

STUDY GUIDE

BLOGGING

SHORT COURSE

HOW TO WORK THROUGH THIS COURSE

Over the following pages, you will move through a logical, self-paced learning experience that can enlighten and educate you.

It is important from the outset to understand that learning about something is not the same as just reading about it. Learning implies a permanent change in what you know and can do.

Anyone can read a book and understand it; but for most people the detail of what you read is largely forgotten.

Reading something once only puts information into short-term memory. It is soon lost if you don't 'work' on it. Studying the same information takes longer, but by thinking about it and processing it you can transfer that information to long-term memory. This way, you will enhance your ability to recall and apply that information for years to come. If you take your time to work through the lessons that follow, you will learn.

Read, Reflect, Research, Revise

Throughout the following pages, you will find not only things to read about, but also things to do:

1. Throughout each lesson, there are suggestions of things to do under the headings "Learn More". These are all sorts of ideas about things you can do in order to explore the subject further.
2. At the end of each lesson, click on the link that says "Click Here to Access your Lesson Review Questions". You will need to be online and logged into the student room to access these. Your answers are evaluated in real time and you will be given a score upon completion. You can repeat these if you need to.

Undertaking these tasks will involve reflection, research and revision of the topics you read about. By repeatedly encountering each topic in different ways, your perspective on each subject will broaden, and the commitment of information to longer term memory will strengthen.

You don't need to undertake all of the suggested tasks if you don't want to; but we strongly recommend that you do some in each lesson, and that you take all of the Lesson Review Questions.

The more time you spend doing these things, the stronger your learning will be.

Completing the Course

After completing all the lessons you will be presented with a final assessment which can also be undertaken online.

Do not attempt to do this until you have worked through all the lessons, and feel like you have learnt the subject well.

Upon finishing this final assessment you will immediately see your final results, and you can save a pdf copy of those results as a "Certificate of Completion".

Welcome Audio

Click the button below to listen to the welcome audio for this course. This feature is supported by most computers and some mobile devices.



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LESSON 1 DEFINING YOUR BLOG

In its simplest form, a blog is a website with a regularly updated set of articles. These articles are generally known as ‘blog posts’, while the person writing the blog is referred to as a ‘blogger’. Anyone can keep a blog, and there is no hard and fast rule about how often a blog should be updated, though there are some expectations based on the blog’s overall purpose.

REASONS PEOPLE KEEP BLOGS

People keep blogs for many reasons, including:

- Building their writing skills through practice
- Marketing a service or product (individual, small business, or large company)
- Building a business brand/identity
- Building a personal brand/identity
- Sharing opinions and reviews
- Lifestyle commentary
- To provide information
- Niche interest e.g. fan reviews, discussion of television/books, birdwatching, etc.
- To tell their story

Bloggers might share their cooking tips and recipes or write about their political views. They may share information about travel and adventure, about their holidays, or recommended places

to go and visit. They might share parenting tips or their experiences of parenthood. Some bloggers may talk about politics or the news. Others might share information on new products, for example, cameras or computers. There is no limit to what a blogger can write about, but a blog should really focus on one specific area. If you are telling your life story by writing a diary in the form of a blog then it will change from day to day, but it is still basically your story. But if you are writing about other topics, it is important to maintain focus. For example, say you want to talk about cameras – what is good or not so good about different brands of camera - then you do not want to start talking about how to take a photograph of a bird in flight halfway through your blog. This is outside your focus, and it is one of the main ways that bloggers can lose sight of what their focus should be.

When deciding on your blog, pick one idea that you want to write about and stick to it. If you have lots of ideas, use different blogs to express them. ‘One blog, one idea’ is a useful rule of thumb.

Running a successful blog takes a lot of planning – many successful bloggers spend a long time researching and reading prior to posting their first piece.

Suggested Tasks: ▼

Throughout this course you will be provided with suggested tasks and reading to aid with your understanding. These will appear in the right hand column. Remember: these tasks are optional. The more you complete, the more you will learn, but in order to complete the course in 20 hours you will need to manage your time well. We suggest you spend about 10 minutes on each task you attempt, and no more than 20 minutes.

This is a good thing, making sure you are prepared and ready, but also be careful to avoid procrastination. You can spend so much time planning that you never actually start the blog. So, don't put off getting started.

A blog needs two things to function:

- Blogger (author)
- Audience

A blog without a blogger is just a website. It is static. A blog without interaction or engagement is much like a print book – it can collect (virtual) dust, but it doesn't truly exist without a reader. Thinking about the purpose of your blog will help ensure you have things to post about and that you engage an audience.

DEVELOPING A PURPOSE FOR YOUR BLOG

It is important to get an idea of the type of blog you want to keep and its overall purpose before delving into the setup. Developing a clear purpose will help you answer many important setup questions, including:

- Topic
- Audience
- Writing style
- Content type and style (e.g. written posts, curated lists, video content, podcasts)

Work Out Why You Are Blogging

It can be difficult to work out why you are blogging and what you intend to achieve, especially if you are new to blogging in general. Start by asking yourself these questions:

- What do I want to do?
- Who am I doing it for?
- Why am I doing this?
- When my readers leave my blog, how do I want them to feel?
- Why do my readers come to my blog?

Write detailed answers. No-one else needs to see your answers, so do not hesitate to explore your thoughts and ideas.

Some examples of answers might be – you are writing your blog to influence opinion, to share your story with others, or to help people with similar interests to your own. Some bloggers may write simply because they want to, and they enjoy doing it. They might want to improve their writing skills or even develop their blog into a book eventually. Others may write because they want to sell something e.g. to sell products or advertising. For example, going back to the camera blog, the blogger might want to sell advertising on their sites for cameras. They might become an affiliate of certain companies and receive money every time someone buys a camera through their blog.

Monetizing your Blog

Before we go further into the purpose of your blog, it is worth considering if you are planning to monetize it. By monetizing a blog, we mean earning money from it. Some bloggers start off with the intention of making money from it. Others may not have any plans to monetize, whilst others may want to start off, get the blog going and then monetize it.

There are different ways to monetize a blog:

- You might sell products. For example, say you make greeting cards, you might write a blog to draw people to your website where you can sell your cards as well.
- You might sell other people's products. For example, you might talk about the products of other people or manufacturers and sell those on your blog.
- You might become an affiliate. An affiliate is someone who joins a company's affiliate programme. Many organisations have affiliate programmes now. You basically are given an advertisement or link to products, which you can use on your blog. If someone then clicks on the advertisement or link and buys the product, the affiliate will then get a payment. This can be quite small or larger, depending on the product that is being sold.
- You might sell advertising on your site.
- Some bloggers can actually gain

money by writing blogs for others.

- You might even write your blog, gain a readership, and so on, with the intention of selling it on to someone else in the future.

So, when thinking of the purpose of your blog, you must also consider if you intend to monetize your blog or not.

Your Mission Statement

Once you have decided on your purpose, you need to have a mission statement.

Here are some examples of mission statements to give you an idea:

- From Cradles to Crayons - provides children from birth through to age 12, living in homeless or low-income situations, with the essential items they need to thrive – at home, at school and at play.
- Prezi - to reinvent how people share knowledge, tell stories, and inspire their audiences to act.
- Tesla - to accelerate the world's transition to sustainable energy.
- TED - spread ideas.

Mission statements can be simple or complex. Also, they do not have to talk about their audience. For example, the TED mission statement does not say who they are spreading ideas to. But TED talks are generally available to anyone who can access them online.

You can also use your answers to the earlier questions to help you write out

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Suggested Tasks

Consider a blog you are familiar with.

Consider if this blog is monetised, and if not, what could be done to monetise it. Discuss this blog with someone else (friend, colleague, family, anyone).

Spend up to 15 minutes doing this.

a mission statement. Commonly used as part of setting a business strategy, a mission statement is 1-3 lines outlining your overall goal and audience. Mission statements include your objectives, so pay special attention to the last two questions:

- When my readers leave my blog, how do I want them to feel?
- Why do my readers come to my blog?

Although they may seem less formal, these questions will help you get to the heart of your objectives because they focus on your audience – and your audience is the ultimate driver for your blog. Mission statements should be:

- Clear
- Direct
- Short

Example

Sam wants to start a cooking blog. He enjoys cooking and sharing food and wants to one day publish a cookbook or host a cooking show online. Sam often uses online forums to provide cooking advice to people starting out in cooking. During the planning phase for his blog, Sam answers some questions to help define the blog's overall purpose.

What do I want to do?

- Post new recipes and help people learn how cooking/recipes actually work. E.g. adding lemon juice at the end of cooking provides a burst of acid which causes flavours to come together and sharpen, while adding acid during cooking helps tenderise the dish by breaking down the cells.

- People who don't have much time to cook but want to cook.

Why am I doing this?

- Cooking is fun.
- Cooking looks hard but it really isn't.
- I love to cook and want other people to share that love.
- I want to publish a book with a mixture of recipes and techniques.
- I want to have a "You can do it Question and Answer" type cooking show online.
- I want people to feel like they can do anything and not be afraid of trying new things like I used to be.

Who am I doing it for?

- People who want to cook but are afraid of recipes with more than four ingredients.
- People just starting out, like college students who have just started cooking for themselves or those who have just left home.

When my readers leave my blog, how do I want them to feel?

- Strong.
- Capable.
- Like they have a plan.
- Like they understand the basics of some cooking concept or idea.

Why do my readers come to my blog?

- They're confused.
- They want to learn how cooking works so they can adapt or make their own recipes.
- They don't know how to get started.
- Cooking seems really hard and they want someone to help them get started.
- They don't understand what "fold egg whites in" means, or why you need a metal or glass bowl for whipping egg whites and stuff like that.
- Their cooking and baking never turns out right and they don't know why.

After you've answered these questions, write your vision statement.

Vision Statement

Think about what you want to achieve over a set period. Write a sentence for what you want in:

- 1 year
- 2 years

- 5 years

Use these sentences to write a vision statement. A vision statement is 2-3 lines that helps you define your end-goal. It focusses on what a blogger aspires to achieve by reaching their mission goal.

Some examples of vision statements:

- A world without Alzheimer's disease. (Alzheimer's Association)
- Realizing the full potential of the internet -- universal access to research and education, full participation in culture -- to drive a new era of development, growth, and productivity. (Creative Commons)
- A computer on every desk and in every home. (Microsoft, when they were founded)

There is no right answer here when it comes to deciding on your mission statement or vision statement. It will be personal to you and your blog. If you have more than one blog, make sure you have a mission statement and vision statement for each one. They may be related, but they should be specific to your blog.

Goal Setting

When setting the goals for your blog, be realistic. Goals keep you motivated and also on track. Goals should be SMART:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable

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Suggested Tasks

Discuss the following questions with a colleague or friend, then write your own mission statement:

If I were starting a new blog, what would it be about and what would I want to do with it?

Who would it be for?

Why would I do this?

How would I want readers to feel after reading this blog?

Why would readers come to this blog?

- Relevant
- Time bound

Let's look at some examples in relation to blogs.

Specific

- 'Improve my blog' is not a specific goal. You want to think how you are going to improve it. For example, improve my blog by adding more images. Improve my blog by checking my grammar and spelling before posting.

Measurable

- 'Increase my readership' is vague. Choose something that is measurable, such as 'increase my blog readership by 100 readers per month, or by 10% per year.'

Achievable

- Can you achieve what you are planning to? It should be realistic, so don't aim to have a million readers within a year. This *could* happen, but it is unlikely. So set an achievable goal, such as 'increase my readership by 10% within the next twelve months'.

