What makes a good blog post, anyway?

Before we get knee-deep into how to write a blog post, let's talk about what the best blog posts have in common.

Although blogging is certainly a skill, you don't need to be Shakespeare to start writing 'em.

Instead, simply consider the common threads between blog posts that actually get read and shared.

They solve a problem

Listen: people don't wind up on blogs by accident.

When we seek out content, it's because we have a problem that needs to be solved or a question that needs to be answered.

Perhaps you're looking for the perfect ramen recipe. Maybe you're looking for marketing tips.

Either way, we're often hunting for content that provides a solution.

Heck, the Sprout Social blog is a shining example of what we're talking about. We've put together hundreds of posts dedicated to solving problems and answering questions on behalf of marketers.

Sprout blog posts

But solving a problem or answering a question is only half the battle.

After all, there are dozens (or hundreds) of blog posts out there covering any given topic.

So not only should your blog post solve a problem, but also do so in a meaningful way.

This might mean breaking down a complex topic with a more digestible approach or going in-depth on a topic that needs addressing in detail.

Considering that most high-performing blog posts around over 1,000 words according to Orbit Media, conventional wisdom tells us that top-tier posts go beyond basic information and dig into specifics.

Sprout's own "Best Times to Post on Social Media" is a great example, brimming with original data and graphs. That's exactly why it's one of our top-performing posts.

They're easy to read

This might seem like a no-brainer, but readability is easy to overlook.

Spoiler alert: most readers have microscopic attention spans.

If your post puts 'em to sleep within the first few seconds, chances are they'll look elsewhere for information. This is especially true in a day and age where people can simply watch a video in lieu of reading a blog post.

As a writer, it's your job to find a balance between relaying in-depth information and keeping your audience's attention.

You can't expect folks to slog through a wall of text. Instead, you should make a point to avoid jargon and present your content in a style that doesn't make you sound like a robot.

For example, The Verge's "How to Choose a Fitness Tracker" is a fairly straightforward example of a simple post that gets the job done. Written at a 9th-grade level and broken up by subheaders and images, the post is easy to scan and understand for just about anyone.

Meanwhile, this post from marketing expert Brittany Berger manages to deliver a valuable lesson in marketing with a simple sentence

structure and conversational tone. Presented as playful with a distinct voice and plenty of visuals to break up the text, readers naturally move from line to line wondering what comes next.

Readability is one of the most important aspects of learning how to write a blog post

Developing a writing style comes with practice. The beauty of blogging is that you aren't typically tied to strict formatting guidelines of traditional writing "rules" that might make your content sound stuffy.

They're optimized (but not too optimized!)

Given the fierce competition among marketers and search engines alike, optimizing your content for SEO (and social!) is a must-do.

Optimization is yet another balancing act, though. From keyword stuffing to clickbait and beyond, writers can't afford to sacrifice readability and quality for the sake of trying to score clicks.

But as proven by tons of bloggers out there, it's possible to find that balance between writing for humans and search engines. For example, posts like "How to Build Your Social Media Marketing Strategy" are able to hit on crucial keywords in a way that's natural and doesn't distract the reader at all.

Learning how to write a blog post involves understanding how to use keywords in a non-spammy way

If you keep these three principles in mind each time you sit down to write a post, you're already way ahead of the curve.

How to write better blog posts: Our foolproof framework

Okay, so how do you take these tips and put them into action when it comes time to write?

Good question!

Staring at the proverbial blank page is one of the worst feelings in the world for blog writers.

That's why we recommend having some sort of framework in place when it comes time to write a blog post. This rings true whether you're starting a post from scratch or are revising older content. Below is our list of tactics and tools to help get you going.

Choose a blog post format before you start writing

Instead of relying on a cut-and-paste blog post template that might come off as cookie-cutter to readers, we recommend simply picking a blog post format before you start writing a post.

Doing so will make it much easier to organize your ideas and actually start writing.

Below are three types of blog posts that typically get shared around. Although these certainly aren't the only types of blog posts, they're can be adapted to just about any topic with ease.

How-to's, which live up to their namesake by explaining how to tackle a certain task or problem (ex: "How to Get a Customer to Edit Their Negative Review")

Listicles, which is simply a blog post formatted as a list (ex: "The Business of DIY: 10 Things to Make and Sell Online")

Question-based posts, which respond to or pose a question with Who, What, When, or Where? (ex: "Why Netflix Cancelled Your Favorite Show" or ex: "When is the Best Time to Send Emails?")

