



Blogging 101:

HOW TO GET STARTED AS A NEW BLOGGER

*<Learn
to CODE
WITH Me>*

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INTRODUCTION

Hi there! If you've decided to get into blogging, but have discovered that it's not quite as simple as you thought--don't worry, I've been there. There are so many blogs out there these days that breaking into the market can seem like a daunting or downright impossible task.

But I've found that the best way to do something "impossible" is to take it one step at a time. In this guide, I'll remind you why blogging is too great to give up on, then help you take those first steps that will set you and your new website up for success.

WHY BLOGGING IS AWESOME

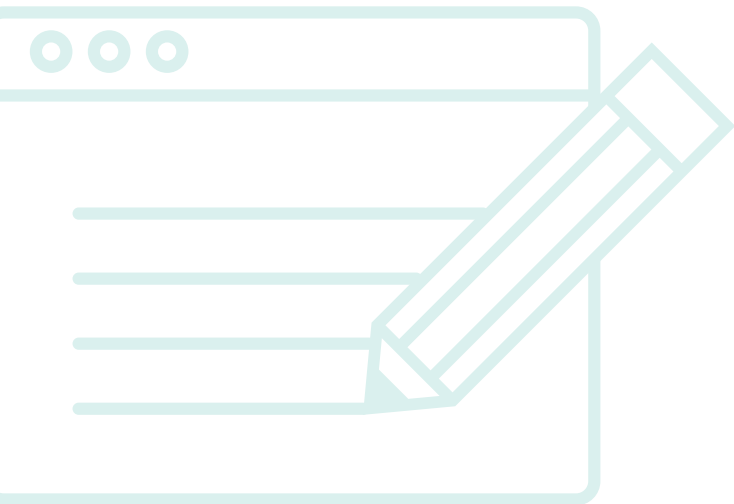
Blogging can be discouraging sometimes, especially during those first few weeks when you look at your traffic and it seems like the only person reading is your mother. So why bother? Why spend all that time and energy on writing posts every day or every week?

For me, it's clear that blogging is absolutely worth it. Even if it doesn't make you a millionaire, a good blog will pay off for you professionally in numerous ways. Here are my top four:

1. **Personal branding:** In today's ultra-connected and competitive world, you need to sell yourself more than ever. To do that, you need to create a powerful online presence that functions as your "brand"—what you're all about. A blog puts you in a position to show what you care about, create an audience of people who want to learn from you, and connect with other influencers in that space. An effective personal brand leads to partnerships, opportunities, credibility, recognition, and more. In a nutshell, it gives you more perceived value in a saturated marketplace.

2. **Positioning yourself as an expert:** As you're creating your blog, a central question should be "What insights can I contribute to this topic that others may not have thought of?" Rehashing information that thousands have written about is pretty unlikely to get you noticed. Position yourself as an authority by learning what questions people today are actually asking, and giving them the answers they need in a way they can understand (with, of course, your own personal style and flair!).
3. **Pursuing personal development:** When you start a blog, you'll probably find yourself learning just as much as you're teaching. Along the way, you'll have the chance to refine your writing style, fine-tune your design aesthetics, and increase your understanding of the topics you cover. Seriously—in a few years you might look back at your first post and think What was I doing!? And that's a good thing. If you're not growing, you're not doing it right!
4. **Showing that you're passionate:** Blogging can help you land better non-blogging opportunities in the here and now, whether for you that means full-time jobs or freelance clients. It gives you a concrete place to publish and collect writing samples, shows that you're willing to put the work in, and demonstrates the skills and expertise you want to be hired for.

So, yes, blogging is awesome, and yes, you should start one! Now let's get into how exactly to do that.



GETTING STARTED

SELECTING A NICHE

Finding your niche might be the most important decision you make for your blog. If the category is too broad, your post topics will be all over the place—but if it's too narrow, you might not appeal to many people.

This means you should be aiming for somewhere in the middle. Where “healthy eating” is too broad and “cooking with African horned cucumber” is too narrow, “cooking with fruits and vegetables you’ve never heard of” could be a good jumping-off point.