Relevant

- Giving yourself goals that are not relevant are a waste of your time. If you want to increase your readership, for example, you need to have a goal that focusses on this specifically. Adding more photos might make your blog look better, but it doesn't necessarily increase your readership, so make sure it is focussed and relevant.

Time bound

- If you don't set a time limit to your plans, they may never get done. You don't want to rush and mess up your blog, but you also want to actually do what you plan, so set yourself time limits. For example, rather than a goal of – 'improve my profile page or home page', set a goal of 'improve my profile page by the 1st June'.

Aim for smaller goals, sometimes called 'microgoals'. The following is a simple example:

'My goal is to write a novel!'

That is all very nice, but it's not very specific. Your goal to write a novel may have been your goal for the last thirty years. So, break down your overall goal of writing a novel into smaller goals. For example, you might write:

- Set up a desk when I can write in peace. By 1st July.
- Draw up a timetable each week for when I can realistically write. By 1st July.
- Prepare a rough draft plan of my novel. By 1st August.
- Prepare a draft of the first chapter. By....
- And so on.

This breaks it down into smaller and more achievable steps. When we look at the big picture it can seem daunting but breaking the goal into smaller steps often helps.

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Suggested Tasks

Write a concise Vision Statement for a proposed blog.

The same can apply to writing your blog. Rather than planning to write fifty blogs a week immediately, think realistically about how much time you have, when you can write, how long it takes you to write a blog, and plan carefully. Break your goals into smaller, achievable steps.

Concept Mapping

Concept mapping is a useful way to start planning your adventure into blogging. This is where you bring together all the work you've already completed to outline a few ideas for your blog.

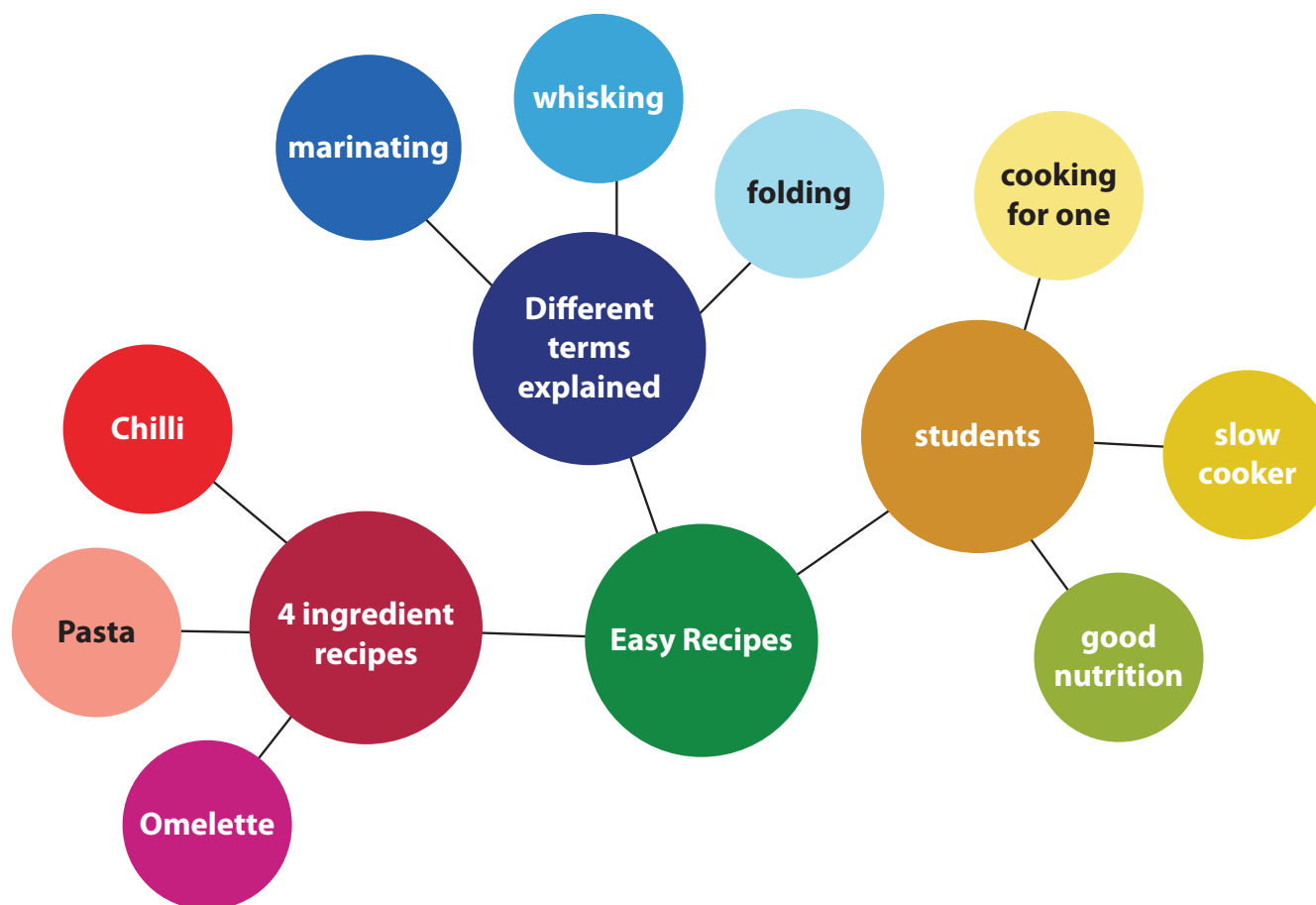
Concept maps are usually used for exploring complex problems. Start with just a few keywords for your blog, words

people might use to search for and find you. Use these to tease out things you might blog about. In our earlier example with Sam the cook, this might include:

- Recipes
- Cooking techniques
- Cooking chemistry

A simpler type of concept map is a mind map. Sam might think of all the areas relevant to the topics he would like to talk about and then develop ideas for blogs from these.

For example, Sam's mind map might look something like this:



Your mind map does not have to include everything you ever plan on blogging about. It is just a starting point to generate ideas to get you

going. You can develop your mind map further as you go along. Think of it as a means of brainstorming, a means of exploring ideas.

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Suggested Tasks

Prepare a list of goals for a blog (existing or proposed). Make sure these goals are SMART (ie. specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time bound).

Research, Research, Research

Once you have your mission statement, vision statement, and concept map, it is time to start your research. Exploring other blogs in your interest area is important for three main reasons. It helps you:

- Find a clearer definition of who you are writing for (intended audience).
- Understand your audience’s expectations in terms of post frequency (how often you post), post type, and post language.
- Identify points of difference (things you can do to make your blog stand out) and gaps in the general area of interest.

Spend time gathering up links for blogs in your general area, then spend time analysing them. Read through a minimum of 5 posts per blog and make notes on:

- Language used
- Post type
- Ideas/topics
- Responses
- Design
- Related ideas

Look through these notes then perform a SWOT analysis to help you analyse what’s working on these blogs and how you can apply their successes to help build your own successful blog.

SWOT Analysis

SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. In this case, the opportunities and threats are related to you and your blog.

Sam might look at other recipe and cooking related blogs. He finds one he likes called ‘ABC Cooking Tips’. He then constructs a SWOT analysis of the blog.

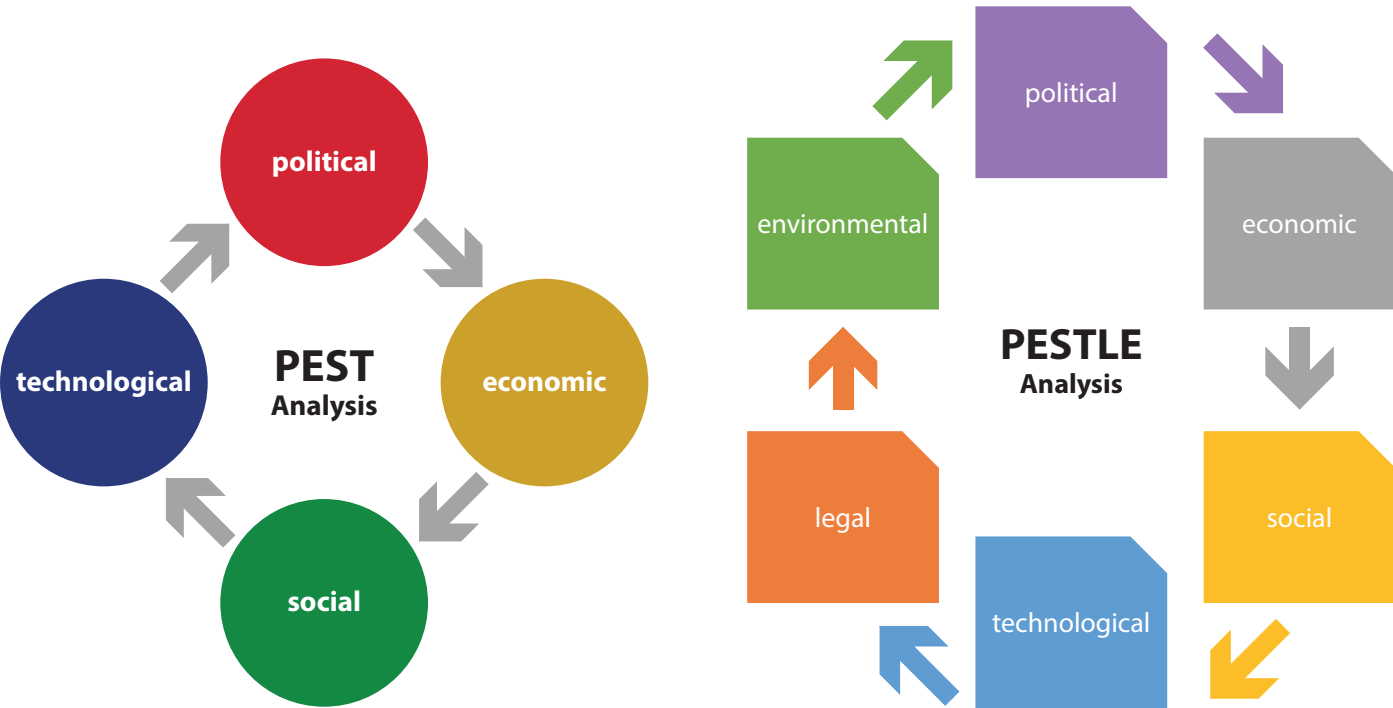
STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Bright● Varied recipes● Catering for a range of different demographics● Unusual recipes● Mostly easy to make	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Instructions in recipes are not always clear.● Not enough images to back up recipes.● Often uses complicated/hard to get ingredients.

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Sam is planning to focus on easy to make recipes, such as 4 ingredients, which this blog doesn't focus on specifically.● Sam is planning to focus on certain groups of people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Similar readership to Sam● Similar topics to Sam

This is just a simple example. Your SWOT analysis may be more complex for each blog you review. You can also carry out SWOT analyses on your own blog as you develop it further.

PESTLE or PEST Analysis

If you are creating a business blog, you may also wish to use a PEST or PESTLE analysis.



This can be used in a similar way to a mind map, developing your ideas around these topics.

We will look at analysing your competitors in later.

LEARN MORE >>>

Suggested Tasks

Do web searches for Pestel analysis and for Pest analysis.

Spend up to 20 minutes reading about these to get a clearer understanding of each.

