

START WRITING

A Definitive Guide
To A High-Traffic Blog



a todaymade marketing guide

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About This Book

Everyone is blogging. Or at least, everyone is talking about blogging. Unfortunately, most blogs don't make it past three months.

Why?

Because starting a blog is easy, but it takes work to keep it going. In other words, there's a right way to do it and a temporary way to do it.

We're going to tell you the right way to blog, so that your words last.

Copyright

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Preface

Everyone is blogging. Or at least, everyone is talking about blogging. Unfortunately, most blogs don't make it past three months.

Why?

Because it's easy to start a blog, but a lot of work to keep it going. In other words, there's a right way to do it and a temporary way to do it.

We're going to tell you how to blog so your words last.

We're going to tell you how to get past writer's block when you run out of ideas.

We're going to tell you how to use your blog to build up your website.

We're going to give you tips and tricks for creating great headlines, and catching the attention of readers using search engines.

Why?

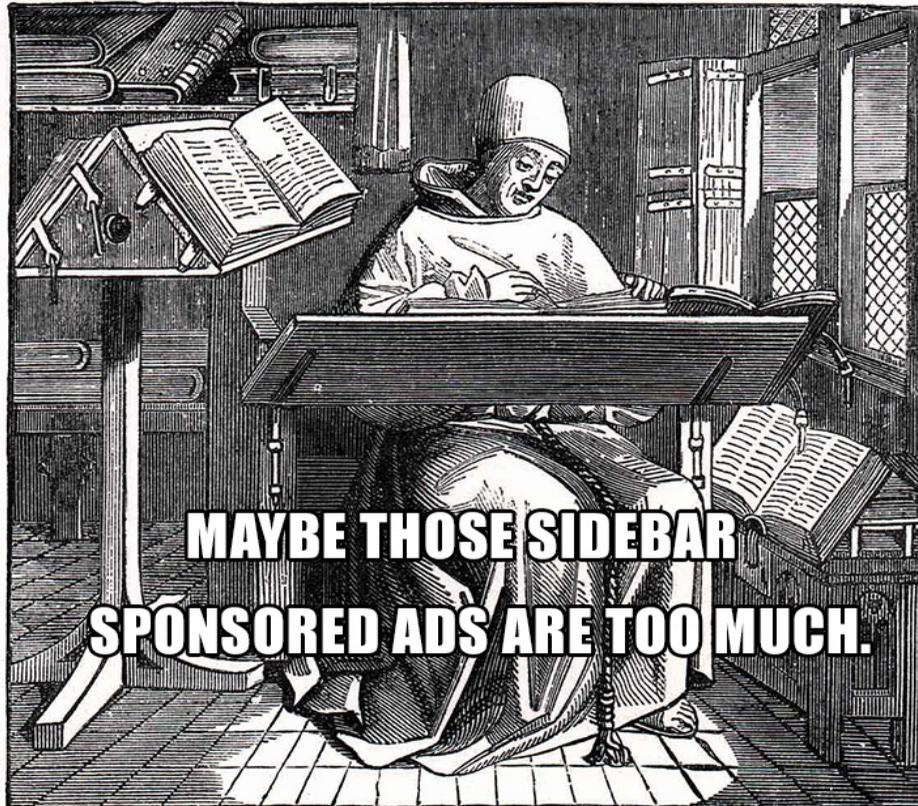
Because the world doesn't need more blogs. It needs more great bloggers. And that's you.

About The Authors

Garrett Moon is a founder at [Todaymade](#), a web development and content marketing company, and the makers of [CoSchedule](#), an editorial calendar for WordPress that makes content marketing and social media easy. He blogs for several of the Todaymade blogs.

Julie R. Neidlinger is a copy writer and blogger at [Todaymade](#), and has had her own personal blog since 2002.

3 Things Every Blogger Needs To Know



Before you get started blogging, there are three things you must understand. Three things that you can't ignore.

You Are Writing Publicly

You're not just writing in your private journal, for your co-workers, or for a controllable semi-private audience. You're writing for the world.

This shouldn't terrify you and keep you from writing.

It shouldn't make your writing stiff and formal. It shouldn't trap you in that black hole of editing and proofing a draft over and over and never having the courage to click publish.

But it probably will.

Your job, as a blogger, is to click publish, and keep improving from then on. Performing in front of a huge audience is terrifying, so focus on the [real people](#) you actually know and write as if you were writing for them.

Defeat the blank screen and write for the world with real people in mind. Make your content interesting for them all. You are writing publicly.

You Are Responsible

Write responsibly. That doesn't mean you have to water down your message. But, because you're writing for the world, you must be aware of the effect your writing will have.

I'm not just talking on how your content affects people on a personal level, [but also how it affects you legally](#). This includes issues such as copyright and trademark infringement, libel, deep linking, paid-for posts or content, privacy, content theft, and even, though you might be blogging in another country, an [understanding of U.S. law](#). Your innocent blogging intentions have legal ramifications.

You can't steal content, you can't make up quotes, you can't falsify information, you can't lie and say you didn't, and you need to be able to back up your claims. It's easy to get a blog; there are free options everywhere. A low barrier to entry doesn't negate these responsibilities.

You are responsible for the content you create. Understand that.

You Must Be Honest

Usually when people talk about honesty in relation to a creative activity (which writing and blogging is), they tend to point it back towards self. As in "you must be honest with yourself."

Fine.

Write honestly so you can live with yourself. Write honestly, but don't let it be an excuse to be a jerk. So yes, be honest with yourself.

But you must be honest with your audience above all.

Don't let marketing trends ever come before being honest with your readers. Don't let what a social media marketing guru-ninja-expert-maven tells you to do ever supercede your responsibility to be honest to your audience. Don't hook, snare, or deceive your reader in any fashion and use them merely as a means to an end.

What you write, how you engage, what you present, and what you promise – it must be done honestly. You must have an audience that [trusts](#) you, or you have nothing.

How do you build trust?

There is no app for building trust, no gimmick, no formula. Trust is built over time by being honest.

If you say something will work, it had better work. If it doesn't work for your reader, you're a liar to them. If you get paid to review or write a blog post, you had better tell your reader up-front. You do all of these things not because you don't want trouble with the FCC or other bloggers, but because you care about your audience.

If your first inclination isn't to be honest with your reader, but to make money off of them or use them as a springboard for personal gain, do everyone a favor and stop blogging.

Where We Write Determines What We Write



In 1997, author David Shenk wrote the book *Data Smog: Surviving The Information Glut*. He theorized that the explosive growth of information made possible by the Internet was both helping society make forward-progress while simultaneously overwhelming us, the individual. He later revisited his original ideas, and posited that some still held true.

In one section of the book, Shenk noted that with the use of computers, our geography of learning has become singular.

That is, we read, learn, write, communicate, buy, and sell all from the same geographic place: in front of our computer. He was concerned about how well we would retain information, since our memory and retention of information is often tied to the place and situation in which it was learned. By limiting where and how we learn (in front of a computer, reading/watching a screen), we have the potential to lessen our ability to retain information.

The same can be said for the geography of writing. Where we write has an impact on what we write in three key ways.

Multi-tasking Is An Idea Sieve

We mostly write on a computer. While it might not seem different than sitting at a desk and writing on paper, or typing on a typewriter, there is a key difference: Our computers are connected to the Internet.

While blissfully able to do research right where we sit as we write, we are also able to “multi-task”, distracting ourselves with Facebook or email or the rabbit hole that is the Internet as we click and lose ourselves in web pages.

Writers need to write.

We don't need any encouragement to be distracted and not write. Multi-tasking is a skeptical achievement at best, but for a writer, it can be deadly. It aids and abets idea loss, and idea distraction.

Multi-tasking is not the same as brainstorming or research; that is something we decide specifically to do.

When it comes time to write, our research and idea gathering should be done and ready to serve the larger purpose of writing. We should be ready to go. Don't let our place of writing get in the way of writing.

Finding Our Niche, And Then Never Leaving It

Shenk believed that an information society wouldn't necessarily bring about broader information gathering or an expansion of ideas, but would make nichification easier. That is, it would make the gathering of the kind of information we were already drawn to that much simpler, overriding most people's desire to leap into something new.

Should a marketing blog be only about marketing?

Maybe. But, from a writer's perspective (and probably a grateful reader, too), a marketing blog that includes topics not commonly thought to be associated with marketing has more value.

Branching out and extending our learning and writing of content from beyond our tightly fenced niche means we avoid recessive inward-looking writing. Be aware that self-limiting niche writing can quickly lead to dried-up ideas and writer's block.

Getting Inspiration From A Place

Where we write influences what we write.

If we only write on a keyboard in an office while staring at a wall, our writing actually reflects that in subtle ways. It might show up in the broad topics we choose, or the words and descriptions we write. Our surroundings become like background noise, rarely offering new inspiration. The outside doesn't influence, because we aren't even aware of it.

How do you let what's around you influence your writing? Does locality have any effect on your writing?

Let's say we write a blog for businesses, and we are about to write on customer service. We could research examples online and rehash facts and other opinions.

But why not go to a local coffee shop during a busy time, get our notebook or laptop out, and just observe what happens? Why not use actual observation of customer service in action to come up with ideas for our blog post on customer service?

Author Lawrence Durrell said writers can tap into the "spirit of place." While we can't always get away from our desk or computer, keeping a notebook handy to jot down observations or ideas when we're out and about helps tap into that "spirit of place" and we are able to bring it back to our writing later.

Escaping Data Smog And Getting A Breath Of Fresh Air

How do we successfully address data smog when it comes to our writing?