TIP:

*Have a common name?
Experiencing trouble
finding a domain name?
Use domainr.com,
where you can type in a
word and it'll show you
available variations of it.*

CHOOSING A DOMAIN NAME

Unsure what to choose? Use your own name if the blog is about you and your experiences or adventures. Otherwise, keep it short, sweet, and topical (ideally the name of the blog itself). URLs that are too long and rambly tend to look unprofessional.

For purchasing domain names, I use NameCheap or Name.com.

FINDING A WEB HOST

For hosting, my recommendation is [Bluehost](https://bluehost.com). Bluehost (and similar hosts) allow you to purchase domains and host them on their servers.

It is easier if you buy your domain from your host. However, I sometimes use other providers to buy domain name because they have more options. (Like .me, which I use for my site—it fits right into the name!).

Now, before choosing a host, consider what kind of site you are running. Ruby on Rails? WordPress?

The technology you're using can affect the host you go with. For instance, if you're using Ruby on Rails, you wouldn't want to use a service Bluehost. (But instead something like [Digital Ocean](#) or [Heroku](#).)

However for most people running WordPress blogs or similar, a provider like Bluehost, GoDaddy, Media Temple, etc. will do the trick. These kinds of providers all have easy-to-follow documentation for getting your site up as well as simple WordPress install procedures.

SELF-HOSTING VERSUS FREE ALTERNATIVES

You may be tempted to take the easy route and use a free host for your blog. There's the obvious pro to this (it's free), but in my experience there are downsides as well. With free blogging options, you:

- can't customize your domain name
- can't fully monetize your blog
- have limits to video and image uploads
- have less theme options

Ultimately, you are not the true owner of a blog unless you self-host with your own domain name. It only costs \$5-10/month for self-hosting, which in my opinion is well worth it.

If you choose to self-host, create a domain name and find a hosting company. Again I like [Bluehost](#). But there are other options, like [iPage](#), which is good for buying domain and hosting, and costs less than \$2.50/month.

PICKING A PLATFORM (OR CMS)

When it comes to blogging, I suggest people use a CMS, or content management system.

A content management system makes it easy to add new blog posts and update old ones. Here are a few of the most common blogging CMS's.

1. WordPress (what I use and my favorite) has two options:
 - a. [Wordpress.com](#): Open-source software, no ads, limited space and limits on customizing your blog, web hosting provided, hosting is free, very few plugins available
 - b. [Wordpress.org](#): Requires more tech knowledge, no cost to remove 3rd party ads, customizable, web host is not free, and renewal of domain name is not free
2. [Ghost](#)
 - a. Open source and free
 - b. Simple; blogging only, not as feature-rich as WordPress
 - c. Easy to install, customize, and use
3. [Jekyll](#)
 - a. Does not store files in a database like WP and other CMS's; compiled for building static website only
 - b. Fully compatible with GitHub; GitHub will compile and serve
 - c. Best for tech savvy people; those who don't mind using the command line
4. [Squarespace](#)
 - a. Makes it easy to blog
 - b. No coding needed! (Great for designers)
 - c. However, not as feature-rich as a CMS like WordPress

DESIGNING YOUR WEBSITE

When it comes to design, the most important thing is that your blog is easy to use. That essentially means five things:

1. **Mobile responsiveness:** The site needs to work across device sizes—phone, tablet, computer. People will be accessing it from all three.
2. **Clear navigation:** Avoid tons of menu items and make the flow logical.
3. **Legible font:** Make sure your font is not some crazy curly font, and is large enough to read.
4. **Color:** Use colors that balance one another.
5. **Simplicity:** Simplicity conquers all. Less is more.

It's all about usability. If people can't use your site, how will they be able to read your posts?

When first starting out, do NOT get too caught up in the details. Use a premade theme if possible—you can always customize it later.

KEY COMPONENTS ANY BLOG SHOULD HAVE

1. **Contact information:** your email address, phone number/address if a business, and social media links should all be present
2. **About page:** a place where readers can find out about you—include a picture!
3. **Privacy policy:** only necessary if you're collecting info from users (even email addresses)
4. **Terms of use:** only necessary if you're selling items/services on your site

CREATING CONTENT FOR YOUR BLOG

THE IMPORTANCE OF WRITING FOR A SPECIFIC AUDIENCE

A broad range of subjects on a single blog won't attract the right people. Like mentioned early on, you want it to be niched.