Let's briefly break down each of these types of blog posts and why they work so well.

How-to blog posts

The concept of a how-to post is self-explanatory. Such posts provide an opportunity to take a deep dive into a specific topic. How-to posts have very specific search-intent and allow you to target niche audiences looking for expertise.

Given that many Google searches are centered around "how to" queries, it's no surprise that many businesses use them as the

foundation for their blogs. For example, brands like Campaign Monitor put together tons of how-to guides covering specific topics for their audience of email marketers.

"How-to" blog posts attack a specific problem for readers

Listicle blog posts

Popularized by the likes of Buzzfeed, list-style posts might seem a bit overdone or cliche.

However, it's hard to ignore their popularity and why they're all the rage in the first place.

After all, listicles are easy to digest at a glance and can be skimmed by busy readers. Additionally, subheaders can help people zero in on key points without necessarily having to read an entire article.

Listicle formatting is easy for readers to skim

Additionally, lists are straightforward for writers to put together and can help break down larger topics into smaller pieces. For writers and readers alike, this sort of simplicity is a win-win.

Question-based blog posts

These types of posts address a specific question readers might have, helping writers hone in their focus on a single topic.

Unlike how-to posts, these types of blogs don't necessarily teach readers how to do something but rather provide insight to the topic at hand.

These types of posts can be broad in scope but do well to pique the curiosity of the reader. This headline and post from The Takeout is a great example of a question-based blog that's click-worthy at a glance. Even if you weren't curious about meatless meats before, chances are you are now.

Question-based headlines do well to pique your readers' curiosity

Make sure your headline packs a punch

There's an oft-cited claim that 80% of people will decide whether or not to read something based on its headline.

Meanwhile, 60% of people will actually share an article on social media without actually reading it.

In a day and age dominated by clickbait headlines, bloggers are tasked with writing compelling headlines that attract readers without pulling a bait-and-switch.

How do you make it happen, though? Most of the examples we've cited so far represent click-worthy, shareable content that you'd see passed around social based on their headlines.

Perhaps what's most important is framing your article as presenting can't-miss.

For example, "The Most Important Social Media Metrics to Track" doesn't just cover any social metrics: it covers the most important ones.

Or consider the "must" in "9 Skills Every Social Media Manager Must Have." By presenting these skills as must-have, readers naturally want to see if their own skills match up the post.

See how that works?

To figure out whether or not your headline packs a punch, tools such as CoSchedule's headline analyzer can be a game-changer. In short, the tool assigns a score to your headlines based on readability, "power words" and other elements that drive people to read and share posts.

CoSchedule's headline analyzer can help hone in your blog post headlines so they pack a puch

This tool isn't the be-all, end-all of headline writing but can definitely help you brainstorm ideas.

Double-check your content and formatting for readability

Conventional wisdom tells us that most people read at a 7th-grade level.

Translation? Businesses should strive to avoid language that's too lofty, if possible.

Remember: you're not writing a college essay. Rules such as "five to seven sentences per paragraph" that you learned in English class don't exactly fly in the blogging world.

Tools such as the Hemingway Editor can help you identify opportunities to make your content more readable. The cut-and-paste app detects words and sentences that might be confusing to readers and highlights them throughout your text.

The Hemingway Editor can hep double-check that your blog posts are readable

Many writers also use tools like Grammarly to avoid common grammatical issues and awkward phrases. This is an especially useful tool if you're new to blog writing or don't often write long-form content.

We should note that while readability checkers are definitely useful, you shouldn't expect anything you write to be totally "perfect" based on these tools. The checks they run represent just one set of guidelines, and as you develop a unique writing voice you'll inevitably vary a bit from them.

Your audience matters too: for example, let's say you're writing about a technical subject are addressing a college-educated audience. A higher readability grade is just fine in these cases.

But also consider that it's possible to cover technical topics without completely going over your readers' head. Case in point, Wired's "AI and the Future of Work" touches on a topic for the tech-savvy but is written as an accessible 9th-grade level.

You've probably noticed by now that so much of figuring out how to write a blog post is a balancing act. The more you write, the easier it is to find those balances over time.

Format your post to be scroll-friendly

Formatting is a huge aspect of readability and shareability for your blog posts.

Think about how the format of your point can naturally draw your reader from one sentence to the next.

That's why most bloggers restrict their paragraphs to no more than three sentences. This helps create a sense of flow and likewise won't overwhelm anyone reading a post via mobile.