1. Consider where we write. We shouldn't always write in the same place. While we might not be able to drag our computer everywhere, we can use a tablet, laptop, or notebook and pen in other physical locations and do some writing or idea generating. New environment, new inspiration.

Consider writer's block. Writer's block has a distinct connection to the geography of place. A [solution](#) is to change the place we write. It works.

2. Consider your part. Write clearly and succinctly, keeping in mind that we don't want to contribute to data smog. Cut the fat. It makes for better writing, and it helps readers from being overwhelmed.

It isn't just "creative" or fiction writers that should consider the importance of the geography of writing.

Businesses and bloggers can benefit no matter what kind of content they are intending to generate. All writing is creating, and our creative mind works in amazing ways, picking up cues from everything. By limiting where we write, we limit what we write.

You Must Master These 4 Blogging Methods



There are four methods of approach for any topic or content piece, and understanding how best to use these four methods can make or break your blogging (and guest blogging) career. Readers will read your blogs based on your ability to use these four methods, not on luck.

The General Post

A general post is written for introductory purposes.

It might be the start for an upcoming blog series with the intent being to lay the groundwork for what will be explained in greater detail later. Or, it might introduce new ideas or trends that the audience hasn't heard about yet.

If not connected to a specific series or with the intention of continued blogging on a subject in an informal series, general posts run the danger of being vague and useless. Weak blog posts that seem to be little more than fluff and formula are usually poorly written general blog posts. They might sound good, and even contain true generalized ideas, but they rely on broad concepts and statements without injecting them with value. They do not take use research, facts, or examples to substantiate. They tell, but don't show.

General posts are not necessarily bad, however.

They can be well-written, particularly in the context of the whole blog and if done by a writer who envisions how this general post will fit into a larger, regular blogging program. A blogger firmly ensconced in regular writing for a blog knows both the content that has been published and the content that will be published, on the [editorial calendar](#). In this situation, a general post can be extremely useful.

Do write a general post in preparation for continued and future exploration. Don't write a general post and submit as a guest blog post on another blog.

The Specific Post

A specific post is exactly that: a post filled with specific detail.

It might be a how-to post, or a post with code snippets and screenshots. It might be about marketing with links to helpful sites or a five-step list of what not to do in a PR disaster. Nearly any topic can be broken down into a specific post.

A specific post dives deep into the subject matter. It does not focus on a broad topic (e.g. "marketing") but instead delves into something more narrow ("small business tips for marketing with Tumblr").

Just as teachers tell students to not choose too broad a topic for a final paper, bloggers need to do the same for this kind of post. A detailed and meaty post that's headed past 1000 words might work as a series and eventual ebook.

A weak version of the specific post happens when the topic is narrow but the blogger doesn't have enough knowledge or content to fill it out, and instead veers into generalities to cover for this. Specific posts do not use abstract phrases like "they say" or "it has been shown" or other similar phrases as proof without backing it up with a link, research, or screenshot.

You must show, not just tell.

If you say "users should choose a good design" and don't provide readers the details that would help them follow your advice, it isn't helpful to the reader.

Do write a specific post to submit as a [guest post](#) or as part of a series. Don't write a specific post on a topic that's new to you or your readers, or one you don't know much about yet.

The Philosophical Post

Philosophical posts are "idea" posts.

Their main goal is to further the culture of the brand or team writing the blog. These posts are as much for the writer as the reader, helping to clarify the thought process and leading on to other posts that come to mind as the writer is working through the initial idea.

Philosophical posts are good in that they reveal the writers as real people. They don't generally come from a place of hierarchy (i.e. teacher-down-to-student), but are instead on the same level. The reader is walking beside the writer and working through the idea.

These posts are great discussion starters. They get everyone thinking and talking. They often stem from books or other outside influences that have caused the author to think about new things and apply them to a current situation.

Do write philosophical posts for your own blog. Don't write philosophical posts for a blog or brand you're not extremely familiar with.

The Action Post

An action post could be any of the above three, but with one difference: it always includes something actionable for the reader can do.

It should leave the reader feeling that yes, they can do something about the problem described. These work well if you've [written your post with the plot triangle in mind](#), presenting a problem, the proof, and a conclusion that gives the reader a chance to be part of the solution.

What do we mean by “action”?

It might lead your reader to sign up for your email newsletter, get an ebook download, or maybe even three life changes they can make today. It is anything that takes them beyond passive reading into action.

Do use the action post as a guest blog post, on your own blog and in guest posts. Don't overuse the same action element (“get our email!”) because you'll train regular readers to ignore it after a while.

How To Write Blog Posts Your Readers Actually Want To Read

They buried it where?!



*This dog is reading a blog post about proper bone disposal techniques.

Did your blog post put several readers to sleep today?

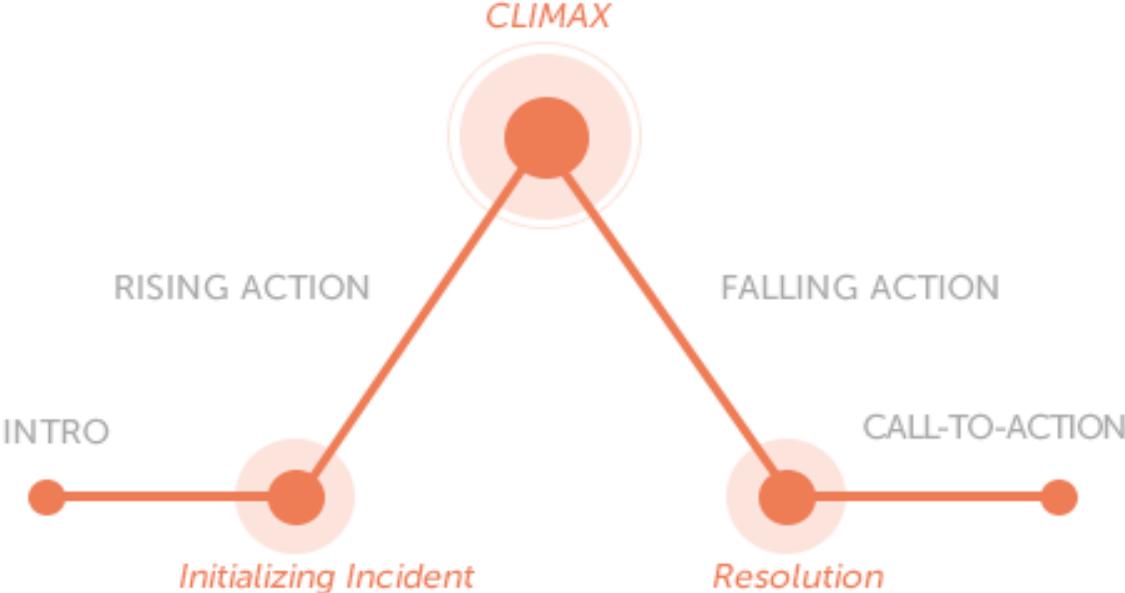
Too bad. Any topic has the opportunity to instill excitement. Using a centuries old writing technique, you can not only keep your reader awake, but you can keep them addicted to your blog.

The Fiction Pyramid And You

Off the record, we're going to call it plain old curiosity.

Officially, though, it's called the Freytag Pyramid. Or, as you might have learned in school, the fiction pyramid or the dramatic arc. These are all fancy phrases for telling us about what makes a good story. Take note: [People love stories](#). They are a curious bunch, and stories feed curiosity.

The pyramid looks something like this:



Introduction (and inciting incident):

This is the headline, the setup, the introduction of characters and setting.

For a blog post, you're introducing the topic and necessary background information to your reader. You're laying out your case. At the end of the introduction, the conflict (inciting incident) is revealed. The reader is made aware of a problem, which should make them curious about it if you've made them care or be concerned enough in your introduction.

Rising Action:

This is where you build your case. The reader has the background info, and knows of the problem. Here is where you begin fleshing that out and building in detail.

Use a few facts, charts, quotes, links — but whatever you use, be sure that it doesn't numb and disinterest the reader. You want to keep them reading.

Climax:

This is the pinnacle of your argument, your idea, your theory.

Or, in the case of a simple how-to post, the nudge to reassure them that your steps should be followed. It tells the reader that yes, they should be doing this because the alternative is to make a common mistake others have made who haven't used your step-by-step expertise.

However you handle it, this is the point where you convince them that the case you laid out for them was true, and that it applied to them. The problem you stated was their problem, too.

Falling Action:

Now that you have your reader's attention or concern (and hopefully trust, since they're still with you this far), you close out your argument and start to suggest to them that there's a way to solve the problem, and you'll share it with them.

Resolution (and call to action):

Here is where you present your solution, your conclusion, and your final thoughts.

If you want your reader to do something specific, this is a good time to ask them. A well-written blog post that has presented a problem or concept that convinced readers it applied to them will leave them wanting to take action immediately so they can feel that they've taken part and concluded the issue for themselves.

Here is where you can get email addresses, sell your ebook, or offer your download. Give them something to do, and be clear you'd like them to do it because it's part of the solution.

This pyramid works.

It has hooked readers for centuries. It works even when you switch a few elements around (start with a bold climactic statement, for example, and then follow with the introduction).

It works because that's what readers want. They want to be eased into what's going to happen, they want to have a reason to keep reading, they want to feel tension because it creates a feeling of possibility and curiosity and excitement, and then they want it brought back down with the problem resolved and a sense of things being finished and their curiosity sated. It works.

Your blog posts should make use of this pyramid.

