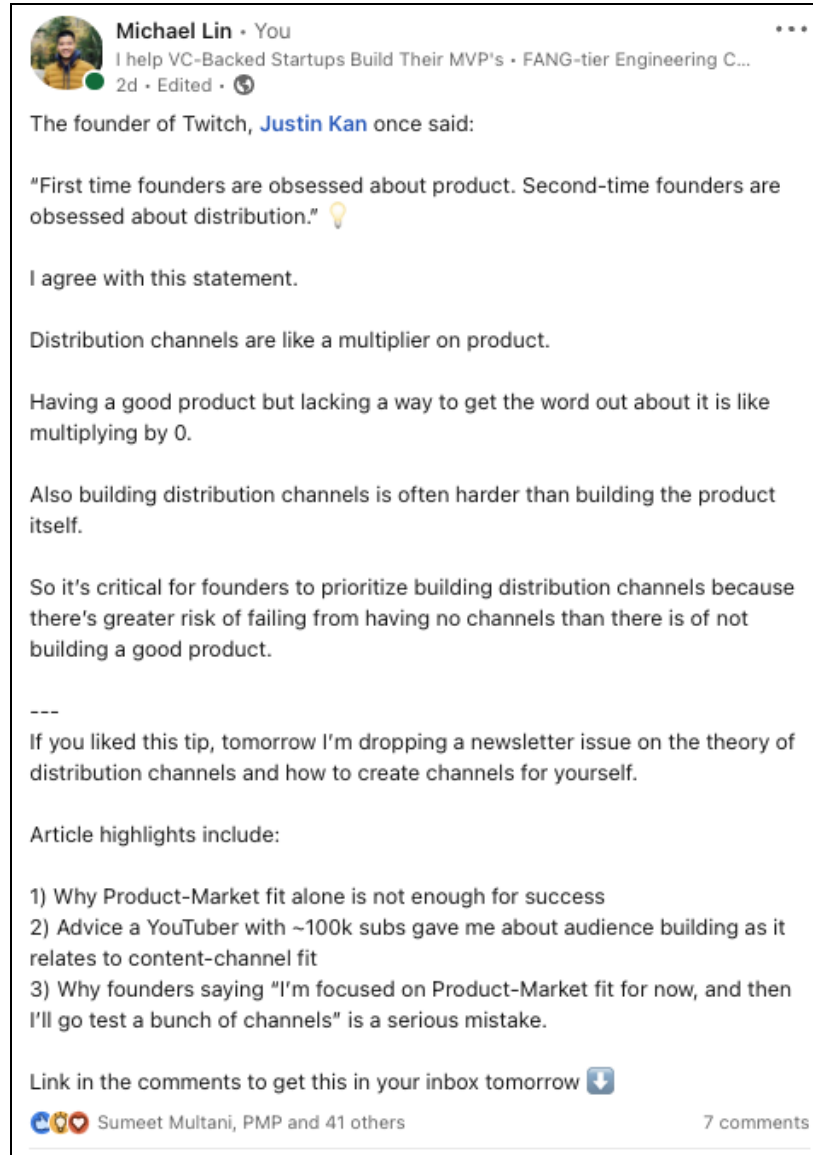
Here's an example. Notice this single tweet I made about the importance of distribution channels.

Find all my socials at <https://bio.link/michaellin>



Then notice how I turned this into a longer-form post, where I added some extra reasoning why this is true. This includes:

- A quote from Justin Kan, the founder of Twitch
- Advice a YouTuber gave me about channels
- Why Product-Market fit alone isn't enough

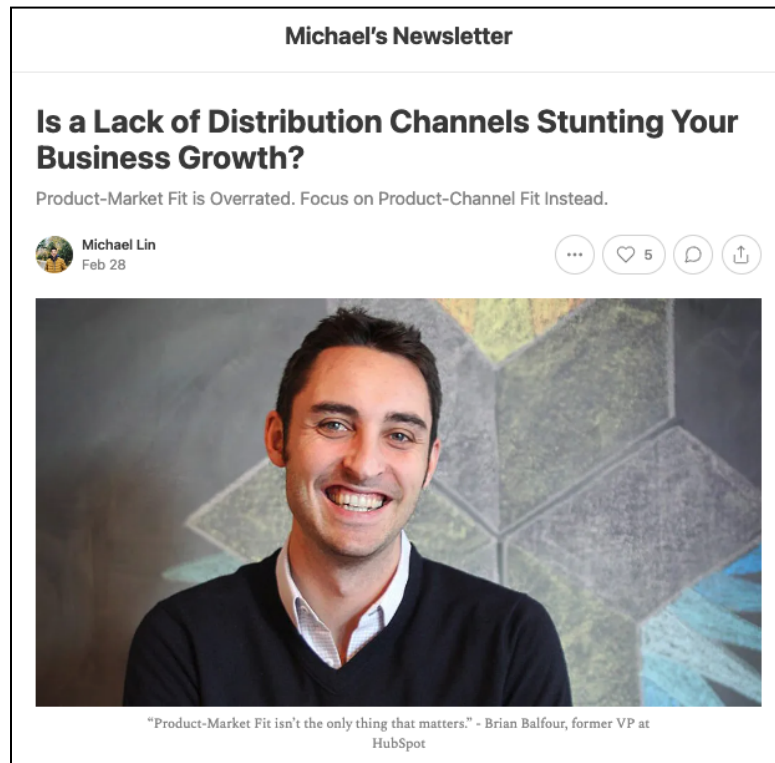


Notice how this post is just a longer-form version of my initial Tweet. It makes the same point about why distribution channels are important, but with extra reasoning behind it.