Setting Up Your Own Blog

There are many different platforms and ways of setting up your own blog. For instance, you may have a website that offers the option of creating a blog on it. Or you may set up a specific blog using platforms such as WordPress or Blogger.

It can be free to set up some blogs, whilst others must be paid for. When deciding which path is the way for you, think carefully about it.

- Do you want to spend any money to start off with? Do the free blogs do what you want? Do you want to spend any money?
- Do you own your blog's name? Some free sites have the right to remove your blog at any time and you can then lose the name of your blog. If you have built up a readership, this can be very upsetting, having to restart. You will not necessarily own the domain name to your blog.
- Do I want to purchase my blog domain name? This is not always expensive, so can be worthwhile doing.
- Do you like the templates and way the blog is presented?
- Is there the option for you to create individual templates?
- How much can you add to your blog? Some free blogs will only allow a certain number of blogs or pages before there is a fee.

Do your research. Look at what is on offer and think carefully about what blog platform suits you best.

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Suggested Tasks

“Consider different blogging platforms you might use. A blog platform is the web site, social media or other system used to deliver the blog posts to the readers. Search for the term “Blogging platforms” to find some options.

Carry out research into two different blogger platforms that are available. Find one or two that suit you.

Carry out a SWOT analysis of both platforms and then decide which is the right one for you.

REVIEW WHAT YOU HAVE BEEN LEARNING

**»CLICK HERE«
TO ACCESS
LESSON REVIEW
QUESTIONS!**

Clicking this link will take you to our online site to do your lesson review questions. Once logged in, click on 'courses' up the top right then click the name of this course (in case you have purchased more than one course). Once you do this, click on 'lesson review questions' and this will give you access to your lesson review questions.

You will be able to re-sit review questions at any time and all attempts and results will be recorded as a printable transcript along with your certificate once you receive a pass (60% or more) on the final exam.

Note: You must be on a device with a connection to the internet when doing this for it to work.

LESSON 2 RESEARCH YOUR NICHE/BLOG

Now you have thought about your mission statement, vision statement and what your blog is about, you need to develop your idea further.

NAMING YOUR BLOG

Firstly, do you have a name for your blog? You might already have an idea in mind. If you don't, try our suggested task.

Write down the keywords from your mission statement and vision statement and any other relevant words. For example, Sam the cook might write down 'recipe', 'easy', 'student', 'ingredient'.

Now try:

- Creating mind maps
- Free writing (just write what comes into your head about the words above)
- Look at similar blogs and their names
- Look at books or articles or websites about similar topics

Start to draw up names for your blog that may suit you. When you have something in mind – check online to make sure it is not already in use! There are many blogs and websites out there, so when you do decide on your name, do some online searches to find out if anyone else has a similar name or even the same name.

Keywords

We will not go into this in great depth here as it is covered later but start to think about categories and keywords.

A keyword is a word or phrase that people use to search for something. Say you wanted to find out what sloths eat you might do a search using words such as:

- 'Sloth bear diet'
- 'Diet of sloth bear'
- 'Sloth bear nutrition'
- 'What do sloth bears eat?'

When deciding on your blog and what it is about. Think about how people may search for your blog. For Sam the cook, people might have searched for things such as:

- 'Easy recipes'

If they have some baked beans in their cupboard (for example), they might do a search for:

- 'Baked bean recipes'
- 'What can I make with baked beans?'

Bear this in mind when planning and naming your blog. When you set up your blog, you will often be asked for

keywords related to your blog, so think carefully about what your keywords are. The mind map or free writing you did in your suggested task for naming your blog should also help here.

Categories

Categories relate to the area in which your blog stands. For example, if you wanted to write a blog about dog training, you might choose categories such as:

- Dog training
- Dog obedience
- Dog trainer
- Dog psychology
- And so on.

Think carefully about what categories your blog fits into. Keywords and categories help your reader to find your blog in the first place, so make sure you take time doing this. As we said at the start, blogs need readers.

COMPETITOR IDENTIFICATION

Knowing who your competitors are is important. There are a LOT of blogs out there today and you want to have one that people read, so you need to know who else is writing about the same topics and what is good and bad about them. We have already touched on this with the SWOT analysis earlier, but let's spend a bit more time on this now.

There are three main types of competitor:

- Direct
- Indirect
- Tertiary

Direct competitors are those that offer the same service and products as you and are in the same geographical area. They target the same readers and serve the same needs. You might think that the geographical area does not apply if you are writing a blog for everyone, or are selling online services, but it does. You will be writing in a certain language (most likely), and you might be talking about things that relate to a specific country or culture, so it is still important.

Indirect competitors are those that offer the same or similar services, and products in the same area, but they target a different audience or serve a different need. For example, imagine you write about whiskey. You are also an affiliate for whiskey companies via your blog and you mainly aim your writing at people in Europe. A direct competitor would be someone else who also sells whiskey via their blog, or who is an affiliate for whiskey via their blog and aims their writing at people in Europe.

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Suggested Tasks

Do a web search for the phrase “Videos on Choosing a Blog Topic”

Spend 15 to 20 minutes watching videos that you find.

Take notes of key points as you watch these videos.

An indirect competitor would be someone who sells wine to the same target audience and also aims their blog at people in Europe. The product is different, the target market might also be different, but there might be some overlap. People who buy whiskey may also buy wine. So, indirect competitors might actually take some of your business or readership if the other blog convinces them to read about red wine instead of whiskey, and even purchase red wine through their blog.

Tertiary competitors are people who sell a product that is linked to yours but does not compete with you. For example, for the whiskey blog, it may be someone who sells whiskey glasses or decanters. You still need to know who they are as they might change their focus and suddenly become a competitor. They may decide that they need to start selling whiskey as well to get more business, so they begin to focus their blog on the whiskey drink.

It is important to always keep an eye on your competitors - direct, indirect and tertiary ones. Blogs are not static. They change. People (hopefully) add content regularly and it is fairly easy for a blog to change direction and suddenly become a major competitor to you.

Finding Your Competitors

The easiest way to identify your competitors is to do simple online searches. Go on to blog platforms and enter a keyword. For example, type in 'whiskey' and see what comes up. You should be able to see who your direct, indirect, and tertiary competitors are.

Don't just search for obvious keywords though. Use other keywords that you have chosen and find out more. Then do online searches and see what else comes up. As we said earlier, some websites will have their own blog as well, so they will not show up on blog platforms.

Once you have found your competitors, now you need to do an analysis.

Competitor Analysis

You now have your list of competitors. Let's take a closer look at them. This can be as detailed or as simple as you prefer. You might want to set up a table in Microsoft Word or a spreadsheet, or simply make notes on your computer or in a notebook.

When analysing other blogs you can use some, or all, of the suggestions below, or you may come up with some of your own ideas. It is entirely up to you. But do not skimp on time here. You may think you only really need to know a few things, but then a couple of weeks later you realise that some other information would have been useful.

Competitor analysis starts with identifying successful blogs in your niche, then identifying their

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Suggested Tasks

Identify a successful blog in an area you might be familiar with. Carry out searches to identify up to 3 different competitors to that blog. Keep a list of those blog addresses.

most successful posts. Consider a competitor's blog post, and work through each piece of that blog post. To do this, put the knowledge you already have to the back of your mind and focus on learning. You're trying to capture the audience's perspective, which means thinking like someone in the audience rather than thinking like an expert.

Considering your competitors, look at their sites for information about the following. Remember to choose what you want to know specifically.

- When were they established?
- What are their readership figures?
- How many writers do they have? This may seem irrelevant, but you want to be realistic with your blog. If they have 20 writers and write 100 blogs a day, they are probably doing this on a professional basis, whereas if you are one person writing in your spare time it is unlikely you will write the same amount, and possibly not to the same level.
- Do they have any particularly popular bloggers (if more than one writer)?
- Topic of the blog.
- Do they try to sell goods and services?
- What blogging platforms or websites do they operate on?
- What social media do they use?
- Other related blogs.
- Related websites.
- Do they offer a message option?
- How do they reply to messages?
- How quickly?
- What is their messaging like? Do they encourage readers to comment and engage or is messaging rare? Do they have a healthy engagement with their readers, and readers between each other?
- Do they do other things? Such as speak at events, attend trade shows, give interviews (for example, some bloggers may be an expert on a topic, so may be sought for interviews or to comment on related topics in the news or in magazines).
- What is their profile like?
- What is their main page like?
- How is their blog presented?
- Who do you think their target audience is?
- Look at the language they use. Is it chatty, personal, formal, academic?
- Do they talk about competitors?
- Do they seem to talk directly to their readers?
- Do they mention readers by name? For example, Jane sent in a message last night saying she loved our recipe for chilli. We decided to do another chilli recipe today to say thank you to Jane.

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Suggested Tasks

Carry out a competitor analysis of at least one, perhaps two competitors to a blog you are familiar with.

Spend no more than 20 minutes doing this.

- Anything else you think is relevant.

Points of Difference

Anyone looking at blogs will be reading particular blogs for interest or information. A photography student might follow blogs from professional photographers, blogs that talk about the technical aspects of photography, and so on. There are many out there, but when the student decides who to follow, there may be some that they look at more often than others. These are their 'go-to blogs'. You want to create a go-to blog for your readers, so you need to make yourself that bit different.

Think about what makes your blog different? Why does it stand out? What do you offer that no-one else does? If you do offer what everyone else does, how might you do it better? What is that thing? It may only be one thing, but that is the thing you need to push. The thing that shows you are different and can appeal to your readers, as well as attract them in the first place.

IDENTIFY YOUR AUDIENCE

Looking at your competitors is a useful way to identify your audience. It can help you to get some idea of who their audience is and what they are looking for. It is not always that easy. They may have a 'healthy' comments page where you can see the people who have contacted them, but unless you trawl through all their readers to find out who they are and where they came from it is hard to identify exactly who their audience is, and also extremely time consuming.

Reach Your Audience with Appropriate Language

Language is the primary driver of most blogs. Whether you're posting text-based reviews or uploading podcasts, you are using some form of language. This means it is important to pay attention to the kind of language you use.

Let's say you are a parenting blogger writing for an audience of parents like you. It makes sense to use familiar language and terms, even common slang. Using this kind of language helps your audience connect with you and recognise themselves in your work – a key component of establishing a strong rapport with readers.

Now let's say you're a psychologist writing for parents – would you use the same language and technical terminology you'd use when writing for other psychologists? No, you would not. Although it might seem like a good idea to use a lot of technical terms to showcase your knowledge, the use of unfamiliar language will make it much harder for your audience to connect with you. Reading blog posts with lots of technical terms (even if you have explained them all) can create a disconnect between you and your audience – a disconnect which can make it hard for you to build a following.

Consider writing a short paragraph in different styles:

- Posh
- Super formal
- Academic

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Suggested Tasks

Consider a blog you might want to create or improve. Think about people who would read that blog.

Start by thinking about your friends and colleagues. Who would be interested? What type of person would be interested in this blog? Don't make assumptions though. Because people read about expensive products it doesn't mean they want to buy them. This may be no more than escapism.

- Informal
- Laid back
- Chatty
- Colloquial
- Instructional

If you are planning to write recipes for university students, an informal or chatty style would be better than an academic or formal tone. If you are writing about climate change for other scientists, then an academic tone may be more suitable.

Intended Audience

Your audience is the people who read your blog. Your actual audience may differ from your intended audience i.e. the people you intend to read your blog. It is important to think about the difference between your actual audience and your intended audience during your initial planning stage.