When you cover everything and the kitchen sink, it discourages recurring visitors—they want the content to matter to them. If it is too broad and much of it doesn't apply to them, they won't come back for more.

Instead, identify and write for your target audience. How old are they, what do they do for a living, what are their goals, etc. You can't write for everyone, so figure out who is most likely to read your blog and structure your posts to attract those readers.

HOW TO CREATE CONTENT YOUR AUDIENCE WILL LIKE

After narrowing down your blog's niche and the target audience, you want to create content that is valuable for them.

WRITING TIPS

1. Great headlines and subject lines Try using [CoSchedule's Headline Analyzer Tool](#), which scores your headline for you.
2. Mimic your audience's language and phrasing to show you relate to them. Look at the questions they're asking and the comments they're making, and write directly for those concerns.
3. Tell stories: they're relational and help readers connect to you.

4. Be honest. Readers appreciate transparency. Opening up about your struggles or failures will make you more relatable.
5. Be conversational. You want your audience to be comfortable with your writing. If people wanted cold, hard information, they'd read a textbook instead.
6. Keep the level of writing at a 6-8 grade level. Too much complexity will turn people away. Non-native English readers may struggle with large words.
7. Write in a straightforward style, as clear and concise as possible.
8. Stay focused on the topic at hand. Too many detours from the main subject and you risk losing readers.
9. Use tools to improve your writing.
 - a. [Hemingwayapp](#): Grades your writing level.
 - b. [Grammarly](#): Points out mistakes and offers solutions.

FORMATTING TIPS

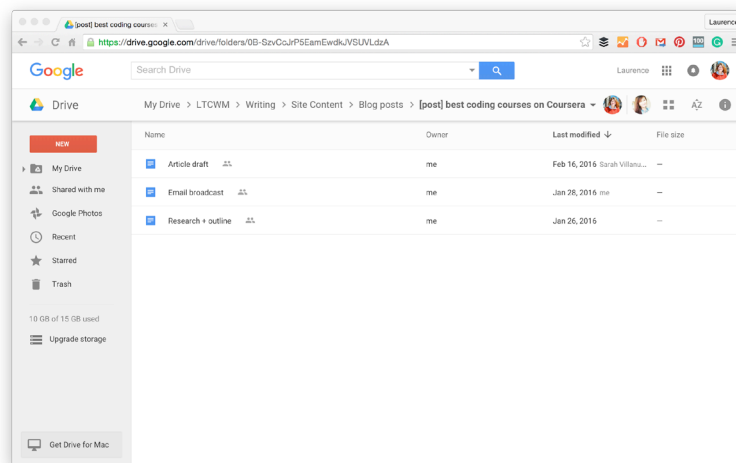
1. Only underline hyperlinks, bold and italics for emphasis (don't go overboard or you'll overstimulate readers).
2. Use bulleted or numbered lists whenever possible.
3. Use subheadings frequently. People are skimmers. Subheadings allow them to scan your articles with ease and hone in on the parts they want to read in more depth.
4. Keep paragraphs short—it improves readability, especially on mobile devices.
5. Optimize content for mobile readers if that is a large part of your audience.