What Does That Pyramid Have To Do With My Blog?

Just because you're not writing a novel doesn't mean this technique isn't for you. As brief as possible, the work of your blog post writing is as follows:

1. [Headline gets initial reader attention.](#)
2. Reader then reads the first line.
3. The first line causes the reader to want to read the second line.
4. This continues.
5. At any point where the writing dwindles and a line doesn't lead on to a line, the reader leaves. They lost curiosity.
6. If each line leads to the next, the reader keeps with you to the end.

The beauty of the fiction pyramid, if done well, is that it leads the reader willingly to the end.

They are willing to do the work of climbing to the key point you want to make and then stay with you to the end. They are willing to give you an email, or buy the book.

You convinced them through the story, and they'll take part in more. They gave you permission to do so.

Make Twitter As Exciting As A Mystery Novel

Let's try an example, and use that post you're going to write, the one on setting up a Twitter account. You could say:

"Getting a Twitter account is a good idea. The first thing you want to do is sign up. Choose a username and password, and login. Then, you'll want to upload an icon..."

That's useful. It's true. You'll get readers who might hop in, read it, and bounce right back out after getting the information they needed.

However, wouldn't you rather pique their interest enough that they might subscribe to your email or RSS feed? Each post you write has velcro potential. What if you wrote it like this instead:

"The first thing you'll need if you want to use Twitter is to learn to say less. No, really. Twitter gives you 140 characters and that's it. Confident you can pull it off? Then these next five steps will make you a Twitter maestro."

One has sequential facts. The other feeds curiosity, revealing information in a drip feed.

No Way Am I Using A 5-Part Structure For A Blog Post

Let's say the five parts aren't appealing to you. It sounds complicated. Break the pyramid down, and what do you have?

1. Here's my idea.
2. Here's my data.
3. Here are solutions.

The key is building curiosity to keep the reader interested, making them willing to hear your call-to-action and giving you permission to ask them to do something.

The pyramid helps do that.

If you don't want to use a 5-part formula, that's fine. Just remember that each line must lead to the other, and that people expect to be introduced, convinced, and given something to do.

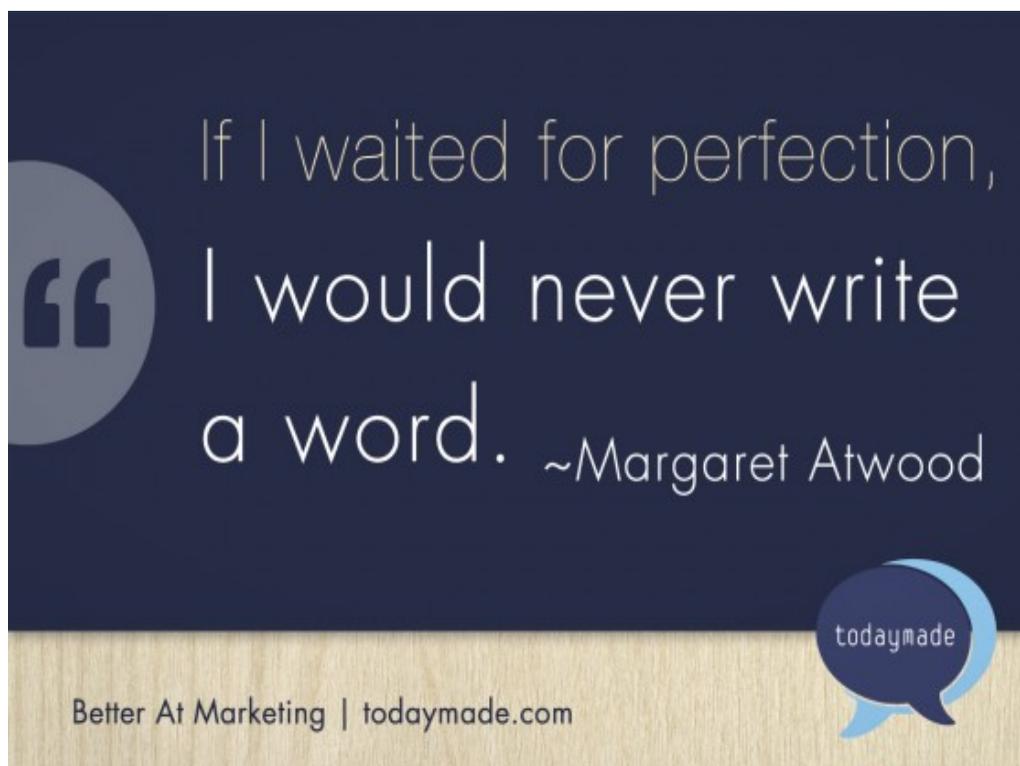
The beauty of it is that after a period of consistently addictive blog posts, your blog itself becomes addictive.

People are curious to know what you'll be saying today. If your readers are coming to read, but dropping off like flies before the end, reconsider your story technique. It's not hip to be square. Be a pyramid instead.

How To Identify And Overcome Writer's Block

It's a lovely ideal, that image we have of inspired writers busy writing, barely able to keep up with the words that flow from their pen, but it's not very realistic.

Writers get writer's block, whether they're writing the company blog or the next Great American Novel. While it is mainly an issue of perseverance, it helps to understand why it happens and to have a few tools to break through the creative wall.



Why Writer's Block Happens

Writer's block seems to happen when we least expect it, but there are a few predictable causes.

1. Give the rough draft a fair chance to exist.

We want things perfect from the beginning, and so we self-edit as we write, choking the words before they can get on the page.

Write freely and know you can edit later. When it's time to write, write. Editing and refinement will follow.

2. Sometimes we write for other's eyes.

While our end goal is to have readers reading our work, the initial process doesn't involve anyone but ourselves, our own eyes, and our own ideas.

Writing for someone else is very similar to being uncomfortable with rough drafts: we are embarrassed by our clumsy initial attempts and constantly go back to clean things up when we should just be writing forward. It's important to have an audience in mind for our writing, but we need to understand that the audience reads the final product, not the crazy notes and horrible paragraphs we start out writing.

3. Writing is work, and that's a little surprising.

The fact that it sometimes feels like work, that the words aren't readily available on any given day, doesn't mean we have writer's block. It just means sometimes the words come easy and sometimes they don't, but they do come.

Writing through writer's block is the best way to show it who is boss, whether we do that writing on the project that is giving us grief, or on something else. Writer's block is best thought of as project-specific, and not person-specific. If we're stuck, that's a statement about the writing at hand, and not us as writers.

Writing doesn't just happen. It's something we practice regularly, and can do on a schedule.

Don't get it right, just get it written.

– James Thurber

Identify The Block

We need to know what kind of writer's block we're dealing with to find the best solution.

Is it the lack of an idea that is preventing us from even getting started? Maybe we have an idea, but we don't know what to do with it, or how to get started. Or perhaps we've been writing and thought we were working through an idea without any issue until we hit the middle and found ourselves stuck.

Determine what it is that is keeping us from moving forward so we know what solution to look for.

I only write when I am inspired. Fortunately I am inspired at 9 o'clock every morning.

– William Faulkner

Solve The Specific Block

Once we've identified what kind of block we're struggling with, we can find a solution.

If the problem was finding an idea, we need to figure out how to generate ideas. A visual person, for example, might be inspired by doing random image searches online and using those images to create a backstory or concept.

Other inspiration can be found through RSS readers, Facebook News Feeds, Google+ Saved Searches, books we're reading — these are all places to find content that serves as an idea springboard for our own. We aren't looking to these to copy, but to jog our already capable writer's mind into gear.

If the problem was that we had an idea but didn't know how to get started, or we were stuck in the middle of an idea, we need our own personal system for breaking things down.

Whether it's brainstorming, writing random related thoughts down on cards and mixing them up, word association, writing a stream of consciousness, or using flow charts, we just need to find what works.

The easiest thing to do on earth is not write.

– William Goldman

Methods To Overcome

There are countless numbers of ways that writers overcome their writer's block. No one finds the same success with each method. Anything that jars us into new paths of thought will work. Here are a few ideas to try:

- Change your geography. If you were writing at the kitchen table, move to the desk, or the front porch. Go to a coffee shop, or the library. Change the location of where you're writing. Different sounds and distractions can jog the creative mind.
- Get creative. Clear your head by doing some creative writing exercises. Word associations, writing prompts, idea generation — anything to get your writing skills out of the temporary rut they are in.

Stop, and write something else. As a last ditch effort, stop what you're writing and work on another writing project. This is a last resort, since a huge part of writing is pushing through. You don't want to get into the habit of not finishing. However, it sometimes helps to change your train of thought.

- Take break. Take a break, but only with the promise to yourself that you'll come back and finish. Don't let a writing block derail your project entirely. Finish it, taking a break if needed. But finish it. Get back on the horse that threw you.
- Get some exercise. Nothing like a walk or a run clears your head. It's that change of geography mixed with endorphins. The heart gets pumping, the air clears your system — writer's blocks seem much less deadly after a session of exercise.
- Work backwards. Maybe you need to write the ending first, or the headline. Our writing doesn't have to happen in the order that it will be read. If you need to start in the middle, do so. Trust your editing abilities to pull it all together when it is all said and done.
- Work. Period. A block is no excuse to stop writing. Writing is work, and it isn't based on a whim or a feeling. Write whether you feel like it or not. Sit down and write. Write through it. Write badly if you have to. Clean it up later.

Each writer is different, and so are the things that block them. Knowing that we'll face writer's block at some point if we're serious about writing and blogging makes it easier to face.