Then spend time thinking which suits your blog better, bearing in mind:

- Which writing style you are best at
- Your potential readers
- The content of your blog

Example

Jamie wants to sell at-home science kits for children aged 10-13 years. They set up a blog exploring some fun aspects of science that can be explored at home, from basic fruit DNA extraction using rubbing alcohol (isopropyl) to potato-powered clocks. Although Jamie's intended audience is parents of children in their target age group, they find that most of their readers are teachers working with grades 3-6. This suggests two things:

- Jamie is not reaching their intended audience, which means they are less likely to sell kits to parents and children.
- Jamie's actual audience is less likely to purchase kits because the kits are not designed for classroom use (even though this audience is an important market demographic).

Therefore, Jamie has two options:

- Change the target demographic to suit the material posted and alter the product.
- Extend the blog to include the intended audience by creating content which is better suited to parents and children.

The first option might work, but it could require significant restructuring to make it happen. The easier option is for Jamie to extend their blog efforts and try to better meet the needs of their audience. But how?

In this scenario, Jamie's best option is to go back to their initial market research, look at their initial questions and their SWOT analysis, and make notes. Next, Jamie should start looking at the language used in other blogs.

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Suggested Tasks

Go through posts from blogs in your niche. Highlight descriptions and phrases that stand out, e.g. the way the blogger writes about the taste of a food, or the words they use to explain an idea. Look for informal words and turns of phrase, clichés, and metaphors.

A simple starting point is the use of keywords. For example, ‘science experiments for children’, could attract teachers, parents, and so on. Whereas ‘science experiments for children at home’ is more likely to attract parents.

Reading successful blogs in your niche is helpful for getting a sense of the language and content your audience responds to, but it can be hard to pinpoint exactly what is happening. This is especially true when it comes to writing because it is such a personal act – when we write, we are writing to express ourselves. This means it’s easy to forget that we are also writing for others, and that we need to find common ground.

Another way to help pin down successful language and tone in other blogs, is to use a ‘word cloud generator’. A word cloud generator analyses articles then shows the most common words in bigger, bolder font.

Blogs as a Knowledge Base

It is easy to think of a blog as a platform for you, your product, or your brand. This makes it easy to fall into the *me-me-me* trap of blogging – focusing on your needs rather than your audience’s.

Me-me-me perspective:

I need ... to sell this product.

... people to know who I am to increase my book sales/speaking gigs, etc.

... to increase views, to increase advertising revenue.

Audience perspective:

My readers need ... information about (topic).

... support for (related topic, usually tied back to mission statement).

... ways to contact/engage with me/ others in community.

While a blog cannot answer the great questions of the universe, the most successful blogs function as knowledge bases. A knowledge base is a place to go for finding information about a given topic or idea.

Examples of blogs as knowledge bases:

- Gardening expert/enthusiast – a blog about growing nightshade vegetables with information about different species, nutrition, and harvest times.
- Child psychologist – a blog about improving sleep in toddlers with information and exercises to try.
- Public relations firm – a blog about communication styles and brand promotion.

Conclusion

You should now have more ideas about how to develop your blog and discover who your target audience is.

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Suggested Tasks

Find a successful blog in your niche. Collect several popular posts together, then put the text into a word cloud generator. There are many of these available to use free online. Examine the words with the biggest, boldest font. Take notes on the informal language used, and the major keywords. Use these to help design blog posts.

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Note: You must be on a device with a connection to the internet when doing this for it to work.

LESSON 3 KEYWORDS

Keywords are an important means of promoting your blog, so long as you know how to use them effectively. They are the words which capture what your posts are all about and draw your readers in.

What are Keywords?

In a digital context, the most common definition of keywords is “words used for searching online”. Although many keywords are single words, a keyword can also be a short phrase or combination of 2-3 words. If you are looking for information on how to write good dialogue for a short story, you could search online using ‘dialogue’, ‘short story’, and ‘creative writing’ as keywords. Keywords are an important marketing tool – and marketing is an important aspect of having a successful blog.

In a writing and academic context, keywords are ‘active’ or ‘activator’ words that help narrow the focus of a question or topic and tell you what to do. For example, if you had an exam question like “Discuss three major causes of the fall of Rome”, the keywords would be ‘discuss’, ‘three causes’, and ‘fall of Rome’. This is because those are the words that tell you what to do to answer the question.

Although they may seem like very different things, these two meanings of keywords can be used as a powerful tool for setting up a blog. Outlining keywords early in your development process helps you:

- Recognise important search strategies for capturing an audience

- Align your content with your target demographic/audience
- Develop a suite of blog post ideas
- Link your content to your audience searches
- Find your context and voice

Strategic Planning with Keywords

Effective blogs use ‘tags’ on each post. A tag is a keyword that is added as an index term. Whilst keywords are included in the page content, tags are used to describe what the content is, and what it relates to. They can be used for articles or pages to aid search engines in finding them. They are also used to organise webpages so that those blogs with similar content can be found using the same tag.

Most blog platforms have a field for entering keywords; some platforms will make suggestions based on the content of your post. Tags/keywords help people find what they want to read on your blog. Keywords are also scattered throughout individual blog posts.

Sometimes, all the keywords in the blog post and the keywords tagged at the end of it match up. Sometimes they don’t – tagging offers a way to link related posts and ideas together,

though the links may not always be obvious at first glance (e.g. a post about the uses of carbon fibre might include 'sports materials' as a keyword because carbon fibre is commonly used in tennis racquets and golf clubs).

Writing Your Own Keywords

The questions you answered to write your mission and vision statements are a good entry into writing overall keywords for your blog. Overall keywords are the main ones that help people find your blog in general (as opposed to keywords that help people find a specific post).

For a blog about moving to Germany, the keywords could be 'expat', 'living

overseas', 'moving to Germany', 'working in Germany', 'leaving home', 'relocation', 'life in a new country', 'new beginning'. The actual keywords will vary a bit depending on the circumstances of the blogger and their overall purpose. For instance, if they are moving to Germany to learn about a local industry, their keywords would be different to someone moving to Germany to trace their roots or attend university.

After you've defined your overall keywords, it's time to think about keywords for your areas of interest. This will help you define your blog's categories and start thinking of post ideas. Use your planning documents to help you.

Example

Ava is moving to Germany because she's been offered a job teaching foreign policy at a university. Ava already maintains a formal web presence for her research work and books on foreign policy, but she wants to write about her experience moving from a small town in Fiji to a bustling metropolis in Germany. Eventually, she would like to use her blog to help her write a book about the experience.

Ava starts planning out her blog by writing key words and phrases for the beginning of her new life (beginning of her story):

- Starting out! New life?
- New job? Different to old job?
- Language barrier

- Fear!!!
- How to make new friends?
- Finding a new house? Making a new home? What is home?

Next, she writes out some keywords for the middle part of her story. She hasn't lived it yet, so she's not certain of everything. This means she thinks about things people would want to know about living in Germany, and things she could probably help them with:

- Confusing words and slang
- Important social customs and adjustments
- Living index – how to spend money and live well without going broke

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Suggested Tasks

Consider a short blog post from a site you are familiar with.

Try thinking about 2 or 3 keywords that might be appropriate to this post.

Discuss these keywords with someone - a colleague or friend; and ask if they can think of any other words that might mean something similar. In this way, expand your list of potential keywords to consider. Use internet searches to expand that list even further.

- What it's like making new friends in a new place in your 40s
- Dating with a language barrier?
- Things I miss
- Things I don't miss
- Homesickness

Ava only writes lists for the beginning and middle of her overall story because she has no idea about her ending yet – i.e. if she'll stay in Germany or move somewhere else.

Once she has her keyword lists, Ava starts using them to plan out the overall categories (or 6 subjects) covered on her blog. She knows she can add new categories later, and that keyword tags will help her readers narrow down posts when they're looking for something.

Ava's blog categories:

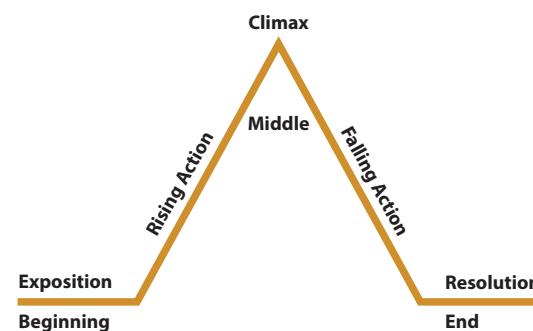
- Relocation blues
- German language
- Starting over
- Personal (she makes a note to think about making this "friends" and "dating" or just using keywords later)
- Foods
- Visas
- Expat life

Although some of Ava's categories may not seem very specific, categories are not the key part of driving traffic to her

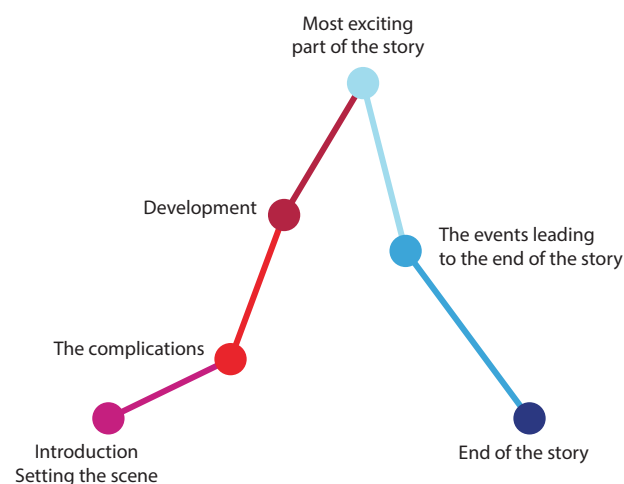
blog – they're more like subjects within a greater context, like English, Maths, and Science are subjects in school. The next step in Ava's blog plan is to write keywords for each category, then look for combinations that will help her plan out a few posts.

Keywords as a Mapping Tool

All blog posts – fiction and non-fiction – are a type of story. They have a beginning, middle, and end. They start with you telling the reader something, then linking that something to an action or idea, and finally, wrapping the post up in an ending. Humans are wired for stories and naturally respond to this type of structure.



Examples of Plot Diagrams



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Suggested Tasks

Find a blog post and consider how it fits with the concept of plot diagrams presented on this page. Try drawing a plot diagram to represent the post you are looking at.

Some blog post ideas will come naturally. In our example about Ava and her move to Germany, it makes sense that Ava would write about her trip from Fiji to Germany, or write about the story of how she landed her teaching job. Often, though, it can be hard to generate blog posts, especially if you're blogging more than once or twice a week.

This is where detailed planning comes in – detailed planning that can help you work out a blog post calendar or to outline some of your posts to ensure you're really engaging the reader in your unique story.

So, choosing one of the blog categories – starting over – Ava might then start to generate some keywords, such as:

- Starting over
- New start
- Germany
- Moving country
- Moving home
- New beginning
- And so on.

She might then think of some titles:

- Moving to Germany
- My move to another country
- Starting over in Germany
- Relocating to Germany

Ava would then need to plan her article:

- Beginning – what she is going to talk about, what is going to happen.
- Middle – what does happen, any difficulties - such as boxes going missing, rushing to catch her flight, saying goodbye to her family and friends
- End – perhaps actually talking about arriving in her new home.

Remember a blog is meant to be short, so this blog could be made into several blogs:

- Boxes going missing when moving home
- Rushing to catch a flight
- Difficulties in saying goodbye to family and friends.

With any blog, try not to make it too big, break it into smaller blogs if possible.

