BLOGGING CRASH COURSE

HOW TO WRITE A BLOG POST (EVEN IF YOU DON’T WANT TO).
**1. WRITE QUICKLY**

**Write a headline.** You can change it later.

**Write everything.** Start writing down all the ideas that come to you, in no particular order with complete disregard for grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Use a word bank if you need to.

**Write as it comes to you.** If the post is due in the future, that free-form draft is where you will dump all post-related thoughts and links that simmer during the time before the post is finished.

**2. WRITE SLOWLY**

**Go back. Look at what you wrote.**

**Choose your angle / viewpoint.** Who are you writing as? What is your voice? This is not the same as who you are writing to, but they can be connected. Understanding how you are talking will affect what you say. Keep a consistent voice through the post. Some of these voices may come naturally to you. Try one that doesn’t and see how it makes you rethink the same topic.

- Teacher - here to teach.
- Insider - have inside “secret” knowledge
- Outsider - questioning, asking what those who don’t know want asked.
- Expert - expressing authority and instilling confidence
- Newbie - writing about something with the fresh eyes of someone new to the topic
- Observer - more philosophical than plain outsider, using observations to create theories
- Other _______

**Pull it together.** Put what you’ve written into the correct voice, and pull it together into paragraphs. Pull those paragraphs into related sections.

**Decide a basic outline.** You have your content. You’ve pulled it together and have a better idea of what you’re working with. Now organize it. You don’t have to create a formal outline, but think in an outline format (main ideas, sub ideas). Move your content sections around to fit this outline. Add content where you find gaps in the outline. Build your outline on what the topic or idea needs, not on what you have written, or you will conveniently forget to fill in the gaps in your ideas.

- Are things in logical order? Do they need to be? Does one thing lead to the logical next?
- Does it answer at least three of the main reader questions? (who, what, why, when, where, how)

**Write subheads.** Subheadings should be compelling enough to catch the reader who is only there to skim your content.

- Do they fit your outline?
- If the reader only had your subheadings to go on, would he or she still know what your post was about?

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**WORD BANK**

A word bank is a place to leave all the words that come to mind as you brainstorm the topic. You don’t have to associate them with anything, or figure out how you might use them. They are simply a place to put them to refer to later. You might find interesting connections or contradictions in a word bank that can be used in the theory of your post.

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**WHY DRAFT?**

Having a draft post means you know of the idea. Being aware of it makes you see the topic in unusual connections as you read or participate in your day. Without starting the draft, you won’t have a place to leave that research or those random thoughts, and it is likely you wouldn’t have thought of them in the first place without the conscious decision to start a draft and write on the topic.
3. BURN

- Remove every use of the word “really.”
- Remove adverbs, those words that end in -ly. Most aren’t necessary. Find a different way to say “it was incredibly slow.” Show, not tell, even if it means another paragraph with a story.
- Remove most uses of “I think” and “I believe.” Of course you think or believe it. You’re writing it.
- Cut the paragraph that you want to keep that seems to be so hard to get to work. You can add parts of it, or the idea it contained, later.
- Remove your favorite sentences and phrases that are so precious. Are they necessary? Simpler words will do the job in most cases.
- Cut repeat content. Make sure you’re not repeating the same ideas with different words. Say an idea once, and say it well that one time.
- You may realize you have two ideas at work in your post, and that’s where the struggle is coming from. Cut out the extra idea and save it for another post. Clarity will appear when that happens.
- Watch for repeated words. Words that you’ve used in too close a proximity is tiring to the reader. Replace any word you’ve used within the previous two sentences. Find a different word.

4. RETURN

Is anyone going to want to read it? Polish it up so they do.
- In some blogs, the introduction to the post is followed by the “read more” tag. You must make the reader actually want to read more. Write a short, tight introduction with a cliffhanger before that break.
- A cliffhanger is an implied question, or a suggestion that they’re missing out on something important if they don’t keep reading. It’s cutting the story or the information right at the crucial point of curiosity.
- Mix short declarative sentences with complex compound sentences.

CREATE, KILL, REVIVE

You created. You killed. Now revive. It’s easier in this order. You have to get the ideas out of your mind without self-editing, you have to kill the lazy words and ideas that you are holding too dear, and you have to find a way to bring it back to life.

EXTRA: HOW WILL YOU BLOG

There are many different approaches to blogging.

1. Workflow: Multiple drafts in progress? One at a time?
2. Tools: Write and draft in the blogging software, or use outside tools?
WORKSHEET: PRE-WRITE

BLOG TOPIC
What is the topic(s) of your blog?

POST TOPIC
What is the topic of your post?

(I DON’T KNOW WHAT TO WRITE)

CHOOSE ONE BELOW
1. I wish someone would explain ______ to me.
2. I have this really great story to tell you.
3. It is so annoying when ______.
4. The thing I know the best is ______.
5. More people should know how to ______.
6. I want to tell people about a product I used.
7. I should probably let people know about a project I’m working on.

APPLY THE CORRESPONDING ACTION AS YOU WRITE QUICKLY:
1. Start researching. The reason you don’t take the time to learn about it is you feel like you don’t have time for research that doesn’t have to do with work. Now it’s work. Research without guilt.

2. Does it have a point? And, can you make that point relevant to the topic of the blog? Can you give the reader something to do at the end? Can you pull some practical how-to tips out of your experience?

3. Don’t just rant. Explain why it annoys you because obviously, it is something important to you. Why is it important to you? What is the fallacy or mistake that is making it an issue? Are there solutions? What can you offer your reader to do, besides making them upset?