Then finally notice that I turned this into an actual article where the structure of the article goes like this:

- Why Product-Market Fit is Not Enough
- Why You Need Product-Channel Fit
- An Example of a Company with Product-Channel and Product-Market fit
- Why We Have to Think About Channels Before We Build Products
- Example of Content-Channel Fit for Content Creators

- Parts I Disagreed With the Article
- Conclusions



[This is just a longer-form version](#) of the tweets and posts above.

Although writing an essay initially may seem intimidating, each of these points I made in an article could be a single Tweet/Post first. And then once you’ve made all these Tweets and posts, you can try to collect them into a single article.

Exercise for “Bite-Snack-Meal” Approach

Consider this Tweet:



Find all my socials at <https://bio.link/michaellin>

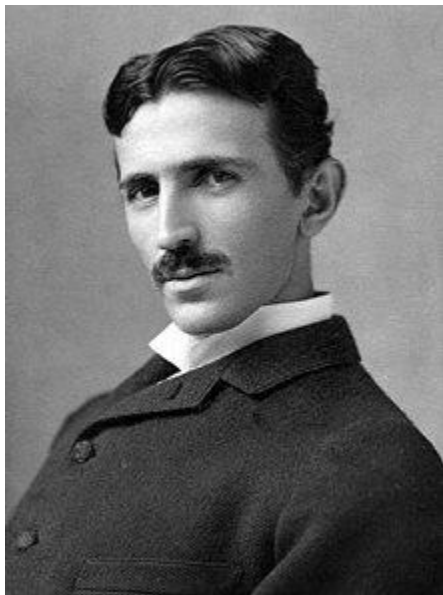
Note how this Tweet is a “bite”. So as an exercise,

1. How would you expand on this and turn it into a “snack”?
2. How would you turn the “snack” into a full-length essay (“a meal”)?

I encourage you to try this yourself before scrolling down to see what I would do.

Harold’s main point here is that you can’t just focus on building technology because that doesn’t make a business.

So to turn this into a snack I might include a post where I just include one example of someone who succeeded with making cool technology, but didn’t actually make money from it. I might give an example of how Nikola Tesla died a pauper despite all of his scientific discoveries related to electricity.



Portrait of Nikola Tesla

Then to turn this into a full-length essay, I’ll start with the “snack” and add on more examples of people who profited from his discoveries, and what they did differently from Nikola Tesla to make this a “snack”.

And if you combine these points together, we now have an outline of an article:

1. Why cool technology alone isn’t a business (the “bite”)
 2. Example of Nikola Tesla who made discoveries but didn’t make money from it (“snack”)
-

Find all my socials at <https://bio.link/michaellin>

3. Example of Tesla the company, and the irony of how they made more money on the back of his discoveries
4. What Tesla and Elon Musk did differently
5. Conclude with what the reader can do

Just flesh each of these points out and you have a full article!

So the takeaway here is:

1. List out some takes about life, career, family, hobbies, or anything you want. Post just that take.
2. The next day, try to think of some extra reasons why it's true. Come up with a few examples to support your argument and make that a longer-form Tweet thread or LinkedIn post.
3. Then the next day, cobble your bites and snacks together, give a few other angles to look at the topic such as
 - a. Why people make these mistakes
 - b. Common arguments against this and rebuttals for why they aren't true
 - c. How the reader can apply this to their own lives.
4. String your answers from 1) + 2) + 3) together and you have your first essay!

Platform Choice

The main 4 writing platforms are:

- Medium
- LinkedIn
- Twitter
- Newsletter (Substack or Beehiiv)

But each of these platforms have different styles:

	Twitter	LinkedIn	Medium	Newsletter
Style	Short, snappy, quick retorts, more blunt	More professional, career-oriented	Long-form articles, caters to stories	Longer-form but also caters to curated content, lists of links,
Pros	Fastest to create content on b/c the format is so	Incredible reach, more qualified leads, more civil	Helps with Distribution	More freedom to promote whatever you

Find all my socials at <https://bio.link/michaellin>

	short (280 characters)	than Twitter		want More opportunities to monetize
Cons	Sometimes feels like everyone is just shouting into the void Starting off can be difficult if you don't have any followers	Your former co-workers may see it.	Drives traffic to Medium but not your website You can only promote 1st party products, but sponsorships and affiliates are not allowed	Poor SEO unless you start a blog alongside it

A couple takeaways from this:

1. As a writer, I personally think you should be on all four of these platforms.
2. I personally think you should post on Twitter and LinkedIn because you can repurpose your threads and posts from one and just cross-post it to the other place
3. I also think if you're going to write on Medium, you might as well start a newsletter because you can just copy-paste your articles from one place to another.