Hashtags

Hashtags (#) are used to identify key topics or keywords on social media, and they can also be used on blogs. For example, after a boxing match between Anthony Joshua and Kubrat Pulev, hashtags such as #boxer, #boxingnews, #roadtoundisputed, and #anthonyjoshua were used.

Afterwards, if someone wanted to read about Anthony Joshua on social media, they could do a search for #anthonyjoshua and see all posts related to Anthony Joshua by people who used this hashtag.

Although blogging platforms make use of hashtags, an important way to get your blog read is to post about it on social media making use of relevant hashtags. Online platforms and social media will generate hashtag ideas, but also use your own. Remember, whatever is generated by the platforms is good because everyone else is using it, so it increases your chances of being read, BUT you also want to ensure you gain other readers, so try and think outside the box when deciding on your hashtags.

Conclusion

Remember that blogs are stories. It doesn't matter if you are writing fiction or non-fiction - you are telling a story, informing your audience about something. So, write a beginning, middle and end to your story, and don't forget to include keywords in your writing.

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LESSON 4 DESIGNING YOUR IDEAL POST

Start by analysing the writing of the competition. Writing analysis is more than just composing essays about books for an English class. All writing can be broken into component parts then examined for function. How we break a text down depends on what we're hoping to achieve.

BLOG ANALYSIS

As a blogger (and potentially marketer), it is important to understand what your audience:

- Needs
- Wants
- Expects

Blogs depend on audiences. A blog's primary purpose is to share something with the world – without readers, nothing is shared. Understanding your audience's needs, wants, and expectations will help ensure they 'click' with your blog.

Anatomy of a Blog

A blog is more than a collection of posts. It's a place for you to share information (establishing a knowledge base), build your brand or reputation, and where readers can ask questions and engage with the blogger (you) and each other (the community).

A blog post is composed of several pieces:

- Title
- Subtitle

- Lede (1-2 lines summarising the most important points of the post)
- Image
- Main body
- Body images
- Written text/story with main point
- Summary/conclusion
- Tags/Keywords
- Comments

Note: In journalism the word 'lede' is spelled as it is to distinguish it from the word 'lead' which refers to a strip of metal used in a printing press. Here, lede refers to the first sentence of a story.

Some blogs will use this entire frame for each post. Other blogs will only use pieces and leave out other parts (e.g. subtitle or body images) depending on the post type or goal. When we analyse a blog, we have to look at each of these pieces to see what's working and why. (Many blogs also include a social media section for sharing content, but this doesn't form part of the writing analysis).

There's no right or wrong way to analyse a blog post or series of blog posts, though it's often easier if you

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Suggested Tasks

Find blog posts which are structured in 2 or 3 different ways. Find at least one with a more simple structure (e.g. little more than a title and main body), as well as at least one with a more complicated structure (eg. that might include a lede, summary and/or comments).

have a set frame to use as a starting point. The table below lists the post parts alongside questions to help you evaluate what’s happening in each piece. These questions are designed as prompts to help you zoom in on what’s working in your chosen blog post. You can also design your own frame around these ideas. The important

part is to analyse 3-5 posts for at least 2 blogs using your tool of choice. Once you’ve completed the individual analysis, compare your notes and look for common factors among the successful posts. These will serve as the guidelines for successful writing in your particular niche.

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Suggested Tasks

Use the three column table on this page to analyse a blog post (any blog post from any blog you are aware of).

Blog Post Part	Criteria	Notes
Title	Is it clear? Is it short and to the point? Does it fit with the blog’s regular content/niche?	
Subtitle	Does it extend the title effectively? Is it too long or too short?	
Lede	Does it summarise key points in the post? Is it direct? Too short or too long?	
Image	Does it relate to the title? Does it have a caption? Is there a copyright notice?	
Body Images	Do they illustrate a point or relate to the text?	
Text	Is it clear and easy to read? Are there paragraphs? Are there subheadings? Are there lists? Is it easy to find information? Does the language match the audience (not too technical, not too formal, etc.)?	

Blog Post Part	Criteria	Notes
Summary/ Conclusion	Does it wrap up the key points? Does it list one or two takeaway points? Does it point to further information?	
Tags/Keywords	Do they relate to the post?	
Comments	Are there any? Are any detailed? Is there discussion in the comments? Is a separate comment platform used (e.g. Facebook)?	

CONTENT ANALYSIS

The previous section covered how to analyse the “bones” of a blog post. Content analysis is a separate thing.

Content analysis considers the themes and patterns in a blog and how they are expressed. It draws from research techniques common in the humanities (e.g. English, education, sociology, anthropology). Although content analysis may seem intense for starting a blog, it is a key component of establishing what your audience needs, wants, and expects within your niche. It also helps you ensure that the content you create matches up those needs, wants, and expectations.

The outcomes of content analysis vary according to the topic. For example, the themes and patterns on a blog about slow living will be quite different to the themes and patterns on a blog about marketing.

Content analysis begins with a question. Start by thinking about what you want to know. In most cases, your question will revolve around what is popular and why – you’ll be looking for a common thread in successful blogs in your niche. That common thread could be anything from providing answers to very specific questions through to deeply personal posts that resonate with a reader and end with some kind of action or challenge. You will need to look at the overall theme of blogs in your area, and your keywords, to help you figure out what you’re actually exploring.

Next, think about the type of content you want to analyse. Are you only looking at written posts? Or do you want to look at video? Decide on some limits. After you have your limits, lay out some categories for your analysis. For example, these could be:

- Personal – content using personal stories or information.

- Professional – content focussing on the professional aspects of a subject.
- How-to/instructional – content providing explicit instructions.
- Inspirational – content to help readers “feel good” and inspire action.
- Aspirational – content designed to make readers want to reach a similar point or idea (e.g. reaching the same skill level as the blogger).

Once you have your categories, you can collect popular posts and start analysing straight away. You can do this by using the table below. Simply fill in the post title, note the categories the post belongs too, and write out the keywords and phrases that stand out to you. Once you’ve done this, see if any underlying themes or ideas jump out, and make a note of them in the appropriate column. You’ll also want to make a note of the number of hits, shares, or comments on the post so you can compare later.

Example Analysis Table

Title	Shares/ Hits	Categories	Keywords	Theme/ Related Theme	Notes
Lounge Therapy	150	Homes, new homes, relaxation, furniture, home decoration	Relaxation, new home, sofas, lamps, home decoration	Decorating a lounge to make a relaxing environment	Bright visuals, informative, links to stockists, fun, chatty article.

Putting It All Together

When you have finished, go back to the work you did earlier on defining your blog’s purpose and look at your research. Compare the findings from your analysis with that early work and adjust if necessary.

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Suggested Tasks

- Find a blog post that you think is good.
- Become familiar with it.
 - Print off two copies.
 - Give one copy to a friend or colleague.
 - Sit down with them. Discuss the content in the light of what you read about content analysis.
 - You might ask your friend questions such as: What do you think about the title? Do you think it covers things people want to know about this subject?
 - Use a pen to write down any comments. Spend 15 minutes on this task.

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LESSON 5 PRESENTATION OF YOUR BLOG

If a blog is to be effective it must be easy to access or use. Providing ramps as well as stairs is an example of accessibility in the physical world. Accessibility is also important online. If your audience can't read your content, they can't engage with it.

IMPROVING ACCESSIBILITY

There are some basic things all bloggers should do to improve accessibility, and some things that can be added for specific audiences. Although ensuring your blog is accessible may seem unimportant, it is an essential means of ensuring *all* of your audience can engage with your content.

Font Types

There are many beautiful fonts available for free online – and it can be tempting to use cursive or handwritten styles, or to add several extra fonts for headings and subheadings. However, too many fonts can create a cluttered display that is difficult for people with vision problems or reading difficulties (e.g. visual dyslexia). Cursive fonts are also difficult to decipher, especially if used for large blocks of text.

When selecting a font type for your blog, look for something clean and common, such as Arial, Helvetica, or Times New Roman. Generally speaking, people who have trouble working with screens, or reading on screens, find sans-serif fonts easier to read, so keep your audience in mind during your design process. For

example, older readers are more likely to experience eye strain when reading on a screen, so if you're blogging about dentures, you'll need a font that's easier for them to read.

There are many website accessibility guides available online, and these can be useful for identifying friendly fonts.

Font Size

Choosing suitable a font size is another important aspect of ensuring a smooth reading experience. Reading online is different to reading in print and smaller text can be nearly indecipherable for some readers. Aiming for 16pt font for your main body text will make your blog accessible for a lot more readers.

Many online users with reading difficulties opt to use the 'reader mode' available in major web browsers and mobile browsers. Reader mode allows the user to control font size. You can improve this experience by taking the time to use your online editor's style options.

For example, heading 1 is selected for large headings:

Heading 1

Heading 2 is used for subheadings, and paragraph for regular paragraph text.

Heading 2

This helps the reader mode show your page correctly.

Then there are options such as:

Heading 3

Heading 4

Normal

These may differ depending on how your document is set up.

Font Colour

Be careful which colour fonts you choose. A different colour may seem nice, but it can be difficult for others to read.

People who are colour blind may find it hard to read red or green.

Red or Green text.

It is estimated that 4.5% of the world's population is colour blind. The majority are men, with one in twelve men being colour blind and one in 200 women. This means you could exclude a significant proportion of potential readers if you do not account for them.

Other colours can be difficult for anyone to read, such as:

Yellow text

Reading this text may be difficult. You might be able to read it, but it is probably straining your eyes more than

a black or dark blue text, so you are more likely to give up.

Light green text

Reading this text may be difficult. You might be able to read it, but it is probably straining your eyes more than a black or dark blue text, so you are more likely to give up.

In case you cannot read the yellow or green text above, it says – 'Reading this text may be difficult. You might be able to read it, but it is probably straining your eyes more than a black or dark blue text, so you are more likely to give up.'

You want to make it easy on your reader, so make sure the font you choose is clear and precise with a suitable colour. Do not choose style and glamour over readability. The aim of your blog is surely to get people to read it, not to think how pretty it looks.

Colour Scheme and Background

You may enjoy reading text over a cherry blossom background, but it can be frustrating for a lot of readers. Pay special attention to your colour scheme and background – if you opt to use a picture in your blog's background, make sure there is a colour block over the top to make it easy for your readers to engage with your text.

Try to pick a colour scheme with contrasting elements – e.g. black font or dark font on a light background, or light font on a dark background. Contrast helps improve readability for people with vision problems or reading differences.

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Suggested Tasks

Find a blog where the use of font size and /or type is not as good as it could be.

Determine what the font size and/or type could be changed to in order to improve that blog.

Here is an example of a lovely image, but the text on top is not clear at all.



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Suggested Tasks

Find a blog where the use of font size and /or type is not as good as it could be.
Determine what font size and/ or type could be changed to in order to improve that blog.

Here is an example of a clear black and blue font on a white background. You can also see the categories on the right and a list of other recent blogs.

Blog


The Skills Shortage in Ornamental Horticulture

By ACS Bookshop UK on December 1, 2020 in [Careers and Jobs](#), [Horticulture / Gardening & Education and Training](#) | [comments](#)

During lock down many people have been reassessing their lives and livelihoods. For many of us, our gardens have become a refuge. Others the opportunity to change career and one of the most appealing and rewarding has been ornamental horticulture, or gardening for pleasure rather than growing crops. The career opportunities are immense, from working in a historic garden of many acres, to designing, building and maintaining a small courtyard garden in a modern housing development. One can be an employee with a salary, or self-employed with the freedom and flexibility to go where your interests take you.