Posts should also be broken up frequently by subheaders, again making your content easy to scan. Many bloggers try to insert a subheader at least every 300 words.

Beyond subheaders, visuals are also a critical component of format and readability.

Considering that 65% of people consider themselves to be visual learners, don't neglect the importance of giving your readers something to look at beyond text.

Note that we typically include a variety of examples, images and screenshots throughout our posts here at Sprout. Most bloggers include three to four images per blog post, but writers should feel free to include as many visuals as they see fit.

What sort of visuals are we talking about, though?

Going beyond stock photos or screenshots, consider how you can whip up a graphic or quote with the help of a tool like Canva.

Canva is a fantastic tool for creating images for your blog posts

Bear in mind that you can also use social embeds to break up your blog posts, too. For bloggers using WordPress, social links you copy-and-paste will immediately populate without issue.

Similarly, you can embed YouTube videos in your content as well.

The takeaway here is to find opportunities to keep your readers scrolling with the help of headers and visuals. Doing so not only helps make your pieces more entertaining but also provides a visual representation of whatever you're blogging about.

Mind what optimization means for SEO

SEO is central to just about any blog strategy.

Of course, sacrificing readability for the sake of SEO is a common mistake among bloggers competing for keywords.

Again, the concept of balance rears its head. For starters, take the time to do proper keyword research via SEO tools and start with keywords you might realistically rank for.

If you're using WordPress, tools such as Yoast can help you tick the boxes of search optimization while ensuring that your content is reader-friendly.

Yoast suggestions are an important piece of optimizing your blog posts for SEO

Like the other tools highlighted above, you shouldn't worry about your posts being absolutely "perfect" from an SEO perspective. Few posts will ever get the total green light from Yoast. Simply use such as tools as a guide to double-check that you aren't missing any obvious opportunities for optimization.

Quick blog writing tips and tactics to keep in mind

By now you probably have a good idea of how to write a blog post.

Your job isn't quite done yet, though.

Becoming a better blogger is an ongoing process that's far from over once your posts go live. To wrap things up, here are some quick tips for bloggers to create high-performing, share-worthy content over time.

Analyze your top-performing blog posts

If you want to figure out which of your blog posts are your "best," look no further than your analytics.

In addition to traffic for individual posts, consider how metrics such as bounce rate and clicks can clue you in the posts that readers interact with the most.

Google Analytics can help you keep track of your blog traffic and social shares

The same rules apply to metrics such as social shares and clicks. Through social analytics, you can discover common threads between the types of content that your readers share.

Don't forget to promote your content on social media!

Given the hours involved in putting together a quality post, content distribution should be a top priority for each post you publish.

And consider how social media is central to promoting your blog to current and new readers alike. Through Sprout's social media scheduling and publishing suite, you can schedule and reschedule your posts across social media to maximize your readership. Additionally, tools such as Viralpost ensure that your blog-centric posts go live when readers are most likely to see them.

Sprout publishing calendar

Be willing to practice and learn from other bloggers

This might be cliche, but becoming a better blogger doesn't happen overnight.

Through consistent reading and writing, you can develop better writing habits and style all your own. When you spot a blog post that you find engaging, take the time to dig into why it clicked with you.

Was it the writer's voice? Was it the level of depth that the post went into? Paying attention to these points and emulating them in your own writing can put you on the path to more compelling content yourself.

How to find and pay blog writers

It's totally understandable that for many brands and marketing teams, doing all the writing in house is a daunting task. In that case, you're most likely looking for outside assistance in the form of freelance bloggers.

Onboarding and managing freelancers brings its own set of tasks, but can be well worth it to expand your publishing scale.

One of the most common questions when starting the search is how much you should be paying for a blog post. This can vary greatly

based on expertise, the uniqueness of your content or brand niche, and the need to research or source images for the posts you're requesting.

You might find a writer in the $25 to $150 range for one article on a simpler topic or shorter word count. Posts on more complex topics requiring detailed research, interviews or stats may start at $150 and go much higher depending on factors like the word count or experience level of the writer.

Ready to start writing better blog posts?

Writing a high-quality blog post isn't a simple as it seems.

At the end of the day, your end goal should be to produce better content than what's already out there.

Whether it's through a distinct sense of style or in-depth information, you can figure out how to write a blog post that provides value to your readers.

With the help of these tips and plenty of practice, you can do exactly that sooner rather than later.