As long as we are willing to figure out what system or method works best in helping us get past the block, writer's block is nothing to fear.

Fresh Blogging Ideas That Will Give Your Content A New Life

They say that [most blogs](#) die after three short months, but yours won't. Right? How do you know your's is safe?

Maybe it's too late.



The reality is that blogging is actually pretty hard work.

In the beginning it is new and exciting. Topics and creativity flow like honey. But the sweet flavor eventually wears off, and that fun new blog turns into a bunch of hard work. That's when our blogging ideas run dry. That's when we need to learn how to breath new life into our 'old' blog.

Clean Up The List

Whenever I work with a new blogger, I always recommend that they spend a significant amount of time [generating a long list of potential headlines](#). This exercise helps bloggers compile a list of article ideas that they can write from each week.

Many times, trying to figure out what to write on a given day is actually harder than doing the writing itself. By doing what I have begun to call a 'headline storm' we can prevent this problem at the pass.

No need to think of something new – just choose a topic from your list. Magic!

But, this plan can backfire.

After a few months that list will inevitably get old. We will subconsciously bypass ideas that sounded good at the time, but never really came to fruition. It is easy to believe that those ideas may be our last, but that is never the case. In order to move forward, we might have to take a few steps back.

The most valuable way to reignite your passion for your blog is to clean up your list of blogging ideas. [It is time for a fresh start](#).

1. Delete ideas that have been on the list for too long.
2. Remove the topics that you don't actually want to write about.
3. Brainstorm new blogging ideas to replace the old.
4. Find a few new sources of inspiration to keep the new list from looking like the old one.

Change Out Your Books

I read somewhere between 12 and 24 books a year. Few are fiction, so they tend to serve as constant source of new ideas. If you look through my writing, it is easy to see the influence of each book in my work. With both writing and reading, it can be easy to get into a rut on a single topic. When we circle the same topic again and again we get bored.

When I find myself getting bored with a book, I have hard time moving forward. The same can happen when we blog.

Maybe it is time to change it up?

When we get bored with something, we get lazy. I've learned to put down books that I don't want to pick up, and we all need to learn to put down topics that we don't really care about.

Try something new. Read a new book and pick some new topics. You might be surprised at what it can do for your [creative thinking](#).

Give It A Facelift

Now, don't get me wrong.

You can spend too much time tweaking your blog. For example, if you spend more time tweaking your theme than you do writing new content, you have a problem. However, a new design could be just what you need in order to get the blogging done.

Clean things up, scrutinize the sidebar, or update your WordPress plug-ins. Whatever it is, help your blog feel new again. It is sort of like the feeling you get driving your car after an oil change. For some reason, it feels like it runs better. It doesn't, but who cares.

Feeling better about your blog can never hurt. Just don't spend too much time fiddling with your widgets.

Rediscover Your Purpose

A simple way to usher in new blogging ideas is to rediscover your blogging purpose. Sometimes we lose sight of what it is all for. Many of us can have a hard time motivating ourselves to do the work when we don't know why we are doing it. Try answering the who, what, and why for your blog. You might be surprised at how it jumpstarts your passion for the writing ahead.

1. Who am I writing to?
2. Why do they need me to do it?
3. My blog creates real value because it....

Commit To A Blogging Schedule

Once you've put the work into new blogging ideas, don't sell them short by "getting to them when you can." [Create a blogging schedule](#) to hold yourself accountable.

We can easily fall behind if we don't create or commit to a writing schedule.

Our [simple content scheduling worksheets](#) could be just what you need to put your new blogging ideas into action.

Much like brainstorming headlines, [content scheduling takes the work out of blogging](#). The task of choosing a daily topic can become so overwhelming that we choose not to blog at all. In the same way, the lack of a schedule can keep us off the hook just long enough to prevent our blog from ever getting off the ground.

Creating a content schedule will help relieve this problem. If blogging is one part writing then it is at least three parts discipline. With any new batch of blogging ideas, you are going to need some good old fashioned discipline to get it done.

So, if you are short on new blogging ideas, find some new inspiration, write some new headlines, and commit yourself to a reasonable schedule. In the end, it is all about a little creativity, and a whole lot of discipline.

3 Ways You Can Accidentally Become A Content Marketing Genius



The best gift you can give your customer isn't a free toaster. It's content. Is it possible to become a content marketing genius without knowing it?

There are three things you're probably already doing that you could capitalize on to create great content for your blog.

You Learned New Stuff And You're Excited To Write About It

When we learn something new that really grabs our interest, we tend to gush. It's exciting enough that we want to tell others about it. So...do that. Tell others about it.

Continuing education, a fantastic book, a new hobby, travel, [a concert you attended](#), [a movie](#) — these are all things that easily put us into the gushing zone. Our head is full of thoughts and ideas centered around that one experience.

Take advantage of that initial rush before it goes away. Translate that great history book you read on ancient warfare into a blog post relevant to your gardening store. Make your traveling experience relevant for your customers.

Why Spamming Your Email List Is Like Trying To Sneak A Pineapple Past Customs

Lessons Runners Can Learn From The Hobbit: When Is It Time To Go Barefoot?

The key skill here, if this new knowledge isn't directly related to your content niche, is being able to translate it. Translating it into something useful is much different than putting a personal travelogue onto a blog where it doesn't belong.

You Got To Know Your Customers In Real Life

Listening to your customers and what they have to say about your products, your services, what they want — that's easy enough to create content from. Heck, you don't even need your own customers to do that; you can [use a website like Quora](#) to find out the same information.

This is different.

This is when you actually listened to Joe talking about his dog, his family, your product, his car, your website — all in one random conversation.

And then you realize something about your customers that you hadn't thought of before.

Maybe it's that you have an interesting person standing in front of you that you could learn something from (see the first point above), or that people are using your product in a completely unusual way you hadn't imagined before.

How To Use Our Titanium Screwdriver As A Handy Paint Stirrer

[How To Pimp Your Gmail And Turn It Into Project Management](#)

It's easy to get stuck in a way of thinking about your product or service, and often a bit surprising when you start to listen to those using it. They tell you what they like and what they want, and you might realize it isn't what you expected.

You Randomly Experience Something And A Thought Strikes You

Hopefully, when a thought strikes you, it doesn't hurt. Meaning, you're ready for it.

Just like you need the ability to translate what you learn into something applicable, you need the ability to find meaning in what you're observing.

Even that driver who has tried nine times to parallel park in front of your office window before driving away in despair might offer you an idea that you can turn into a great blog post. Maybe, as you sit at your desk and watch in disbelief, a [headline or two](#) will come to mind.

9 Ways To Attack A Problem

Know When To Move On And Capture New Momentum

Observe, realize, and note.

Write on paper, in a mobile app, or in your blogging platform as a draft. Just don't wait, because these kind of observations quickly fade in sunlight and start to seem like "dumb ideas" the more you think about them.

Let's be honest, though.

You can't accidentally become great at content marketing and sustain it accidentally for a long period of time. You might excel in moments, but, as with anything that matters, you have to work at it. The point is this: learn to listen, observe, and translate.

Stay aware of the times when the ideas are naturally flowing, and get busy creating content out of it. Stock up on blog posts, if necessary, and take advantage of your natural inclination to research. There will be dry spells, so when you're inspired, run with it.

Go ahead. Accidentally find great ideas for content when you're just out enjoying life.

Do You Have Enough Evergreen Content On Your Blog?



Who knew you needed trees on your blog?

Well no, you don't. You do need content that keeps working for you long after you hit the publish button, though. You need content that doesn't go dormant, content that doesn't die or fade away. Without evergreen content, your traffic will bounce like crazy.

Evergreen content is content that will always be relevant to your reader, and won't lose relevancy or interest over time. The more evergreen content you have, the better.

How You Create Content That Quickly Expires

We all create content that just won't last. It usually falls into a few categories.

Too Trendy To Matter

While I won't say you can never use a pop cultural reference to something such as a movie or TV show, just be aware that [your awesome post about True Grit](#) has a pretty short shelf life. The reason for writing such a post would be to grab searches on True Grit (newsflash: turns out there weren't many) while tying it in with a different topic.

If you write a post titled "What Honey Boo Boo Can Teach You About Facebook", don't expect it to be evergreen. Probably fun to write, and maybe even has elements of timeless truth, but that's it. Trendy posts probably aren't going to be your workhorses. And just for clarification, at this point nothing should be done Gangnam style.

The Useful, Sad How-To Post

How-to posts that walk readers step-by-step through something are generally evergreen.

However, at the rate that Facebook changes its Timeline and Google changes its algorithm and Google+, it's a given that a some how-to posts are going to become outdated. Unless you commit to keeping them updated, just know that you have a lot of dead wood on your blog that will probably attract and bounce traffic. Best case: find a way to turn that high traffic into conversions of some sort, and let the old posts be.

You might not be able to babysit or change them all, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't write them.

Grand Listings

I love posts that collect huge lists of useful links or websites.

Sadly, within half a year, many of the links are dead. List posts have a short shelf life. That great list of must-have apps is only valid until their venture funding runs out or Facebook buys them. This doesn't mean you shouldn't make such a list. [We do.](#)

Blog Posts Only

Evergreen content doesn't just happen on your actual blog.

Your [killer FAQ section](#) has value as a static page which you can easily adjust as time goes on to be completely valid to all your readers. Focusing on your blog posts as your only traffic grabber is a bit of a mistake; you have other potential in landing pages, FAQ pages, about pages, and so on.

Going (Ever)Green

True evergreen content is timeless, meaning that a reader will always find it worth their while to read even if you created it a year ago. You can boost the evergreen content on your site in several ways.