ORGANIZATION TIPS

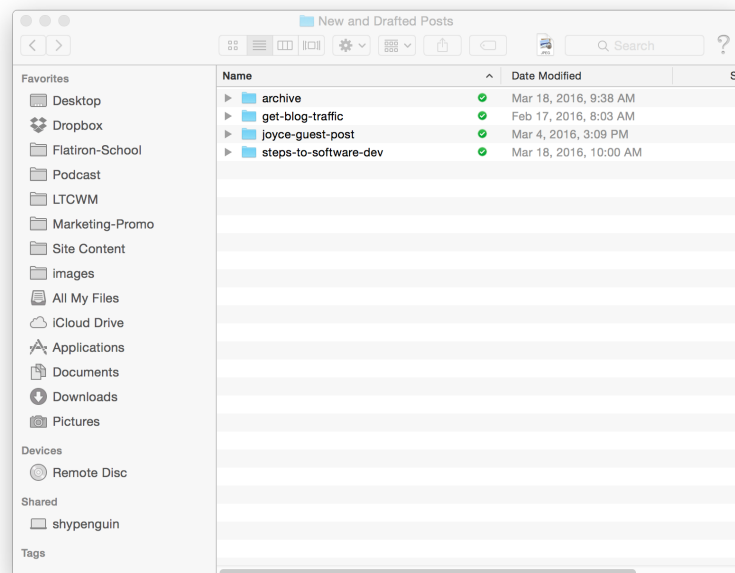
As you continue to create content on your website, it can add up quickly. Staying organized is important, both for your own sanity and for your final product.

Here's how I stay organized when I blog:

1. Keep article research and drafts stored in Google Drive
 - a. I like how you can collaborate with others, and everything is stored in the cloud, accessible from any device and immune to crashes
 - b. Usually I have my outline, drafts/notes, and final article in separate documents—all of which are stored in a Google Drive folder



2. All blog posts get a new folder in Dropbox
 - a. Inside the folder, I store in-post images, and the feature image

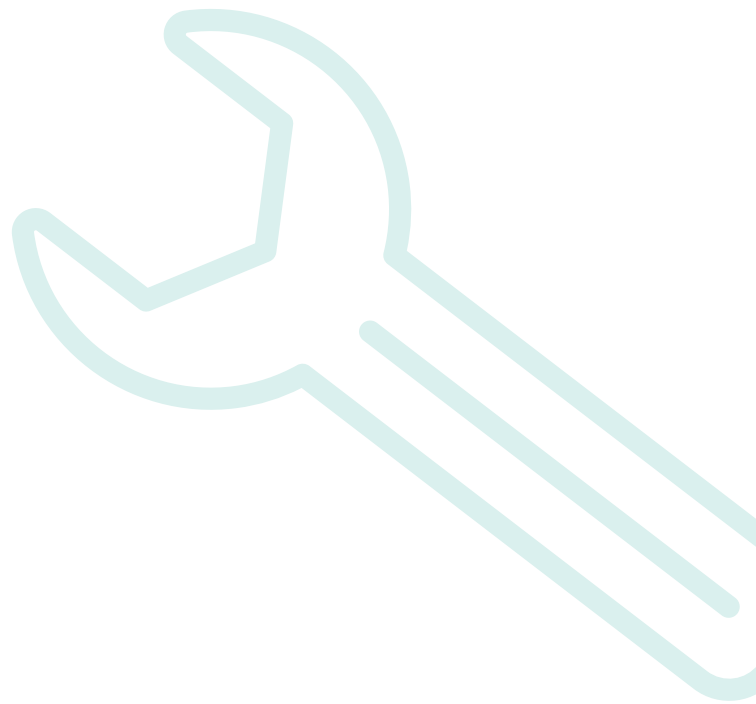


3. Project management tool (Asana) used to organize blog posts. I only added the Asana to the mix recently, after a year and a half of blogging on LTCWM, and wish I'd found it sooner!
 - a. I'm able to schedule everything involved in a new post, from drafting to publishing—it's like my editorial calendar
 - b. It also helps me collaborate with others: leave project notes, compile links/research, and keep everything on track

***START
SIMPLE,
GET FANCY
LATER***

Keep in mind that I didn't start out this way; over time I became more organized, and put into place more efficient practices.

Start simple, get fancy later. A tool like Google Docs and a CMS is probably enough to start.



PROMOTING YOUR BLOG

It's one thing to have a blog and write blog posts. It's another to get people to read it. Here are some quick tips for promoting your content.

BUILD AN EMAIL LIST

If you want people to read your blog, having an email list is more important than anything else. (Yes—even more important than gaining followers on social media!)

Here are common ways you can grow your email list.