What is becoming very clear to employers, whether they are large institutions or small garden maintenance companies, is that there is a severe skills shortage in the horticultural profession. There is an urgent need for trained and motivated horticulturalists with skills ranging from lawns to maintaining ponds. The courses at ACS cover a plethora of skills and interests. The tutors have decades, if not centuries, of experience between them from many different areas of ornamental horticulture.

Perhaps the most important attraction of ornamental horticulture for many of us is that our gardens are becoming a vital refuge, not only for us, but for the wildlife with which we share this space on Earth. Many animals, and especially those



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Alt text

Screen readers are tools which read out the content of a website for the user. They read regular text but also read out formatting cues, like 'heading' followed by the relevant text.

Alt text, or 'alternate text' is an image description that a screen reader will read to the user. It can be used by people with visual impairments and is also used by search engines to trawl and rank your content. Alt text is usually quite short but can provide a lot of useful information for people using screen readers, particularly if the image includes key information you have not explicitly written in the text of your post. It is generally used to describe images on your blog.

Enabling Captions on Video Content

Closed captions are increasingly popular online because they allow users to reinforce their intake of information by providing two streams (audio/vocal and visual/written). This process, called dual coding, is considered quite important in teaching and education theory.

While large providers will create independent closed caption scripts, you can help your users by ticking the "enable automatic captions" option available on most major video platforms. While the auto-generated captions will not be perfect, they will likely prove helpful to many viewers.

How Audiences Read

Humans read in a series of small jumps known as saccades. These quick

movements scan across text; readers then pause to process (fixating) or skim back over text (a regression). Reading skill affects the numbers of saccades, fixations, and regressions. The number of characters taken in during a saccade varies from person to person.

Saccades are more stressful on readers when using a screen compared to reading text on paper. It is also much harder to keep your place when reading on a screen. This means that appropriate spacing and font size can help make it easier for readers to engage with your content. If your text is too close together or the font is too small, readers are more likely to lose their place (and their train of thought).

Texture is another aspect of reading on a screen. Printed books are "grippy" – the ink on the page provides contrast for the eye which makes it easier for the reader to stay in control regardless of the number of saccades taking place. Online, that textural element disappears such that reading can sometimes feel "slippery". You can help adjust the level of "grip" by integrating very fine patterned backgrounds into your blog e.g. a light pinstripe. This type of background should be almost invisible in the way a printed page's texture is invisible.

The link between how saccades work and processing time is still under investigation. However, this "jumpy" process means that we cannot depend on readers to read smoothly to the end of each sentence and then think about it. Instead, we have to think about the very short amount of time we have to engage a reader's attention before they navigate away from our blog. This means headlines and subheadings

This blog is hard to read. This blog is hard to read. This blog is hard to read. This blog is hard to read. This blog is hard to read. This blog is hard to read.

Now add an image.

This blog is hard to read. This blog is
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This blog is hard to read. This blog is

This is a bit better. The image breaks up the text. But why not improve it even further?

This blog is hard to read. (heading 1)

This blog is hard to read. (heading 2)

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This blog is hard to read. This blog is hard to read. This blog is hard to read. This blog is hard to read. This blog is

hard to read. This blog is hard to read. This blog is hard to read. This blog is hard to read. This blog is hard to read.

This blog is hard to read (Heading 3)

- This blog is hard to read.
- This blog is hard to read. This blog is hard to read. This blog is hard to read.
- This blog is hard to read.
- This blog is hard to read. This blog is hard to read.
- This blog is hard to read. This blog is hard to read. This blog is hard to read.

And so on. This makes the text clearer.

The use of images breaks up the text, but so does the use of headings, subheadings, and bullet points.

Use Clear Images

Make sure the images are clear. Poor images can detract from what you are saying in the same way that poor spelling and grammar can. People may zoom in and out of images, so make sure they look good when larger and smaller.

Legal Issues

If you are using your own photos and images, legal issues are generally not a problem. Be careful if you are taking images of people though, as you will need to gain their permission to use them.

Using images of people can humanise what you are saying. It can make your blog seem more relevant to them. But make sure the image is relevant to what you are saying. A picture of a group of businesspeople in an office holding a meeting may be a nice picture of people, but if you are talking about people exercising outdoors, it is not relevant.

If you plan on using images collected from elsewhere, do you have permission to use them? There are many royalty-free websites online where you can download and use the images so long as you give them credit for the image on your site. Others will want a royalty payment for using the image on your site. Do not use other people's images without their permission or this can result in legal issues and difficulties.

Number of Images

Finally, the number of images used is important to consider. A general rule of thumb is to use one image per 150 words. More than this and your blog can seem cluttered and hard to read. Also, bear in mind that you do not have to include images at all, or you may choose one image per blog. You must see what works best for you and how you wish to present your work.

Conclusion

Remember your reader will not engage and come back if they cannot read your blog, so audience accessibility is essential. You need to ensure you understand how people read texts and how they interact with your use of fonts. When using images, also take care to avoid a cluttered look.

LEARN MORE >>>

Suggested Tasks

If you are already running a blog, try posting a blog with no images. Then retry it a week later with lots of images (at least one image every 50 words). After 2 weeks, try posting a different blog with an image every 150 words. Consider what works best?

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You will be able to re-sit review questions at any time and all attempts and results will be recorded as a printable transcript along with your certificate once you receive a pass (60% or more) on the final exam.

Note: You must be on a device with a connection to the internet when doing this for it to work.

LESSON 6 BUSINESS BLOGS I

Business blogs come in many formats. The type of blog you choose will depend on your overall goals.

Business Blog Considerations

Try asking yourself questions like the following ones to help you decide which kind of business blog is appropriate for your goals:

- Are you intending to build the company's profile?
- Is your goal investment/share sales/ IPO?
- Is your goal to sell a product or service?
- Is your goal to educate your staff?
- Are you showcasing staff efforts?
- Is your blog intended to provide support for features of your product or service?
- Are you trying to develop your brand and increase your reach?

COMMON TYPES OF BUSINESS BLOG

There are many different types of blogs in the business world, but they generally fall into one of these eight categories:

- Leadership – CEO/Founder/Thought Leader

- News/announcements/PR
- Brand development
- SEO improvement (content marketing)
- General
- Departmental
- Educational
- Sales (content marketing)

Leadership – CEO/Founder/Thought Leader

Leadership blogs fall into two distinct categories:

1) Corporate Leadership

A corporate leadership blog helps establish a company's mission, strategy, and overall perspective across areas of key importance. These blogs are usually run by someone in a C-suite role (i.e. one of the most important senior executives).

This type of blog is valuable for:

- Establishing strong rapport and reputation with stakeholders (e.g. shareholders).
- Providing company perspective on topics of global importance (e.g.

climate change, human rights).

- Showcasing company efforts at improvement (company-based or in charitable work).
- Establishing an ethical framework for the company.
- Addressing concerns over the company's product, services, or actions (e.g. recalls, privacy policy).

Although it may seem some of these points are irrelevant in a corporate space (e.g. company perspective on global topics like climate change and human rights), there is an increasing focus on what constitutes ethical business practice and on corporations working toward a common social good.

Some types of corporation build on the personal brands of their founders or executives – this is especially common in the technology sector. This means this type of blog can also provide a valuable opportunity for rapport which can, in the long-term, drive product sales. For example, Elon Musk, Mark Cuban, and Richard Branson are regular writers and contributors to social media. Their organisations are known, but so are they, and they give the personal touch to their organisations.

2) Thought Leadership

Thought leadership blogs are sometimes used as personal branding blogs. They are there to show their readers that they are leaders in a particular area of thought or knowledge. It is an area of blogging where the person uses their passion, knowledge, expertise and experience to write about

what they know about, what they are experts about.

News/Announcement/PR Blogs

A news blog is a hub for news about the company, including product releases and marketing releases. Many companies also use this type of blog as a way of sharing industry news to help demonstrate that the company is both connected and current. Sharing and responding to industry news may include:

- Writing a response to new partnerships (e.g. when related companies merge, as with the publishing companies Penguin and Random House).
- Strategies relating to new findings or information (e.g. a marketing firm responding to an announcement regarding a new web search algorithm).
- Announcing partnerships.

Restructures, new hires, and shifts within the company are also announced via this type of blog.

Although news and PR blogs usually mention new products, they are not usually direct sales tools. B2B (business-to-business) set-ups are more likely to require this kind of blog than B2C (business-to-consumer) companies.

Brand Development

A brand development blog is focused on building the company's brand and reputation. Brand development is about

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Suggested Tasks

If you own, operate or work in any type of business, consider what type of business blog might be appropriate to that business. Consider why. Discuss your thoughts with someone who is familiar with that business (a 5 minute discussion is sufficient).

creating connections and positive associations between a business and its target demographic. It ties into the target demographic's:

- Perception of self – e.g. “I’m a serious coffee drinker, so I buy upmarket coffee.”
- General beliefs – e.g. “I believe recycling is important, this company uses recycled packaging.”
- Trust in the company – e.g. “This company won’t cheat me, won’t sell inferior products/services.”
- Value for the company’s product or service – e.g. “This coffee is expensive, but it is very high quality, and I am getting what I pay for.”

Together, these ideas help create overall brand value in the target demographic. If the brand value is high, it may eventually translate to brand loyalty.

A brand development blog leverages these ideas through content marketing. It provides some sort of content service to consumers, such as:

- Recipes using the product e.g. pasta, pastry etc.
- Feature details for the product, including how to get the most value from it e.g. ways to make the product last longer.
- ‘How-to’ posts related to the service e.g. social media services – how to start your first podcast.
- Summaries of relevant issues e.g.

industry news and what it means for users/consumers.

- Solutions-focussed posts intended to solve a problem the demographic is having.

Over time, this type of blog draws an audience as a result of its content. This strategy is called ‘inbound marketing’, and is dependent on the idea of service i.e. serve the target audience and they will be more receptive to your messaging.

SEO Improvement

Blogs can also be used for improving SEO (search engine optimisation). This type of blog may be built to funnel potential leads to the company website. It works by boosting the likelihood of the blog or website improving their ranking in a web search.

SEO is a constantly changing area of concern to anyone with an internet presence. There are lots of different criteria that can impact rankings, and their relative importance does keep changing. Criteria may include such things as duplicate content issues, redirect chains and loops, site map issues, broken links, slow speed pages, minified code, images lacking alt attributes, low text to html ratio, headings not using heading code, minimal incoming links, crawl depth, or orphaned page. There are a variety of ways people can stay informed about these important changes. A very concise, clear, and up-to-date blog can be highly valued by readers. However, this is a subject that should only be tackled if you have the ability to source high quality, up-to-date information.

An SEO improvement blog can be comprised of different types of content or blog strategies. This type of blog may use brand development in conjunction with news and PR style blogs, though other combinations are possible. Posts are specifically developed using keyword analysis and on-page marketing tactics. This type of blog may also use strategic linking between posts and other websites.

General

A general blog is arguably the most ineffective type of business blog – it is a mishmash of things the company's bloggers think are important or that people should know. The audience is rarely clearly defined, and the blog may also lack purpose and strategy. Despite this, a general blog is the most common type of business blog, particularly among newer and/or smaller companies. General blogs rarely build communities or large readership bases.

Departmental

A departmental blog is a blog run by a particular department within the company. This type of blog may focus on the company's target demographic or on developing/improving an idea/aspect/process within the company. Departmental blogs can also serve as co-creation spaces where staff can share ideas and thoughts.