- Write blog posts that are historical or tell a story ("[How Your Feedback Influences What We Build](#)").
- Write bog posts that are universal in advice or topic ("How To Make Your Day More Productive").
- Share your core principles or techniques.
- Create a frequently asked questions for your industry or niche (i.e. What are the [50 most asked questions](#) you hear? Those answers are probably going to end up being evergreen content.)
- Create downloads or guides that are either always true, or that you can manage updating without too much headache.
- Write on beginner topics that help the person starting out. (The experts already know. It's the beginners who are searching the internet for information.)
- Link to previous posts that are relevant, even if they're not "evergreen." Put all available information in one spot; even outdated content takes on an evergreen sheen within the larger group.
- Include your content in a progressive series. Outdated content can seem timeless within the context of the series.

Check your analytics.

We discovered that some of our top posts were woefully outdated and had high bounce rates. However, they really brought in the traffic. We came up with a way to capitalize on the old content and turn that into a conversion. Don't trash your outdated posts; maximize them instead.

Your Blog Is Waiting For A Date

This next bit goes against a lot of the current theory on creating evergreen content, but here goes: considering putting a date on your blog posts. At least some of them, even.

The reason you're told not to date your posts is out of a fear that readers will see an old date and not read the post since it is outdated. That they'll know it isn't "evergreen" because it has a time stamp. The idea is that a date, in and of itself, turns otherwise evergreen content into dead content.

Dates, however, have value.

They provide context for the reader and the blogger, and they suggest authority (if you've been blogging a while). Let me explain.

As a blog reader, I search high and low for a date, not to determine if I'll read the post or not, but to know what context to put it in. Some bloggers might see that as a triumph, the ability to trick me to stay on a page longer before leaving, the ability to hide where in the timeline I hopped into your blog.

Maybe.

But I'm not going to sign up for their email list if I feel frustrated.

As a blogger, dates tell readers when I wrote a post and, for eight-year-old posts that aren't the best writing, it helps them put my writing and blog into proper context (i.e. "Oh, she wrote this eight years ago. She's probably gotten better by now.")

Dates also help establish authority if you've been blogging a while (i.e. "Oh, she wrote this eight years ago! She's been around a long time and her blog post about content marketing is more believable because she's actually been doing it a long time.")

A date means a post can be "outdated" but it can also provide context.

Consider letting your readers put your content into perspective, especially if it's content you know isn't evergreen. Your post on setting up a Facebook profile could use a date, since that topic changes every few months.

It's just another chance you have to be upfront with your reader.

5 Ways To Make Your Blog Better Today

Great blogs don't happen overnight.

There is nothing in this blog post that will make our blog one of the Top-Ten All-Time Blogs by tomorrow morning. It takes time attract readers, to find our blogging voice, and to get in the habit of creating content.



Blogging is like a pair of jeans right out of the dryer — we gotta wear them for a while first. There are, however, a few things we can do today to make our current blog a notch better.

Be A Reader

Readers and writers go hand in hand. Writers are readers, or their writing will suffer in every way, from style of writing to freshness of ideas.

There are many rules of good writing, but the best way to find them is to be a good reader.

– Stephen Ambrose

Being a great blogger means we're also a great blog reader. Reading other blogs means we may find ourselves commenting on them. This is how other blog readers find our blog. This is how we offer ourselves as an expert on a topic outside of our own blog walls.

Take Action: Find three new blogs to read today, with at least one being outside of your industry or usual reading comfort zone. Add them to your RSS reader if necessary. Read them for at least a week. Respond to a post on each at least once.

Be A Magazine Magnate

Our blog is a lot of things. It's a blog, it's a link, it's a feed, it's a magazine, it's... Supercontent!

We can't all be Conde Nast, but with [Flipboard](#) (for iPad) and [Google Currents](#) (for Android and iPad), our blog can become a digital magazine. Google Currents, in particular, opens the door and [makes it easy](#) for everyone to become a magazine publisher.

When we realize how many different ways readers can find and read our content, it should get us to step up our game a bit.

Every post is our best post. Every post has images. Every post is stand-alone, meaning we don't rely on our blog's sidebar to help our readers find us online or on social networks. Instead of constantly fussing with a blog's template, make the actual content super-strong. Our readers might never come to our actual blog; they might be reading it elsewhere.

Take Action: Find a new outlet for your blog content. Whether it's through a feed, a digital magazine format, a mobile app — find a new way to serve it up. Note how it changes the way you think about the content you create.

Be A Sub Captain

Huge ambiguous goals are white whales. They are impossible to master.



"That goal is too big to handle, Captain!"

Let's say our goal for our blog is to get more readers.

That's a huge goal. A big goal like "get more readers" doesn't provide us with an obvious plan, so it makes achieving the goal pretty tough. What if we considered some sub-goals? Can we break down the holy grail of "more readers!" into some approachable steps in order to reach that ultimate goal?

We need sub-goals. We need to be sub-captains and take control of the small goals to master the bigger goal.

Let's use our example, and ask ourselves how we'll get more readers?

The answers to that question become the smaller goals we focus on. Perhaps it would include beefing up our social media activity, or being more responsive to our current blog readers. It might be creating a better [mix of content](#). Find these sub-goals. Work on them first. The big goal will follow.

Take Action: Write down one big goal for your blog. Write down 10 questions that relate to achieving that big goal. From those questions, come up with three smaller goals that are manageable, and will ultimately make the big goal a reality.

Be A Gracious Host

Like guests? Why not consider guest bloggers? Carefully chosen guest bloggers bring three things:

A fresh voice our readers haven't heard.

1. Their own fans and readers.
2. A surprising view on how someone else sees our blog and what content they believe should be found there.

It's great to be a guest blogger ourselves (that certainly brings traffic to our own site and street cred to our blogging abilities), but for our blog — it's own "entity" and the subject of our discussion — how much better to be seen as the host? Our blog becomes the place writers want to be seen writing.

Mankind is divisible into two great classes: hosts and guests.
– Sir Max Beerbohm

Keep in mind that guests like to visit places that make them feel welcome and safe.

Guest bloggers know that where they write reflects on their reputation as a blogger, so be honest about whether our blog is ready to offer that. And, of course, personal blogs might be better off without guest bloggers. We have to decide what we want to do.

Take Action: Determine what kind of content your blog is lacking. Create a guest-blogger policy that is clear and concise. Find guest bloggers, based on these two things, and invite them to participate. Consider new bloggers who are eager for exposure and who show great promise in their writing.

Be A Headliner

Forget about getting our name in the headlines. Let's get our blog's content up in headlines. Good ones.

With our blog being read on all kinds of platforms, the headlines for each post have never been so important.

From feed readers to mobile-ready apps, the headlines we use for our blog posts might be the first (and only) thing our reader has to go by when they decide if they want to read or not. They might not see our pretty photos right away, or be impressed by our slick blog template. When it comes to content, the headline carries the weight of getting people to read.

Headlines should be direct, and not trying to trick people or be so clever as to be obscure. Their job is to tell people what they are about to read.

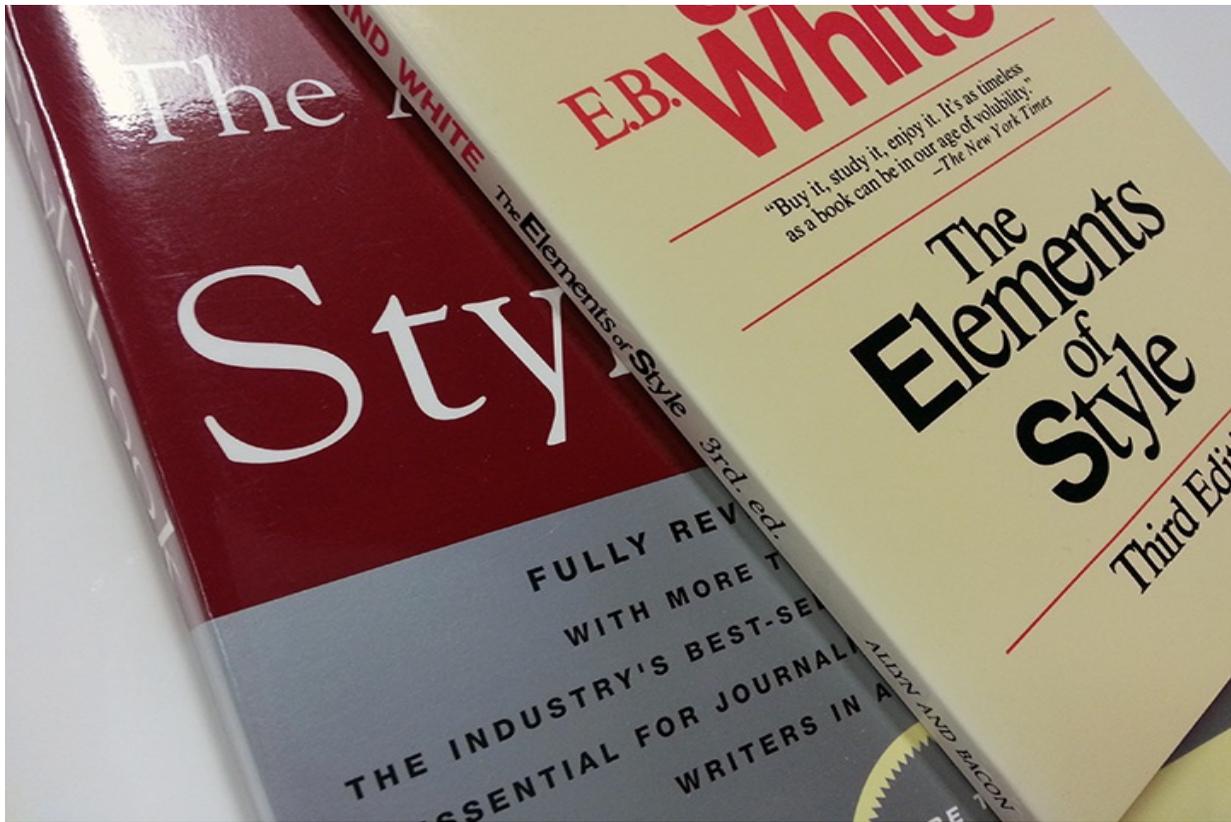
People don't like wasting time and don't like to be made the fool of. They'll only fall for it once. This doesn't mean that there is no place for a clever headline or play on words; we just have to be sure we're not lying or leading our reader on.