1. Join and frequently contribute in an FB group full of people you want on your list. Once you're a known name there, request feedback on posted articles.
2. Develop a [lead magnet](#) as a way to entice readers to sign-up for your email list. Basically, a free piece of content you give away in exchange for an email. An example would be this Blogging 101 guide!
3. Post content on your social media channels that encourages people to sign up for a lead magnet (Example Tweet: "Check out my FREE Blogging Guide for beginners. Download it here: <http://learntocodewith.me/blogging>")
4. Build a custom 404 page that includes a lead magnet and email address. Mistakes happen, pages get relocated or deleted...but the 404 page is your chance to convince users to stay on your site.
5. Add a call-to-action (CTA) in your email signature with a link to your lead magnet.
6. Encourage existing readers to share and forward your articles (The best way to do this? Ask them to share it!)
7. Do a lead magnet swap with similar bloggers.

8. Guest post on other blogs with a similar audience as yours (Example: how I [guest post for Skillcrush](#).)
9. On your website, include multiple opportunities for people to subscribe: in your footer, sidebar, homepage, about page, and more.
10. (Advanced) Host a virtual workshop/webinar where attendees must sign up using their email address.
11. (Advanced) Retargeting pixels and relevant ads (having them appear places like Facebook ad space, etc.) will remind people of your site once they're gone.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Depending what you enjoy and what your blog's topic is, there are different platforms you can take advantage of. Here are some of the best for bloggers.

1. **Facebook:** This platform can be used in several ways. Make (a) a page so people can "like" you and stay on top of new blog posts, or (b) a group if you want to encourage a more interactive environment.
2. **Twitter:** Use this for the "short and sweet" stuff. Linking to new posts, interacting with and retweeting your followers, following other bloggers.
3. **YouTube:** If you like to make videos, it can add a nice personal touch and help people feel like they know you better.
4. **Pinterest:** Great for fashion, fitness, makeup, and food bloggers. Share tips, recipes, photos, etc.
5. **Instagram:** Like Pinterest, this is great for fashion, fitness, makeup, and food bloggers. However, it is limited because you can't link to posts.
6. **LinkedIn:** A must-have for professional networking. Connect, endorse, update, and publish on Pulse!



TIP:

Use social share buttons on your site to encourage sharing

There are other platforms out there—hundreds in fact. What matters is that you're present on the ones where your audience resides, and that you enjoy the ones you use. For instance, if you dislike being in front of the camera and editing videos, YouTube may not be good for you.

SEO OPTIMIZATION

Good SEO will boost your ranking in the search engines, and as a result can increase your blog traffic. Here are a few quick strategies/tools to make sure yours is on point.

1. Be aware of [what search engines see](#) when they browse your site. You can do this by using plugins to see how it looks from a search engine point of view.
2. If using WordPress, download a free plugin like [Yoast](#) which will allow you to customize meta titles, descriptions, and more.
3. Research key phrases to find out what people are searching for. (Keywordtool.io is a free tool that helps you do this.) Then, incorporate these phrases (in a natural way) into your blog's content.
4. Use a tool like [Buzzsumo](#) to see what articles on your target subject are most popular. Then, use this information to guide your own content strategy.



NEXT STEPS

Ultimately, this information is meant to get you started with a great foundation. There's plenty more info out there—and you can read it until you're blue in the face—but the best way to learn what works for you and your blog is by actually launching it! Take it from me: if you wait until all the conditions are “perfect,” you'll be waiting a long time. So build it, write it, promote it, refine it...and don't forget to enjoy the journey.



ABOUT ME

Hey - I'm Laurence Bradford, the creator of learntocodewith.me. Since I began blogging almost two years ago, my life has changed for the better. But I know how hard it can be - which is exactly why I created this special guide. I hope you found it helpful!

“Thank you for making Learn to Code With Me and sharing all your resources. You've been such a motivator on my journey”

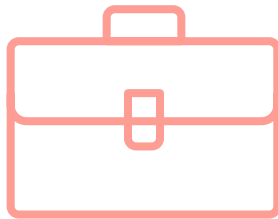
CHRISTEL M.

“I use your site/info/suggestions almost on a daily basis”

KATE R.

THANK YOU!

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