
How to blog well

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Good news, authors: having a blog does not mean you have to write about yourself. Those days are gone. Blogs began as personal diaries but nowadays a blog is simply a collection of articles, like an online magazine, and can take many forms: anything from a collection of poetry to writing tips to political opinion pieces. If you think you have a blog in you, here are a few tips for getting started.

Give your blog a beginning and an end

Blogs do not have to be a forever commitment. You can treat a blog like a book project that has a definite beginning and end. The key here is to define the parameters from the outset so your readers know what to expect. My favourite example of this is a blog called *Speak to Strangers* (speaktostrangers.wordpress.com) by Gemma Seltzer. Gemma set out to write 100 words of fiction per day, for 100 days, about an interaction with a stranger. She completed her blog many years ago but it is still online as a self-contained flash fiction project.

Plan the content

A good blog has a pre-defined structure so that readers know what to expect each week or month. Here's a simple exercise to define your structure: imagine your blog is a magazine. What would it look like? Where would it sit in a shop? What would it cover? Write a contents list that clarifies your main topics and types of content (interviews, reviews, feature articles etc). In blogging terms the items on this list are your *categories*. Once you have this, create a second list of *keywords*: these are terms that might come up again and again – and which search engines will use to find your blog. Whenever you sit down to write a new article these two lists should be your starting point.

Don't be afraid of the technology

No matter what your tech skill level, there are blogging options for you. Those who are tech savvy can use Word-Press, a free platform that lets you create your own stand-alone blog. There are other options (such as Blogger) but Word-Press is considered the most flexible platform and has excellent built-in Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) to help people find your blog.

If you prefer not to have the responsibility of your own blog, consider a third-party blog platform. Medium, for example, is essentially a digital magazine for which anyone can register. It does not vet articles and you can publish whatever you want, but the quality is generally quite good and the design is attractive.

For those who are allergic to technology, consider writing articles for other people's blogs. In digital speak this is *guest blogging* and is a great way to create a digital footprint. Do you have author friends with blogs? Or could you contribute something to the SoA's blog, or others such as the Writing Platform or *The Bookseller*? Or any other online magazine or newspaper?

Bring in the readership

Writing blogs is one thing but getting people to read them is quite another. This takes a little effort. Tips:

- use your keywords in the titles and the body of your articles to help search engines find you;

- blog regularly and be predictable with the timing. Weekly or fortnightly is ideal;

- announce your blog to friends, family and your network and include a link to it at the bottom of all of your emails;

- link to it from all of your social media profiles (if you have any) and from places like your SoA bio and your publisher and agent websites.

And most importantly, collaborate. Invite readers to engage with your blog, by asking readers to respond to a question or challenge, for example. Ask other people to write blogs on your website. Are there experts you can interview? If those you collaborate with have an active audience online this will help you to expand your own readership. It is not unusual to do guest blogging for free but the trade-off is to share and publicise the person who has blogged for you. You should expect the same if you blog for others too.

Above all, don't be afraid to start small. You don't have to write 1,000-word articles; you can just post a picture a day if you want to. Your blog should be an extension of you and your writing – a space to explore, experiment and engage with readers. ●

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