Headlines that ask questions or specifically state an action the reader can expect to make are also great ways to hook readers. Some of the best headline advice can be found [here](#).

Headlines are what bring our readers in. Perhaps this will be part of our "get more readers" sub-goals: improving our headlines.

Take Action: Brainstorm a list of headlines that would make you stop and read. Don't worry about whether they seem ridiculous or even applicable to your blog. From that list, choose ten that you could use. Write those posts.

Create A Style Guide For Your Team Blog



A style guide is meant to keep multiple authors on the same page, which could be a complicated thing.

It could have every last bit of information your blog writers need to know, answering every question they might ever have. It could be complex and complete and, unfortunately, a reason for your team to blog terribly.

Why would blogging suffer because of a comprehensive style guide?

A Style Guide You Can Work With

Whether you call it your editorial guidelines, editorial policy, or a style guide, it should make your blogging better, for both the writers and the readers. It gives the writers the guidelines and the readers a sense that there is congruency across the blog(s).

When To Use An Informal Guide

You may be a large brand with a large team, and need a style guide that encompasses blogging, magazine or other print writing, public relations, and so on. A more traditional style guide is probably what you'd prefer, with more detail and use case scenarios.

Most blogs, however, favor the personalities of writers coming through a bit, since they want to avoid that "corporate speak" and uniformity that sometimes comes from a strict style guide. A more informal set of guidelines allows personality to show through in the writing.

An informal guide also works well if you have one person handling the proofing or copyediting. That person can make sure the important things, as well as any grammatical issues, are taken care of.

Understand that you don't have to re-invent the wheel, and that you can use other style guides that are [already available](#) for things like grammar and punctuation, if necessary. Refer a writer who seems to need those tips to an [established guide](#) instead of recreating it for everyone within your own. Not all writers need the burden of that level of detail.

A Low Barrier To Entry

A low barrier to entry is especially important for something like blogging where maybe not everyone on your team is comfortable with writing. Getting them to agree to blogging was difficult enough. Do you really want to drop a 12-page style guide on their desk and tell them they need to follow it?

Reduce as many creative and courage barriers as you can for your blogging team. Don't let a complex style guide get in the way of team members trying to creating content.

What Your Style Guide Looks Like

Now that you've decided on a broad and informal style guide that preserves the personality of your writers, there are few things you should include and a few to leave out if you want it to work well.

Things To Include In Your Informal Style Guide

Your style guide includes those general things that make your blog unique.

- How you reference your own products. We have had a few product name changes, as well as new products introduced, and we had to be sure the team was referring and spelling them in the same way on the blogs as well as on social media.
- What you write about. If your team is large enough that not everyone is aware of the content your blog covers, first you should require everyone to read your blog, and then you should summarize the content found on your blog.
- How you use your blogging platform. We use WordPress, and we have several plugins that must be used for each post. Writers should know about designating a featured image, SEO plugins, [CoSchedule](#) plugin, etc.
- Any code or in-post techniques you use. We have code that we use to create a click-to-tweet, quote, or question box. You might have some classes or callouts that you use in a certain way. For example, blue boxes for information, or yellow boxes for a call to action. Include the code necessary to use these systems.
- How you handle links in posts. Do you want writers to find an older post on your blog to link to? Do they need to be careful of what kind of sites they link to? Give them some guidelines on what you expect.
- How you handle social media and conversation. We like to have the writers of our blog posts respond to the comments of their own posts. Give your writers a guide on how they should respond not just in the style of writing, but the manner and attitude they should use, too.
- How the blogging process happens. Give your writers a general feel for what the editorial process of the blog is. It helps them understand deadlines, requests, and changes to their writing that they may see and put it into perspective.

Some of these things might be taken care of by your copy editor.

Even if your copy editor handles most of these tasks at the end, it doesn't hurt to at least let the team know how things work in general. You can leave out detail, but give them a heads up so they understand how the post they wrote ended up looking as it did on the blog.

Things To Leave Out Of Your Style Guide

There are things your writers don't have to know, and shouldn't be included in the style guide.

- Design or visual elements. These are things the designer needs to know, not the writers. Colors, fonts, and other design decisions will have an effect on the final product, but your writers don't need to be bothered with it. Again, remove barriers and make the writing process as straightforward as possible. Make a style guide for designers, and leave the writers free to write.
- Pages and pages of details. Again, you don't need to instruct them on nouns and verbs, or the proper spelling of the most commonly misspelled words. Frankly, they have access to online search. They can look that up. Don't drown them in details so their writing freezes up.
- Talking points. It's not unreasonable to put constraints on content as far as appropriateness is concerned. You do not want links or references to things that are offensive. On the other hand, be cautious in how you restrict your writing team. Find a way to be positive about it instead of negative, i.e. "we write about this" as opposed to "do not say this." You likely have team members with differing opinions on things. Different view points give your readers value. Forcing the same view point is less about cohesiveness and more about restriction.

As always, consider your editorial process.

If you have team members that proofread and edit all blog posts before publishing, let them handle the more detailed issues. They're going to finalize and clean it up anyway, so remove as many barriers as possible from your writers so that they can get into the business of writing.

What Our Style Guide Looks Like

[Our style guide here at Todaymade](#) is less about specifics, and more about a general structure that allows the personalities of the writers to show through.

We don't have a style guide with a complex set of guidelines. We don't tell the authors how to choose categories, how to use SEO plugins, and how to set up our [CoSchedule](#) plugin. Why?

We're a small team, and have a copy editor (me).

The goal is to get everyone writing and thinking. The editing and final tweaking of the post will be handled at the end by one person. That means we remove as many barriers to entry, when it comes to blogging, as we can.

The main thing that the writers on our team need, according to our guide, are solid ideas, substantial and unique content, and a heads-up on what might happen to the post on its way through the final editing process. That's pretty much it.

You want a level of uniformity to your blogs so there is cohesiveness, but you don't want to kill personality and flavor. That's where an informal and encouraging style guide comes into play. Use your style guide as a way to give your blog posts your brand's particular flavor, not kill it.

There's Only 1 Thing That Matters To Writing A Great Blog



There is only one big secret to a successful blog, yet it is the place that we fail the most often. Blogs fail to stay consistent.

It has never been easier to share our ideas with the world, but publishing is only the first step. The next step is difficult, and it involves doing the same thing every day for a long period of time, having faith that the rewards will pay off in the long run.

Consistency = Trust

Some call it the social media age, while others may prefer the “age of the customer.”

Either way, things have changed and brands need to build trust with their audience more than ever before. People buy things from people they know, like and trust. The same rule applies to a blogger. People read blogs from people they know, like and trust.

Key Idea: Publishing consistently makes you reliable, and that makes you someone that your readers will trust.

Consistency = Traffic

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand that the more content you publish, the more visits you will receive.

There is a direct correlation to consistent publishing and growing traffic. As people learn your publishing schedule, they will become more likely to subscribe to your RSS feed or follow you on Facebook or Twitter. This means that they will be more likely to visit your site multiple times per week. Simple math with results that really pay off.

Key Idea: The more often you publish, the more often people will frequent your site. It is a one-to-many relationship.

Consistency = SEO

Google loves a website with frequent and fresh content.

The more you write and publish, the more you create incentives for Google to come back again. It is important always remember that your blog is for **both people and robots**. Google, Bing, and Yahoo all have bots working overtime to find the latest and greatest content on the web. Every time you publish you throw your name in that hat.

Key Idea: Good blogs get a majority of their traffic from Google. Bottom line? Feed the Google monster.

Consistency = Perfect

We all know that practice makes perfect.

What is practicing, but the act of being consistent? Consistency is practice. There is no end to people telling you that you need to be creating “high-quality” content. While there are many small tweaks and tips that will help you move towards great blogging, the easiest is to just practice more. Train yourself to be great. Any blogger will tell you that when they started, they weren’t really that great. Their paragraphs were too long, their headlines weak, and their ability to connect to the reader was poor. This means that in the beginning your writing will be worse than ever. Hey, the only direction you can go is up right?

Key Idea: Keep writing. Keep practicing. You will get better, and as you do your blog will grow.

Consistency = Authority

Blogging allows you to establish yourself as a subject matter expert.

It is important to keep in mind that the term “expert” doesn’t mean you know more about something than anyone else. Rather, it simply means that you know more about a subject than the average person. This means that others will turn to you for advice and counsel. Consistency on your blog will increase your authority for your reader, and your confidence as a writer. Just think of the what your readers will think when they visit a site with several hundred quality posts, rather than just a few.

