

Author Directions: Navigating your success in Academic Blogging

Why Should I Blog and Where Do I Start?



Introduction

Blogging, at its most basic level, is the keeping of an online journal (White & Biggs). As an academic, you're probably already aware of blogging and know that it has a role to play in your field, but you may not know the benefits of creating a blog yourself or how to go about it.

This paper will demonstrate the benefits of blogging within academia, how to get started, and will provide key pointers to help make your blog a success.

As you explore the world of academic blogging, use this snapshot to help you answer the following questions:

1. Why should I blog?
2. Where do I begin?
3. What should I keep in mind?
4. What elements do the best blogs include?
5. How can I develop my online presence?

Why Should I Blog?

You may initially hesitate to start a blog – blogs can be time-consuming, and you may worry about being able to generate enough relevant content to maintain an audience – but the benefits outweigh the challenges.

Starting a blog, maintaining it, and making it successful will always take time, which can be a turn-off for some. However, once you get going, it is surprisingly easy to think of content; as an academic you're constantly weighing up ideas, working on papers or presentations, or thinking about your next lecture. It is this very process which lends itself to blog writing, and the ability to make the process personal and focused is what will help you define your audience and draw readers in.

If you're an author, blogging allows you to interact directly with your book's audience, in your own voice, but affords you a bit more space to make your point or explore a subject. A blog can be a great way for you to articulate ideas, offer opinions, ask questions, and take advantage of a long-form communication platform. Additionally, the more references and links to your book there are on the internet, the better it will perform in searches for related terms and keywords.

Blogs can also be an outlet for your creativity, somewhere you can write in a completely different style to the one you use for papers or presentations, as well as a chance to explore ideas and link to information that intrigues you. Some academics think of blogging as a highly

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Blogging allows you to interact directly with your book's audience, explore ideas creatively, and write in a more relaxed, accessible style that you may not be able to use in your everyday professional writing.

effective way of exploring ideas before they teach them, improving their communication skills and the way they present information.

Finally, at its simplest level, blogging is a great way to hone your writing skills, pushing you to write in a more accessible style and to distil a paper or thought process into a brief, readable blog post. Such a skill is highly valuable as researchers strive to ensure their work has as wide a readership as possible – driving tweets, shares, likes, impact, and citations.

Where Do I Begin?

2

With so many paid and free blogging platforms out there, how do you choose the right one for you?

When you are first starting your blog, you may find it useful to choose a more templated, free blogging platform. You will be busy finding your blogger's voice and generating interesting content – why not minimize the work you put into building your blog?

There are several free blogging platforms that provide detailed instructions for setting up a new blog, including:

- ❑ **Wordpress.com** – A popular service that allows you to build a blog, a website, or both. You can import content from most other platforms and there is 24/7 support.
- ❑ **Blogger** – Google's blogging platform provides a selection of easy-to-use templates, can give you a free domain name (or allows you to purchase a custom one), and offers built-in analytics that allow you to see which posts have best captured your audience's interest.
- ❑ **Tumblr** – Tumblr allows you to create a basic but attractive blog in just a few minutes. You can post images, text, videos, and audio, and you can schedule updates via email, SMS, or instant message. There's also the ability to tag photos to make them easier for others to find them (White & Biggs).
- ❑ **LiveJournal** – This service has strong privacy, letting you designate who has access to your posts all the way down to individual post level. However, you should consider that posts on this service don't appear in search engines. Opt for a paid account to avoid advertisements appearing on your blog (White & Biggs).

The list extends beyond just these options, and we encourage you to do your own research to find out which blogging platform will be the most comfortable and productive for you. Just type "free blogging tools" into your search engine and you'll come up with a huge number of hits. From WordPress to Blogger and everything in between, there is bound to be something that suits you and the way you work.

If you're committed to blogging and want more freedom than the free platforms provide, investing in a web domain and self-hosting a blog is also an option.

What Should I Keep In Mind?

Make the most of the time and effort you're spending on your blog.