Regarding newsletters

If you're going to post long-form articles on Medium for example, you might as well start a newsletter and start copy-pasting your articles there too. The newsletter and collecting emails is EXTREMELY important because:

- Followers come and go but email stays
- Many businesses start as newsletters

If you're starting off, Substack is the fastest place to start. However, personally (as of 3/1/23) I've personally wondered if Beehiiv is the better place to start as they have a referral system, and allow for canonical links. Canonical links let you tell Google where the "master" source of your article is, so you can build a blog while you're at it. But personally, I don't think you can go wrong with either.

 substack

or



beehiiv

You can't really go wrong with either.

Editing Process

Don't spend too long on editing, but **always do a pass-through to edit for conciseness.** Particularly look out for

- Redundancies
- Really long sentences
- Adverbs

Here is an exercise. How would you edit this piece below?

<https://every.to/p/how-to-be-strategic>

"What does it mean to be strategic? Through my experience of leading engineering organizations at Google, both as a tech lead and manager, the word "strategy" and the need to "be strategic" came up a lot across technical, product, and organizational contexts. Yet clearly defining what either might mean and consistently delivering on both has been challenging.

*As I understand it now, being strategic is a sort of practice, a thinking hygiene. Simply put, **being strategic means that the outcomes produced by our actions are not at odds with our intentions.**"*

Don't scroll down unless you want to see how I would reword this:

How I Would Edit This

Find all my socials at <https://bio.link/michaellin>

“The word “strategy” comes up a lot in my experience leading engineering organizations at Google. Yet clearly defining what it means and delivering on it is challenging.

As I understand it now, being strategic is a practice, a thinking hygiene. Being strategic means that the outcomes produced by our actions are not at odds with our intentions.”

What I deleted:

~~“What does it mean to be strategic? Through my experience of leading engineering organizations at Google, both as a tech lead and manager, the word “strategy” and the need to “be strategic” comes up a lot across technical, product, and organizational contexts. Yet in my experience of leading engineering organizations at Google. Yet clearly defining what either might it mean and consistently delivering on both [it] has been challenging.~~

~~As I understand it now, being strategic is a sort-of practice, a thinking hygiene. Simply put, being strategic means that the outcomes produced by our actions are not at odds with our intentions.”~~

Note how I simplified this from 91 words to 57, a 34% reduction in word count. And it reads significantly lighter. **I recommend going through your piece at the end and trying to cut out at least 10% of the words out** - it'll make a big difference!

Distribution

As you grow your readership, it's critical to distribute your work to get your name out there. Here are all the places I post my articles on:

1. Medium
2. Substack
3. Hashnode (a blog for engineers)
4. Dev.to (a blog for engineers)
5. Taro Blog (a blog for engineers)

I also break my posts into smaller posts and post in various Discords, Slack Groups, I'm in including:

- [Asian Hustle Network](#) (a Facebook group)
- [Small Bets](#) (a discord community)
- [Lenny's Newsletter](#) (a slack community)

Find all my socials at <https://bio.link/michaellin>

Also consider partnerships and guest-posts on other people's blogs and newsletters with greater readership. You can also promote it on LinkedIn and Twitter, but make sure your content has value as a standalone post.

To learn more about this, [check out this article about “zero-click” content](#) on how to promote your articles the right way.

My Writing Coach

And if you really need help, **I highly recommend my writing coach who I work with twice a week.** Her contacts are below.



Her IG is <https://www.instagram.com/oliviafisherwriter/>

Her email is oliviajeanettefisher@gmail.com

I work with her roughly twice a week, once to produce an outline and once to review my final draft for an hour each.

Her rates are roughly \$160 for 4 outlining and 4 final draft reviews, or \$20 each. I've worked with her for almost a year now, and I appreciate her perspective as someone not in tech. She has my full recommendation as a coach and editor.

Writing is a Game of Consistency

Success as a writer is a game of consistency. All the biggest writers have serious output:

Top Medium Writer's Output



Tim Denning
306K Followers

- 30+ articles in December 2022



Nick Wignall
178K Followers

- 2x/week
- Has 4 kids and a full-time job
- Published on his newsletter 1x/week every week for 5 years



Julie Zhuo
210K Followers



- 4 articles in November 2022
- She has published almost 1x/week since 2013

So your first few articles might not take-off, but if you stick with it for let's say 6 months of weekly publishing, I'm certain that you will see results. **I believe in you!**

And If You Liked This Guide...



Me in Santa Cruz, 2022

Check out my 2 other courses below:

1. ["Beginner's Guide to Medium in 75 minutes"](#) - where I break down my entire writing process and show you how to grow your Medium following. (\$25)
2. ["How to Be an Engineer Influencer"](#) - where I teach W-2 employees how to diversify their income streams by building an audience on social media. (\$75)



Find all my socials at <https://bio.link/michaellin>