Key Idea: As you get better, your authority when writing will also grow. Authority depends on consistency.

Consistency = Content

Write every once and awhile for three months, and you’ve made good progress, but write every day for a year, and you’ll make a dent in the universe.

I promise that you will be amazed at the mountain of content you’ll have at your disposal. This great content can be put to good use. It will provide a starting point for other types of content, like an ebook or a video podcast.

Key Idea: Once your ideas are on paper (or screen) you can mix and match them to create additional touch points for your audience.

How often should I publish a blog post?

The number of weekly blog posts depend upon the stage (or age) of your blog.

If you are just getting started, consistency probably means that you are publishing something unique and new at least three times per week. If you are in an industry with heavy competition, five to seven times per week is probably more appropriate.

This may sound like a lot, but remember, the faster we build our blog, the faster we will reach many of the consistency goals outlined the in this post.

How can I become more consistent?

You must first decide that consistency is a priority for your blog.

There are a lot of things during the day that can distract; there will always be fires to put out. We need to learn to trust in the power of online content and what it can do for our audience. If we don't trust the process, it will be difficult to get results.

Also, remember that a blog isn't the fastest way to build traffic and audience growth – don't start watching your analytics from day one. Blog traffic is one of the best types of traffic you get in the long run.

You'll build your audience slowly, with consistency, and achieve something that most marketing and advertising methods only dream of – trust. Blogging is channel that builds trust with your audience, and consistency is the ONLY way to get it done.

Outsell, Outsmart, And Outbid Your Blogging Competition With Great Customer Service



In business, the goal is has always been to outdo the competition. It may be through a better price, better customer service, or a better product. Every business has to find its secret weapon in order to succeed.

Is a blog really any different?

Nope. Every blog is in competition for readers, even your blog. So, how do you compare to your competition? Do you stand out?

The things that set a good blog apart from other blogs aren't that much different from those things that set a business apart from its competition. While you can't offer a lower price (free is free after all), you can offer better customer service. You can also offer a better product.

Blogging Is Customer Service

The good news for bloggers is that great service and great products go hand-in-hand.

That is, your customer service is your product. Great customer service, for a blogger, happens when you pay close attention to the personal needs of your readers. You find out who they actually are.

Do You Know Who Your Readers Are?

We must get down to the individuals. We must treat people in advertising as we treat them in person. Center on their desires. Consider the person who stands before you with certain expressed desires. However big your business, get down to the units, for those units are all that make size. - Claude C. Hopkins

Usually, when thinking about our audience, the focus tends to be only that we want more of them. More likes, more tweets, and more hits. In other words, the numbers. We love watching the numbers.

Too often, bloggers treat their readers just like the numbers they are looking for.

We use demographics such as age, location, and browser-type to determine how to go about our business of acquiring readers. Does any of that really matter? At the end of the day a person, not a number, will do the subscribing.

How do we become content creators that truly serve our audience?

The "Them" Question

If you haven't asked yourself the question "what's in it for them" yet, then now would be a great time to get started. Why that question? Because that's the question your reader is asking themselves:

"What's in this for me?"

It's all they want to know. They came to read your blog not their benefit, not yours.

Think Usability

Make sure that the design, layout, and workflow of your blog fits their needs.

This is more than a great design or a new WordPress theme. Your blog should be welcoming, easy to read, and [mobile friendly](#). You should create an experiences that makes reading and sharing easy wherever your reader chooses to do it.

Your content should also be accessible, broken up into small chunks that are easy to follow and understand. Bulleted lists, block quotes, and great images can go a long way in making things readable.

The idea is that you have to create a pleasurable experience for your audience. Your blog should be:

- Mobile friendly.
- Great design that's easy to read.
- Well formatted posts that are easy to follow.
- Include images, charts, and visual elements.

How does the usability of your blog stand up to your competition? Are you barraging your visitors with pop-ups, ads, and sharing buttons? Is your sidebar distracting, full of too many things they could be doing other than reading your blog? Is this really what's best for them?

Put your reader first, not your subscription list.

Think Readability

Great blog posts are easy to read, and this isn't just because they are written at an 8th grade level. Great blogs are readable because they are full of information that readers care about.

As a publisher, your content should be easy to understand. New visitors should quickly understand your topic, and understand why they should be paying attention to what you have to say.

Headlines are also a major factor on a great blog. They should be directed at serving the particular needs and interests of your reader. When it comes to reading your blog, it should be:

- Conversational and easy to read.
- Topical and well-focused.
- Focused, with great headlines.

Bloggers often hear people say that proofreading and grammar just don't matter when they blog, that it's more important to generate content rather than get tripped up in those details.

That's wrong!

You already know you have to make your blog easy to read. This includes correct spelling and grammar so your reader isn't distracted. Poor writing style will hide your great ideas.

Always think back to your readers. Do everything you can to make your blog more readable to them.

Think Helpful

To be geared towards a human audience, your blog must be focused on being helpful.

This doesn't mean that every post has to be a step-by-step how-to guide, but it should help your readers accomplish a goal. That goal might be one of staying informed on the latest information within a particular industry, making them laugh, or helping them stay motivated. It doesn't have to involve a how-to guide.

Whatever you write, just remember that you are in the business of serving your audience.

It's easy to make the mistake of selling while you're writing. On a good blog, this has no place.

- Stop selling, and be helpful instead.
- Serve your audience's actual needs.
- Help readers accomplish a goal, whatever that might be.

Your blog has a job. It needs to help your readers achieve a goal. What is yours helping them do?

Out-Serve Your Competition

Your readers have no shortage of options when it comes to what they should spend their time reading.

The web has made content publishing easy for us, but it's done the same for everyone else, too. There's no shortage of competition. It takes hard work to know and focus on your readers. To succeed, your content has to do more than merely exist.

Reading comments, developing discussions, and visiting other successful blogs are other great ways to better understand our audience.

The key to success is learning to see past the surface and getting to the core of what motivates your readers. What are you really helping them do? Are you helping them grow their business, improve their writing, or maybe mend a fractured business relationship?

Once you understand the purpose that your readers see in our blog, you begin to understand how to serve them best, and that's what brings better customer service, and a better product.

Out-Blog Your Competition By Developing A Spirit Of Learning



For a blogger, defining the competition isn't always an easy thing to do.

At first glance, it would seem we're competing against other bloggers. More often than not, that isn't the case. That would be far too simple. Our real competition is all of the other things that our readers could be doing. Playing games on their iPhone, watching television, or heck, even sleeping.

How do we outshine such a massive field of competition? One of the most reliable methods is to develop a spirit of learning.

Yes, learning. A spirit of learning is one of the most important tools that a blogger needs for success, and it comes in two very different forms.

1) Learning By Reading

Did you know that the average millionaire reads a book a month?

That may not seem like a lot at first, but consider that many of us only read when absolutely necessary. In that light, reading a book a month is put in perspective. We realize we don't read 12 books in a year.

Reading, of course, is the most obvious form of learning, and it is a huge asset for bloggers. Books, blogs, white papers, and reports are all important forms of reading that we should be participating in on a daily basis. This reading helps keep our thinking and subsequent ideas sharp. Unfortunately, after college many of us lose the habit of reading to learn. We remember such books as boring and required – not overly motivating and enjoyable.

Realize that the most successful people are also avid readers.

Reading Is Thinking

We [encourage reading](#) here at Todaymade. I cannot tell you how many blog posts I have written after being prompted by a book. Just yesterday, I wrote a post about [usability in web application design](#) that was inspired by a book I was reading. Many times, the purpose and point of the book is far less important than the ideas that it generates in you. Great ideas, and therefore blog posts, come from reading.

Reading Is Writing

You may have heard it said that the best readers are often the best writers. I doubt there is a lot of hard evidence on this (maybe there is) but it certainly has been true for me. Practice makes perfect, and while the best practice is to simply start writing – reading is a great way to study the masters, and learn how to communicate ideas through the written word.

5 Steps To Making Reading A Habit

For me, reading wasn't always a habit. In fact, like many of you, I had several years of absence from the sport of reading after my college years. Picking it up again wasn't natural; it took concerted effort.

At the beginning, I relied primarily on audiobooks. It worked with my time schedule and was a good place to start. This reliance soon grew into a new love for the written word that now encompasses all formats – audio, ebook, and print. There are a basic methods that we can all follow to make a reading a habit in our own lives.

1. Find Some Variety

At any given time, I like to have 2-3 books in my reading cycle. This usually includes one audiobook and two regular books (print or ebook). I have found that this system keeps me constantly engaged. If I am getting bored with one, I can simply switch to another for a few days. I also try to maintain a variety of topics. For this to work, I allow myself at least one fiction book per year (or so).

2. Select Your Topics Wisely

It is important to read the books that you will enjoy the most, not necessarily the ones that you feel you should read. That or, create a mix of the two. If you force yourself to read books that you aren't that interested in right at the start, you will be much more likely to become bored and move to other things – like television.

3. Create A Consistent Reading Schedule

My goal is to set aside a bit of time at the end of each day to make progress of my reading. The length of time can vary, but I usually devote at least 20-30 minutes of reading in each day. The length of time isn't all that important in the beginning. It is better to start with what you're able to manage, and then increase your reading time as you go.

4. Track Your Progress

For personal tracking, I keep a simple document listing the books that I have read so far during the year. The social network [Goodreads](#) can also be a good way to track progress and thoughts. This is an important step, particularly for those who are motivated by trackable results, as it will help you visualize your success.

5. Take Notes

A fellow Todaymade team member recently mentioned that [he likes to take notes as he reads](#) to keep himself awake and engaged. I have also found this to be true. I use Evernote to track thoughts and quotes from the books I read.