Educational

Educational blogs are written for various reasons:

- They can inform people on a specific topic, such as social

psychology, marine biology, year 3 maths.

- They may advise others on education, such as how to teach year 3 maths, maths exercises for 8-year-olds, teaching adult learners, teaching by distance learning, etc.
- They might look at educational policy changes within organisations, or by governments.
- Blogs might consider theories on education, what works well, and what doesn't work well. How people learn.

Educational blogs are varied and if you are planning an educational blog, make sure to consider your specific goal and mission statement to avoid it becoming too broad.

Sales

We have already mentioned that a blog may be written to directly sell products or to sell affiliate products. However, people do not want to read blogs that are constantly trying to sell, so your blog needs to be developed in a way that encourages people to read, as well as to sell your product.

For example – 'Buy this, our new film for £9.99 here.'

This just sounds like an advert. But a blog must be more subtle.

'NEW FILM X is being released on the 1st January. This international blockbuster stars The film mainly takes place on the Planet X where aliens are hunting the inhabitants to

extinction. Etc. The film is available to buy or rent here.’ (Then link to the actual film).

This is more subtle. It draws the reader in, it attracts their attention and then hopefully leads them to buy.

Remember Your Goals

We have already talked about goals for your blog. When deciding on the type of blog you are writing, you will also be deciding on your goals. You may have an overall goal for your blog, but each blog should also have its own goal.

My overall goal may be to sell films. But my goal for this blog is to sell the new film X.

This also ties back to categories and keywords. If you are writing about films, you might write about romances, science fiction, historical films, and so on. So, the categories will not always be the same.

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Suggested Tasks

Identify a business that does not have a blog. This may be one you buy from, work with, a start up or anything else. Consider what type of business blog would be best for this business. Write down the pros and cons of this type of business blog in this situation. Spend up to 15 mins on this task.

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LESSON 7 BUSINESS BLOGS II

You have decided on your blog, your title, your categories, and so on, now it is time to explore further. Blogs can be limitless. Using a mind map, you can expand and expand your blog. This is great but be wary of expanding too much and losing sight of your original goals.

Keep Focussed

When writing an essay question, we should keep looking back at the question to make sure we are on the right track. The same applies with blog writing. When writing a blog, keep thinking:

- Does what I am writing relate to the blog title?
- Does it relate to my overall goal and plan for the blog?

Keep on track.

EXPANDING YOUR BLOG

So, how can you develop your blog further?

Guest Posts

Guest posts are exactly what they sound like – posts written by a guest blogger. They are sometimes run as feature pieces, or question and answer sessions, particularly if the guest blogger is considered an expert in their area.

Guest posts are a useful tool for:

- Building credibility through association
- Reaching new readers

Building Credibility Through Association

Working with a guest blogger creates an endorsement-type relationship. Even if you are not directly endorsing a person or product, giving them a platform on your blog sends the message that you think their expertise and content are valuable. Similarly, when a guest blogger agrees to provide content, they are sending the message that they consider your blog worth their time and effort i.e. that your blog is a credible resource within its niche.

Sometimes the blogger/guest blogger relationship is balanced – this is especially likely if you are friends with your guest blogger. Sometimes, however, the relationship can be out of balance – you need the guest blogger to post more often than they are doing, or they want to bootstrap off your reputation. It is important to be careful when the relationship is out of balance because using guest content ties into your readers' trust. Spend time reading your potential guest blogger's content and confirming their values and expertise. Ensure these align with the goals you have for your blog before sharing guest content.

Reaching New Readers

A guest writer/blogger may have their own readers and followers. They may be well-known. This can attract readers to your blog. It can also attract your readers to their blog, so be careful how you use guest bloggers.

Writing a blog about a famous person, significant event, or new product can attract new readers to your site, so the same applies if you have a guest blogger.

MULTIPLE CONTENT STREAMS

All blogs have some type of content. An ongoing flow of content is called a content stream. This means that regular posts on a blog are considered a content stream.

There are many different potential content streams, or “flows of content”. These can be incorporated directly in your blog or created as part of your social media strategy with your blog as a central point for locating content. Content streams may include:

Audio/podcasts

Blogs can be recorded verbally or presented in the form of podcasts such as educational content, interviews, or recorded answers to reader questions. There are many free options for recording audio; the built-in microphone on a laptop or smart phone is enough to get started. Audio content helps create a real-feel experience for your audience – it gives your content a more personal aspect which can help boost

your credibility and rapport. Audio content is also more portable than many content streams since it can be listened to in bite-sized chunks while engaging in everyday activities like commuting, exercising, and cooking.

Vlogs

Some blogs are verbal and given in the form of video. These are known as vlogs (video blogs). Again, careful writing and consideration is required for your vlog. But a blog/vlog does not have to be one or the other. You might have written blogs and video blogs. For example, going back to Sam the cook, he might write blogs about recipes, getting ingredients and so on, but might also do vlogs showing how to prepare food. Vlogs can be tutorials, explainers, short interviews, short educational content, and so on. Like audio, video helps you create rapport with your audience. Video can also help boost social media sharing and search engine optimisation.

It is a more personalised experience, especially when offered via a livestream format where viewers can ask questions in real time. Video can be pre-recorded – this is common for how-to and general educational or class videos. Live sessions can also be used, allowing viewers to comment in real-time or engage via a webinar. Both options create a low-energy way for your audience to engage.

Interviews and explainers are particularly useful types of video. Interviews create an added sense of immediacy and break up potential monotony through conversation. When used with intent, this can create a “living

room” type experience where the viewer feels as if they are directly included in the content.

Explainer videos provide context for complex concepts. Length varies; a series may be used for more complex contexts. Good explainer videos:

- Use simple language or explain technical terms.
- Leverage graphics – use appropriate animations or images to illustrate a process or link content to a graphic to improve learning and knowledge retention.
- Often use a person as a guide either as a voice-over or for direct filming.

Explainers are an excellent way to capture a new audience, particularly in times of industry flux.

Live Content

You can expand your blog content with live content. For example, Facebook live stream, twitch, webinars. These can be live, but they can also be recorded so that they can remain permanently on your blog as well. Vlogs and live content, as well as any of the other techniques mentioned here, can add variety to your blog.

Regular Hosted Chat

Some blogging sites offer a chat facility. This is where readers can ask you questions. An author might offer readers the chance to ask them questions at a certain time. This encourages interaction with your readers. The author might then use this later in their

blog. For example, they may provide a transcript, use it to answer questions in more detail, or use it as a focus of further blogs. Chats can be done in written form or you can also use visual forms, such as Facebook live.

eBooks

An eBook or other downloadable content can be a way to increase your readership. You might offer eBooks on certain topics related to your blog. These could be free, or you could charge for them. Some bloggers develop a novel or story via their blog, then aim to produce it as a book once their story is finished. Nowadays, eBooks are a common form of downloadable content. They are often used as a way to harvest email addresses e.g. ‘Sign up now to receive my free eBook about The Top 10 Heirloom Tomatoes.’ The average user, however, has an overflowing inbox – which means an eBook must offer valuable information that makes it worth the action of signing up.

A good eBook gives you the opportunity to showcase your experience and knowledge in an easy-to-read format. While other online content is subject to the user’s actions and the formatting offered by a user’s web browser, an eBook can be designed to render a specific experience. This gives you, the author, power over how the user can interact and engage with your eBook, from the sequencing of content through to the design elements used to draw attention to key points or themes. This means you can:

- Help the reader discover what they already know.

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Suggested Tasks

If you are planning to write a business blog, consider which type of blog best fits your needs? Is your blog focussed enough on that area?

Consider your own blog and consider what other channels might enhance your blog. You may come to the conclusion that you prefer a written blog. Or you may be interested in other channels, but not at the moment, or you might consider using them from the start.

- Identify gaps in the reader's knowledge.
- Set up expectations in the reader as to what they can expect to learn from your content.
- Lay out some clear solutions to build rapport and trust.

Downloadable or Shareable Graphics

You might produce your own graphics that people can download and share. For example, '5 steps for a more productive morning' with illustrations, Instagram and Pinterest friendly content. Newsletters can also be used. These will be discussed later.

BENEFITS OF MULTIPLE CONTENT STREAMS

People gather and interpret information in a variety of ways. Diversifying the delivery of your message can help consolidate your message and expertise. Multiple content streams – especially if spread over 2-3 platforms – also creates multiple opportunities for engagement which can help foster a sense of community.

You can also use multiple content streams to design a user journey that leads your audience through your key messages. This helps introduce your readers to your purpose (remember your mission statement?) and the things they can expect from your content. Providing this information up front can help you establish trust and rapport with your prospective readership.

For example - Graphic with eBook intro → 5 most popular or important posts → about me → newsletter → suggested streams based on interest, etc.

In conclusion

We can engage people in our blog in different ways. A blog can be presented in written form alone, but it does not have to be. You can also use vlogs, podcasts, audio recordings, chat, and so on, as discussed above.

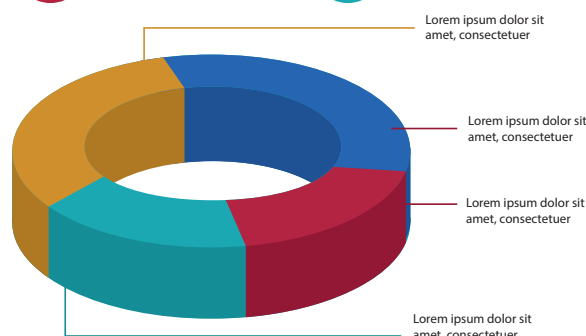
LEARN MORE >>>

Suggested Tasks

If you are interested in using other channels, research what is available and what might enhance your own blog.

Infographics

Infographics is shortened form of 'information and graphics'. They are a visual graphic that represents a lot of information, data and knowledge in a quick and easy format. They are easy to read visual tools presenting key information or concepts e.g. success rates for a particular tool, Instagram and Pinterest friendly content. They help your reader to easily see trends and patterns in the information you present.



Example of infographic

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LESSON 8 INTERMEDIATE BLOGS

(FREELANCE BLOGS)

A freelancer is a person who is self-employed and engages with employers on a per-project basis. A freelance journalist pitches then sells articles to publications rather than being assigned articles, and a freelance marketer contracts with a company for a pre-defined period.

FREELANCE BLOGGING

Until they have established a network, most freelancers must hustle for work.

A freelance blogger will therefore choose what they write, and who they write for, whereas a blogger writing for a specific business will focus on that business.

Benefits of a Freelance Blog

Freelancing has several pros and cons, though discussing these is outside the scope of this course. The important thing to remember is that anyone with appropriate knowledge (and licensing, if applicable) can freelance. This means that even if you work a 9 to 5 job in retail, you can choose to freelance as a copywriter, designer, programmer, etc. for extra income.

As a freelancer, a blog helps you demonstrate your knowledge, industry knowledge, and previous work/ portfolio. It can also provide a hub for all your other content and social media presence. Like a traditional business blog, successful freelance blogs have a clearly defined purpose and set of goals.

Purpose of a Freelance Blog

The purpose of your freelance blog depends on your overall mission. Are you:

- Looking to expand your side hustle or hobby to a full-time career?
- Wanting to pick up the odd bit of freelance work to stay current?
- Trying to supplement your income?
- Trying to develop your brand/ influencer status?
- Experimenting/trialling a new idea or service?