4. Talk about what you know best. Make sure you write it for the correct audience (newbie, industry insider, etc.).

5. Tell why people should do it, how they should do it, and how they can get started right now.

6. Disclose any affiliate links. Tell the reason or story behind using the product. Discuss what happened. Tell what’s good, what’s bad, and if you’d recommend it overall. Be honest.

7. Tell the reader why you started the project, what you hope to accomplish, where you’re at now, what you’ve learned along the way, and what’s up next.

1 WRITE QUICKLY

WRITE 3 HEADLINES FOR YOUR POST
1.
2.
3.

WRITE EVERYTHING
Begin the “write everything” and “write as it comes to you” process in your blog or draft software.
2 WRITE SLOWLY

CHOOSE YOUR ANGLE / VIEWPOINT
1. Teacher
2. Insider
3. Outsider
4. Expert
5. Newbie
6. Observer
7. Other

PUT YOUR CONTENT INTO THE SUBHEADING SECTIONS.
Work within your blog software.
1. Introduce and Entice
2. Explain, Persuade, or Discuss
3. Conclude

WRITE SUBHEADINGS.
Write compelling subheadings that fit your outline.

BUILD AN OUTLINE FOR YOUR BLOG
Work within your blog software.
1. Introduce and Entice
2. Explain, Persuade, or Discuss
3. Conclude

DOES IT FIT YOUR ANGLE / VIEWPOINT?
Keep the same voice throughout.

DID YOU ANSWER AT LEAST 3 OF THESE?
Which ones? List how you did it.
1. Who
2. What
3. Why
4. When
5. Where
6. How
RETURN TO YOUR SECOND DRAFT AND REMOVE:

1. Every use of the word “really.”

2. Any word that ends in -ly (adverbs) that doesn’t have to be there for sentence structure.

3. Any use of “I think” and “I believe.”

4. Any sentence or paragraph you think is brilliant but can’t get others paragraphs to fit with it. Replace it entirely if your post requires the thought it contained.

5. Any sentence that just feels clunky. Rewrite it with new words, half as long.

6. Any word that has been used in the previous two sentences. Replace with a different synonym.

7. Any ideas you’ve already stated before.
HOW TO WRITE A BLOG POST
YOU DON’T WANT TO WRITE

You may have been assigned a post to write. It’s common in a team blog, but it also happens if you have your own blog and you’re serious about blogging regularly and have created headlines and ideas ahead of time. Not every idea you’ll feel like writing later, and not every post is one you will be inspired to write. The personal blogger who doesn’t care if anyone reads his blog or not is the only one who gets the luxury of writing when they “feel inspired”, though these often end up being the blogs that have six entries and then die.

1. USE YOUR OWN QUESTIONS

Break the topic down into your own immediate questions. If you are assigned a post topic that you don’t know a thing about, that’s even better. You have lots of questions which puts you into the perfect mindset of the eventual reader, so start researching the answers to those questions. If you answer your questions, you’ll probably be hitting on many of the same your reader has.

2. DECIDE WHAT THE POINT IS

Just because you’ve been assigned a post with the headline “Why You Should Never Buy Brown Cats” doesn’t mean the conclusion is laid out. That headline leaves a lot of wiggle room, and at most you’re only limited in your penultimate conclusion to “don’t buy brown cats.” Maybe your conclusion is:

- You shouldn’t buy brown cats on Tuesdays.
- You should only buy brown dogs.
- You should not buy, but can receive as a gift, brown cats.

Your research from step one, your own personal gut feeling as you research, and hopefully, your creativity will help you come up with a conclusion that hooks. The headline and idea is just a springboard and nothing more.

3. DECIDE ON YOUR APPROACH

An uninteresting topic can become completely fascinating if it is approached from a unique perspective. That boring post that you’re supposed to write about “What’s New In Corduroy Pants” could be extremely fascinating if you wrote it from the perspective of the sewing machine used to make the pants.

You might approach your topic with a historic view, change up the verb tense, write something as a how-to post that you would never think of as needing a how-to (“How To Order At Starbucks And Change The World”), interviews, as a soliloquy or one-sided conversation, relating a personal story…the possibilities are endless.
4. BUILD ON THE DEFAULT SCAFFOLDING

When you aren’t particularly inspired and aren’t feeling creative and are just banging out a post to get it done, it’s OK to use the basic blog post scaffolding below.

1. **Introduction that ends in a hook.**

2. **Body made up of at least three:**
   - Of your top three questions/answers from research OR
   - Discussion or provocative points OR
   - Steps or how-to.

   The body of the post should be in a logical progression of thought, and should provide only what you need to support the point of the post.

3. **Conclusion that sums up the body.**
   It should leave your reader with a task, a bit of hope, or something they can do to make things better.

You shouldn’t get in the habit of your blog posts always looking like the default structure above, because a three-point blog post would be rhythmically boring to your reader day after day. However, if you can’t come up with a creative approach to a topic you don’t want to write, this is your default.

There is a time for inspired writing. It hits randomly, usually in an inconvenient time or location, and you should take advantage of that somehow, whether you’re just scribbling down ideas on paper or in an app, or you’re writing frantically in your blog software and your fingers can’t keep up with your words.

GOOD BLOGGING HABITS

1. Create headlines and ideas for posts all the time. Get in the habit of thinking “that would make a great blog post” when you’re out and about in your daily life.

2. Have a system to put your notes, research, and links into, whether that’s your blogging software or an outside app like Evernote. Consider keeping a small notebook with you for those times when you want to jot a idea down. Yes, paper. It still works.

3. Grow accustomed to remembering your post ideas that are still percolating, and throw links or other ideas into that storage area so that when it comes time to write, you have lots to work with.

4. Set up a schedule to blog, and stick to it. Use these ideas you’ve come up with, and force yourself to write.