

Tips for Writing Successful Blog Posts

There is no one model for a successful or effective blog post, but there are some basic principles that apply across the board. Every blog has a “feel” and that tone is what keeps readers coming back to read more. What’s important is that your readers are engaged, have a sense of what they’re getting when they visit and that they feel like they’re hearing from a person, not an organization. The tips below are good guidelines as you set out to write for a blog.

- ▶ **Be fresh and engaging.** Many authors, particularly academics, approach writing as an exercise in seriousness. Blogging is an opportunity to lighten up and have some fun. Find your voice and be yourself! Try reading your post out loud and see if it sounds like you’d speak (cadence matters when writing too). Write a blog that you would want to read!
- ▶ **Be relevant.** Stay on top of the news—not only within your field, but outside as well. Look for those counterintuitive connections and use your insight and experience to show readers why they’re important.
- ▶ **Be accurate.** Consistent attention to detail and factual accuracy, more than anything else, will win you trust and loyalty from your readers. If you make a mistake, don’t be afraid to fix it and explain what happened.
- ▶ **Make a single point—well.** Your goal is not tell the reader everything they need to know in one post. Your goal is to engage them in an ongoing conversation about your organization, research interest or cause. A reader should be able to summarize your point in one sentence when they’re done.
- ▶ **Tell readers why they should care.** We’re all bombarded with emails, Twitter, Facebook, text messages and calls, so be sure to put yourself in your readers’ place and ask yourself: “Who cares? Why is this important *now*?”
- ▶ **Give examples and tell stories.** Showing is always better than telling. People remember stories and colorful details better than dry facts. Look for stories and examples that will bring your writing to life.
- ▶ **Use links.** Success in the blogosphere is usually measured in terms of reach. When you link to other, credible blogs or news sites in your posts you show your readers where you’re getting your information (think of it like footnotes) and you build goodwill with these other websites.

- ▶ **Use short sentences and paragraphs.** This is the easiest way for people to digest information, especially online. Long paragraphs can look daunting and are difficult to scan. You want your writing to be as accessible as possible.
- ▶ **Use active voice.** When possible, excise all forms of the verb “to be.” For example, don’t say: “Survey respondents were asked to give their opinions on ...” Instead, say: “We asked the survey respondents to give their opinions on ...”
- ▶ **Avoid jargon.** In this world of multiple acronyms and indecipherable inside lingo, simple language is best. It shows consideration for readers who want to engage but don’t necessarily have your expertise.
- ▶ **Don’t preach.** Think of your readers as colleagues—people who share your interests and concerns, although not necessarily your views. Your opinions are important, but they’re best expressed when shared for what they are—your personal views—not dictated from on high.
- ▶ **Ask readers for comments and incorporate their feedback into your posts.** Blogging is an interactive sport. Readers like to know that you’re not only listening but actually giving some thought to what they have to say. From time to time, you may even consider writing an entire post to report reader feedback on a particular topic. Readers who feel engaged and invested in your work are more likely to come back regularly.
- ▶ **Diversify.** It’s fine to revisit an issue that’s particularly important to you, but don’t dwell on it to the exclusion of other interesting topics. Otherwise, readers eventually will get bored and stop reading. Cover your organization or your interest area in all its aspects.

Managing a Blog

- ▶ **Post comments but moderate your blog.** Reader comments are an important part of your blog, and you want to encourage them. Feel free to delete offensive, off-topic or spam comments.
- ▶ **Respond to readers who comment on your posts.** Engage your readers with prompt responses to their comments. Ask follow up questions, encourage others to respond, and always say thank you!
- ▶ **Don’t engage in negative dialogues or arguments with readers.** It’s one thing to disagree with a reader and explain why. It’s another to get into a long, drawn-out, online argument. When the tone shifts negative, or the discussion no longer feels productive, cut it off at that point.

► **Diversify your content.** Push yourself to try new types of posts all the time. This is not a newspaper—feel free to experiment with different types of content. What gets the most visits, comments or shares? What can you produce easily? What’s the most fun? Let the answers to these and other questions guide your blogging. To get started, here are a few blog post suggestions that will add variety to your blog:

- 1. Breaking news.** Share and comment on breaking news, such as a new study or an important policy development.
- 2. Event coverage.** Share stories, photos and videos from a recent event or related conference.
- 3. Conference central.** Use the blog to preview the conference, host blogs during the event (from staff and guests), and to recap and provide resources afterwards.
- 4. Organizational updates.** Provide an organizational update—talk about new staff, project collaborations, and more.
- 5. Stories.** Share stories from the field, regardless of whether they’re connected to the organization or not.
- 6. Quick interviews.** Interview an expert—hear about a new study from a researcher, discuss a program with an advocate, or capture a conversation with a policymaker—and create a simple Q&A post.
- 7. Resources.** Highlight resources and useful tips.
- 8. Useful lists.** Write a numbered list of useful information. These are very popular among blog readers. For example: “Six Ways to Use Your Research to Inform Policymakers” or “Ten Reasons Why More Research is Needed.”
- 9. Outstanding examples.** Highlight outstanding researchers, communities or policymakers.