This is an important habit, and it will help you see how reading and learning works itself into whatever it is that you do. As a blogger, you will develop great material for posts from those notes. When I am stumped for a topic, I often dig through my notes to find thoughts that I forgot I even had.

2) Learning By Doing

The second method for learning is to learn by doing. As a blogger, developing new ideas and methods for growth is an important part of your job. You will constantly be finding, cataloging, and looking back on ideas for inspiration. You may get an idea for a blog post, a promotion or contest, or even another way to market what you do. Using what you have learned helps guide you in changes and solid experiments that will set your blog apart.

Change Stuff

Bloggers can easily become slave to their schedule if they aren't careful. We all set goals – say, 10 posts per month, or week. Before too long, we fall into a rut and lose momentum. We're writing merely to get the job done, and our blogging becomes one of just output, with no input refreshing the well.

As bloggers, we need to realize that changing how we do things every once and awhile is an important part of the learning process. As you look to transform your blogging lifestyle into one of learning, make sure that you incorporate iteration and experimentation into your process.

Evaluate The Response

As you make changes, it is absolutely vital that you develop a method for tracking your progress.

Are the changes that you are making resulting in viable growth for you and your audience? This could come from more readers, more comments, or even more shares on various social networks. The key here is that you need to know that changes are actually doing what they intended to do. If they aren't, they probably aren't worth your time.

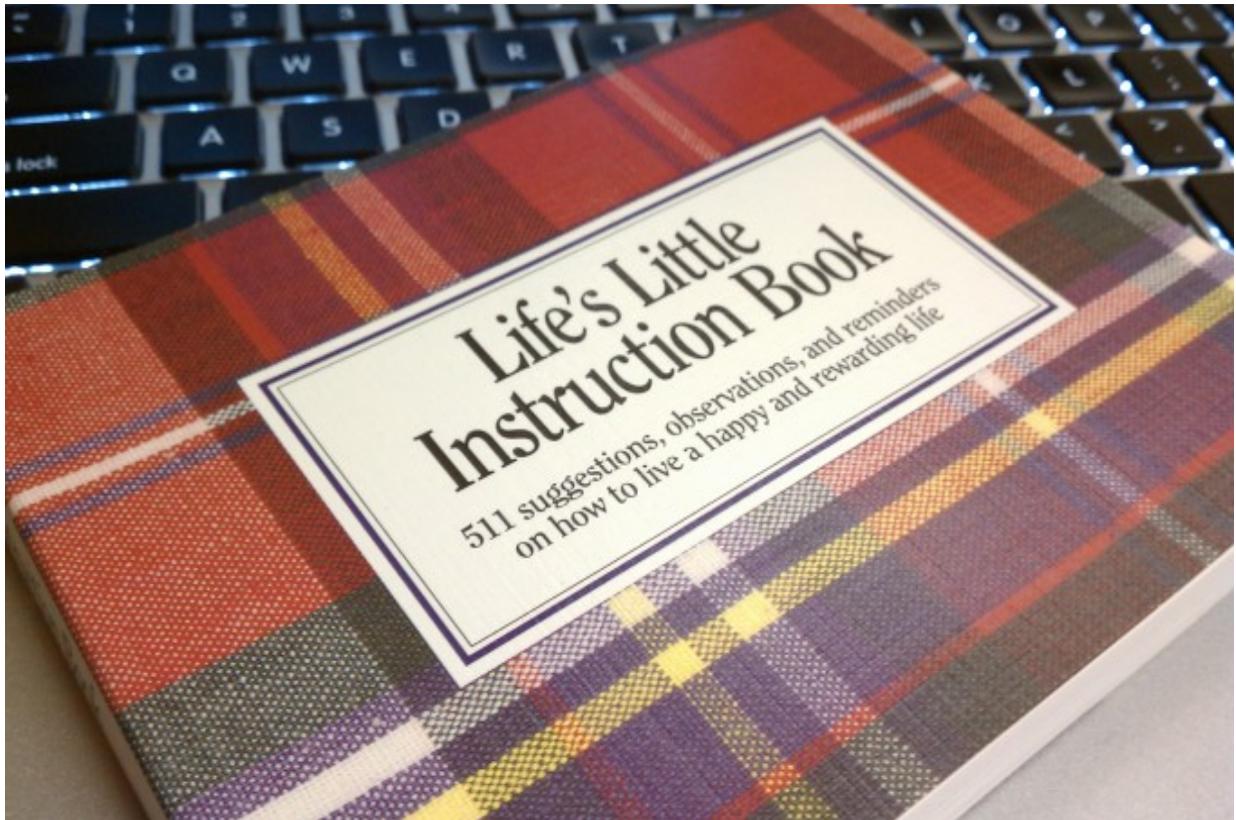
Refine Your Methods

If you evaluate and track your methods and results, you should be able to formalize refined ideas that will carry you forward. You may choose to abandon some ideas that didn't perform so well, but the ones that you keep should be refined and incorporated into your daily workflow.

Learn To Be Better

The big goal at the end of the day is to simply become a better blogger than you were the day before. This isn't always easy, but it is possible, if we choose to develop a simple spirit of learning.

How To Blog And Change The World



When I graduated from high school back in 1992, one of the gifts I received was a copy of H. Jackson Brown, Jr.'s *Life's Little Instruction Book*. I've had the book on my bookshelf through many moves. Every few years I pick it up and read it. I've found that the strange mix of advice in it has weathered time well.

And, like any truly good advice, it applies across a broad range of situations. Even blogging.

Leave Everything A Little Better Than You Found It.

When I write, I think of the end result. Will it make my readers laugh? Try a new experience? Connect with me on a personal level? Contemplate important things about life? Improve themselves? Or will they regret reading?

I often miss the mark, I'll admit.

Sometimes I blog for myself instead of my reader (which only works for my mom who will read anything I write). In the back of my mind, though, is the reality that I want my readers to feel better for having read my writing. I want to leave them a little better off by the end of the last sentence than when they started. I want them to feel glad that they took the time to read, maybe even feeling a little bit of hope, or renewed energy and effort for the rest of the day.

Learn To Listen. Opportunity Sometimes Knocks Very Softly.

Where do you listen, as a blogger?

The comments section, certainly. Your readers will tell you a lot, and even if it's done in a not-so-kind way, finding a way to really listen to what is said without taking it personally is important.

There might be opportunity to improve, make a negative a positive, grow your network, or, in a worst-case scenario, learn who not to listen to. Identifying opportunity isn't as obvious as you think. It's often in a difficult disguise.

We can also listen on other blogs that we read. We can listen to what other bloggers are saying, what comments they receive, and consider how that fits into how and what we write. We get ideas, make connections, and learn from their mistakes. We must listen. We can't always be talking.

Don't Use Time Or Words Carelessly. Neither Can Be Retrieved.

If you've blogged for any amount of time, it is inevitable that you will write something you wish you could take back. It might be as benign as rough beginner writing, or as regretful as brash statements about others.

Over time, if no one latches onto your writing, you might be fortunate enough that it fades away quietly. Or it might get snapped up, linked, republished, and turned into something you have no control over anymore.

When blogging, use the draft option.

Write immediately and with immediacy to capture that fresh inspiration and raw emotion. Then save it as a draft. Wait before you publish, even if just an hour. Revisit, refine, and reconsider, especially if your writing is going to rock the boat. Let your initial anger settle down into a well-thought response.

Publish when you're sure so you can stand by what you write.

Become The Most Positive And Enthusiastic Person You Know.

I have been known to comment that someone was "too happy", meaning that sometimes it is difficult to be around someone who is overly upbeat and who seems to force positivity on everyone. That behavior only serves to emphasize the unhappy things we feel by comparison, or, at the very least, is exhausting after continued exposure.

It is possible to write in a way that is positive and enthusiastic without being overbearing and fake.

Your writing doesn't have to be peppered with quick-fix super-happy sound bites, but showing some enthusiasm and a determined attempt at a positive outlook helps your reader do the same. This is particularly true when you can acknowledge a challenge or difficulty and comment on it with a positive overtone.

You don't write to make your reader feel badly about not being happy; you write to lead them into it genuinely on their own.

Never Overestimate Your Power To Change Others.

You can't write a blog post to change others. You'll miss the mark if that is your sole goal.

You can write a blog post that connects with your reader, and you can write a post your reader enjoys. You can write a post that readers thank you for, and you can write a post that inspires your reader. You can write a post that teaches, helps, hopes, and encourages. You can write with the idea of bringing about change in others.

But you cannot write with a focus on guaranteeing a change in others. Blog posts that have a goal of changing others polarize and divide more than anything. They solidify your reader against change.

Having said that...

Never Underestimate Your Power To Change Yourself.

...you can write to change yourself.

Ask any blogger, and you'll often find that the process of writing usually ends up changing the writer.

While trying to write for your reader, you find yourself understanding your own thoughts and reasons better. You grasp your personal philosophy. You realize what you hadn't before. When you sit down with the goal of teaching or helping or encouraging your reader, you end up changing yourself.

How do you change the world with your blog?

You change yourself. That changes the world around you. That's your power as a writer and blogger.

Turn Your Blog Into An Online Powerhouse

You've got the basics on how to keep your blog alive. Are you ready to take your blog to the next level?

We'll show you how to get more readers and expand your blog's influence, using content marketing. You want to write to an actual audience, and we'll show you how to build a loyal one with our [Content Marketing For Real People](#) course.



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blogging and
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