- ❑ **Your audience.** Who are you blogging for – other academics, industry professionals, students, or another audience? Answering this question and thinking about the needs of the group(s) you're addressing will help you determine what you want to blog about and how you should approach it.
- ❑ **The purpose of your blog.** What are you trying to achieve? Do you want to share information and news about your area(s) of interest? Are you interested in examining the professional or academic culture surrounding your area of interest? Do you want to share tips and suggestions for others in the same field? Giving your blog a clear focus will make it easier for your readers to understand what you have to offer and will help you attract the audience you are looking for.
- ❑ **Your subject matter.** How can you focus your ideas? How does your subject speak to your audience? Finding the right balance between a broad and a narrow focus will help you to craft a blog that communicates a clear standpoint and doesn't get wrapped up in tangential details. And don't forget, if you're an author, to connect your blog content to your book in some way (but resist the urge to plug your work in every post).
- ❑ **Your writing style.** Are you engaging your audience? Is your tone clear, readable, and enjoyable? Would you want to read what you're writing? Blogging doesn't need to be formal – a good post might read like you're talking directly to your reader – but remember, even your biggest fan wants to read something engaging and interesting. That same fan is probably also a lot like every other reader on the Internet, and tends to scan more than read in-depth, so keep it short and sweet.
- ❑ **Your format.** Do you just want to write, or are you open to video blogging? Some posts might lend themselves more easily to one format or another. If you're tech savvy, video blogging might be a fun route to try every now and then to keep your readers interested.
- ❑ **Introducing yourself.** Use your blog's biography section to define yourself as a writer. Think of your biography as the first thing people will see when they search for your topic on Google. You are the face of the topic, and you need to encourage them to keep reading (White & Biggs). To get you started on your bio, begin by answering the questions below:
 1. Who are you?
 2. What do you do?
 3. Why is what you do important?

It's important to consider identities when blogging – yours as a writer and academic, as well as your prospective readers!

What Elements do the Best Blogs Include?

When setting up your own blog, look to bloggers who are already successful.

We have taken some key features from successful blogs and listed them below. There is more to blogging than these features, but using this list as a checklist will help you monitor whether your blog is on the right track.

Consider including:

- Relevant titles for your posts
- Interesting, eye-catching images or videos that illustrate your posts
- Tags that are related to the posts' subjects
- A length of under 1,000 words (as a general guideline) for each post
- Organized, engaging, and consistent updates – the best blogs are updated daily, if not hourly (White & Biggs)
- Digestible content such as top 10 lists – these are effective because they allow readers to quickly absorb information without having to sift through too much verbiage
- Clean spelling and grammar – it is important to find your own voice, but don't forget the rules of language (White & Biggs)
- Links to related material, websites, and blogs, as well as links to other relevant posts that you've written

How Can I Develop My Online Presence?

You're writing, but are you promoting and effectively sharing what you've written?

To drive traffic to your blog, you need to promote it. Use channels like Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and LinkedIn, as well as any relevant academic networking sites, to let your colleagues, friends, and family know that you're blogging, and encourage them to get the word out, too. This tactic allows you to "push" information to each of these networks every time you create a new post, enabling you to share your updates quickly and easily but also, just as importantly, motivating others to share your content, too.

Integrating all your communications means minimum effort for maximum return – you send information out to your network, your network shares it with their networks, and so on. The best bloggers also regularly engage with other bloggers by linking to their content and commenting on their posts, making blogging a very social activity.

For tips on promoting your work on social media, download our [Snapshot: 5 Key Tips for Authors Using Social Media](#)



You can also share your post on sites such as [Reddit](#), [Medium](#) or the [Guardian Higher Education Professional Network](#). If you think your posts are worth highlighting and bringing to a wider audience, there's a wealth of ways to share. Guest blogging on other related sites is also a great way to get your name out to a community of readers, not to mention develop relationships with others who are blogging about similar topics.

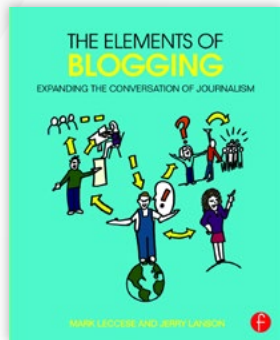
Conclusion

Writing a blog will be time consuming and requires consistent hard work, but if done correctly, it allows you to develop your writing skills, provides you with a creative outlet, and increases your exposure in your field. Don't be discouraged or intimidated by the multitude of blogs already in existence – think of this as an opportunity to attract potential readers, explore diverse blogging platforms, and take advantage of helpful, established resources.

The tips above should help you understand what you want to get out of your blog, how it can help you as an academic professional, and how building a strong online presence can optimize your efforts.

Blogging is just one way you can gain better exposure, not only for yourself, but also for your book. As an author, you know that you are empowered to take certain crucial steps that can help your book reach the right audiences and sell more copies. For more ideas, visit the [Routledge Resources For Authors](#) page.

References



The Elements of Blogging

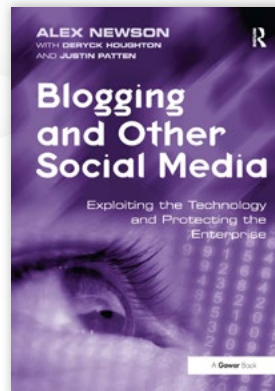
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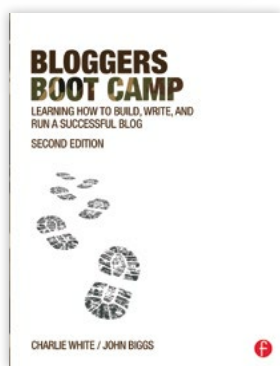
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