Once you have a clear answer for your purpose, you can:

- Define your audience.
- Write a mission and vision statement.
- Set some smart goals for your blog.
- Work out categories and keywords.
- Create a list of post titles.

While all blogs require fresh content on a regular basis, freelance blogs generally require a clear posting schedule. This is because limited content or old content can suggest that you are:

- No longer interested in taking on work.
- Out of date/out of touch.
- Lacking in skill.

While a freelancer may not require as many content streams and social media channels as a large corporation, you should generally aim for 2 content streams. This allows you to:

- Demonstrate your skill in two different ways.
- Highlight additional, desirable skills like video editing or proficiency in Adobe Indesign.
- Increase opportunities to reach and grow your audience.

However, there are times when even the most dedicated freelancer needs to take a break from posting. If this is the case, it is good practice to write a post noting that you're taking a break to focus on other projects for a while but are still open for business and would love to discuss opportunities. If relevant, direct readers to your other channels e.g. social media, website for a new project, etc.

Anatomy of a Freelance Blog

There are some core pages a freelance blog must have. These include:

- About me – your professional bio with some personal information included.
- Contact page – how to get in touch, expected response time, preferred subject line (i.e. something that clearly flags work opportunities vs. a more general query).
- Portfolio of work – if you are just starting out and don't have existing client work to showcase your talent, you can create some exemplars.
- Information about your specialties – e.g. the magazine pieces you write are generally in the health niche, or you specialise in wedding photography.
- Testimonials.
- Downloadable or interactive content – e.g. eBook, how-to video showing your process.

Other necessary pages vary by industry. Spend time examining other freelance blogs in your area to help figure out any additional pages you will need.

Proofread, Proofread, Proofread

Although all bloggers should take the time to proofread their content, proofreading is a must for freelancers. As a freelancer, your blog is a living resumé – if it's poorly edited you risk creating a negative impression that will affect your employability.

Proofreading does not have to be arduous. Many blog platforms have spelling and grammar checkers built into

their editors, and there are a variety of offline apps for writing and proofing blog content.

Personal/Professional Balance

Standard employer/employee relationships come with a clearly outlined contract regarding behaviour. This functions as a script for expectations of both parties from language and dress code through to duties. Moreover, while employers often hire for fit into workplace culture, they have the opportunity to assess potential employees during the interview and probation stages.

Freelancers rarely have the chance to demonstrate how they will fit into a workplace culture. This is because of the nature of “gig work”; freelancers are hired to complete a set project and often work offsite. Yet this type of work still requires communication – arguably more communication than a traditional employer/employee relationship – which means despite the lack of interview, employers may hire based off perceived personality traits and how much they like or connect with the freelancer. This means that blogging freelancers must:

- Ensure their blog is professional.
- Post about relevant industry topics (and stay as current as possible).
- Inject some of their personality into their work.
- Create a sense of capability and confidence.
- Provide enough personal information to be likeable.

Managing the line between personal and professional can be quite difficult, but there are a few things you can do to help strike a balance. Help keep your posts professional by:

- Avoiding swearing and taboo topics.
- Avoiding personal lifestyle posts e.g. dating.
- Keeping detailed politics out of posts (unless working in a political space).

Help establish a personal presence by:

- Including “safe” personal information on your about page, like your love of cats and/or cheese.
- Referring to hobbies you enjoy e.g. boardgames.
- Using analogies and stories to illustrate your points – the stories you choose help reflect your personal style.
- Including style elements that reflect you in photos – e.g. your favourite coffee cup in a picture showing some aspect of your work.
- Letting your personal sense of fashion show in photos of you.
- Including limited “personal” or “lifestyle” posts – keep these to once every two weeks or once a week maximum.

There are some exceptions to personal disclosures on your blog – this is at your discretion and dependent on you, your industry, and your location. It is also

perfectly fine to state a policy regarding hate speech, your expectations for commenters, and that you will not respond to baited political comments.

In conclusion

Freelance blogs have many features in common with business blogs, but some extra goals and opportunities in play. It can be useful to maintain a freelance blog, even if you are in fulltime employment or blogging for another organisation. It can be a way for you to develop your online presence and to explore topics that are of interest to you. This also helps to maintain the balance between personal and professional work.

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Suggested Tasks

How could you use and develop a freelance blog?

Consider your interests (outside your original blog idea).

This does not have to be something you plan to do right now, but something you can consider for the future.

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Note: You must be on a device with a connection to the internet when doing this for it to work.

LESSON 9 ESTABLISHING SOCIAL MEDIA, FEEDS & NEWSLETTERS

The internet is drowning in content. Individual users are swamped: inboxes are overflowing; newsfeeds are full of competing articles; friends and family are constantly sending new photos, articles, and must-listens. If you have captured a reader – and they’ve made the effort to read a few of your posts – providing them with an easy way to keep up to date with new posts will help you stand out among an overwhelming sea of content.

KEEPING YOUR AUDIENCE INFORMED

There are three major ways bloggers keep their audiences apprised of new content:

- RSS feed
- Newsletter
- Twitter, Facebook, or other social media platforms

RSS Feed

RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication. Posts in RSS format are bare bones versions – they look like very basic pages, usually with a white background, with images in the body of the text. Users subscribe to a blog’s RSS feed through their ‘aggregator’.

An aggregator is a news hub – a service that collects up all the things a user has subscribed to. Every day, the aggregator provides an RSS feed, or collection of updates across all subscriptions. Some aggregators show snippets of pieces,

with the user clicking through headlines within the aggregator; others provide a whole stream of content at once, allowing the user to scroll through each piece until they reach the end of the day’s subscriptions.

Many blogging platforms have RSS capability built in, meaning the blogger does not have to take any extra steps. Some, however, require you to set up an RSS subscription via a third-party service.

RSS use has declined over the past decade – partially due to the rise of social media as a way of interacting with new content, and partially because RSS can be used to strip advertising out of posts. It is no longer built into most major web browsers, though it can be added via extensions. However, the RSS reader app “Feedly” boasted 14 million users in 2018, meaning that it’s probably worth your time to either tick the “allow RSS” box on your blogging platform or set up RSS in a third-party app.

Newsletter

Newsletters help your audience keep up with your content across all channels.

They provide a simple way to let your readers know about:

- New blog posts
- Opportunities in your niche (e.g. jobs open at your company, competitions)
- Ways to contact you
- New promotions

Many bloggers also use newsletters as a forum for answering reader questions. While it is possible to answer reader questions directly on a blog, including newsletter-only content is a good way to drive subscriptions up, especially if you make it clear this content is only available for subscribers.

Twitter, Facebook, and Other Social Media

There are many social media platforms on the internet. Each platform has its own pros and cons, so which is the best option for you? Typically, it is the one your audience uses.

The popularity of a given social media platform varies across demographics. There is no point maintaining a strong Facebook presence if your audience is all 'hanging out' on Instagram. Popularity also varies across countries. In 2020, the major social media players are:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn

- Reddit
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- Pinterest

Note, however, that this list specifically caters to English speakers. In China in 2020, the top social media platforms included:

- WeChat
- Tencent QQ
- Xiao Hong Shu
- Zhihu
- Toutiao
- Sina Weibo
- Douban

In India, the top platforms in 2020 included:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- WhatsApp
- Instagram
- YouTube
- Pinterest
- V Kontakte

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Suggested Tasks

Look at 3 or 4 different profiles of blog owners on their blogs and on social media.

Now write a profile or bio on yourself that could be used on a blog or on social media or support your profile.

Note the inclusion of WhatsApp. Unlike the other high-performing platforms in India, WhatsApp does not use a directed feed. That said, the large number of users available in a group (around 280), who can all share content equally, creates a de facto feed that has resulted in the company creating a WhatsApp for Business feature to facilitate marketing for small and medium enterprises (SME). The platform's recent inclusion of a status option has added to the general social media feel. All this boils down to one key fact: you must market where your audience lives. If your primary audience lives in India, you need to be on WhatsApp running some kind of community and creating content that's easy to share via the app. If your primary audience lives in China, you must be on WeChat, creating for WeChat, and engaging with your audience on WeChat.

Selecting Platforms

Generally, it is best to have a presence on Facebook and at least one other major player for your demographic. You can decide where to focus your efforts based on market research. The number of social media accounts you maintain will depend on the time and energy you have for management and content creation.

Selecting a platform begins with the analysis you did when setting up your blog. Go back to your keyword and word clouds. Set up a spreadsheet (or a draw up a table in a notebook). Add in the keywords and anything that stands out from your word clouds.

Next, add in some target demographic data. This includes age, gender, and other details you have from a marketing persona or similar tool.

Finally, select a social media platform. Set up a basic account for marketing, then go to the ad creator tool (names for this vary). Plug in your demographic data then add a few keywords. Record the reach (number of users the platform says the ad could reach) for each keyword combination. Add this information to your spreadsheet. This will give you a basic idea of the potential audience on that platform. Repeat across platforms you're interested in.

After this, go and find influencers and thought leaders in your niche. Research where they have the strongest presence. Add this information to your spreadsheet. Generally, you want to establish a presence where the niche leaders are, but you can also use them to help validate your numerical research – you should see a correlation between potential high audiences and thought leader platforms (though this will vary with the platform and its available tools). It is important to note that this is not a foolproof method for picking a social media platform – indeed, there is no foolproof method – but it is a useful tool for finding a starting point.

Social Media Influencers

An influencer is simply a person who has influence over another person's buying decisions. It is someone who people trust for a certain reason. For example, they may be trusted because of their:

- Knowledge
- Behaviour
- A group they belong to
- And so on.

In marketing terms, an influencer is someone who affects the buying patterns of others.

Influencers may be celebrities or famous people who are asked to encourage people to buy a certain product. We may see famous people wearing a certain brand of trainer or drinking a certain drink. The aim is to encourage buyers to buy that product as well.

Influencers are not just famous people though, they can also be important, knowledgeable, and influential people. A famous scientist might say that a certain product is good for resisting climate change. We listen to them because they are knowledgeable.

Some influencers do start off as influencers. They become famous so marketers ask them to recommend their product. Or they are knowledgeable, so they are asked.

But influencers can start off as simple bloggers and writers and then become influencers. Candice Braithwaite is a prime example. She started off as a blog writer in 2016. She wrote her debut book in 2020, *I Am Not Your Baby Mother*, about the experiences of being a black mother in the UK. She is now an influencer, encouraging people to make motherhood diverse, use certain types of vitamins, wear brighter colours, and so on.

Becoming an Influencer

People are paid to be an influencer. If you want to become an influencer on your blog, take the following steps:

- Make sure you select your niche. The niche should be something you

are interested in AND something you can consistently create blogs on. It also helps that you have some expertise in this area if you want to establish yourself as an influencer. This does not mean you have to have certain qualifications and so on, but experience and knowledge are important.

- To become an influencer, you will need to research your chosen interest area. So, make sure it is something you are passionate about and want to spend time finding out about.
- As we said at the start of the course, you might have more than one blog, but try not to have too broad a focus or you can find you simply will not progress well in any of them. Aim to have two or three interests/blogs at most, particularly to start off with. You do not have to have more than one. Remember, the aim is to get the blog started and people reading it, so if you focus on too many blogs, you may find you do not do anything you intend to do.
- Once your niche is chosen, decide what social media platform you want to use. Most influencers are popular on one or two platforms only, so decide on two and stick to them.
- Create a profile on social media. Make sure it is optimised, so remember your keywords and categories. If you already have a profile, make sure it is optimised.
- Your bio is the first thing that someone sees. You know the saying, first impressions count, well this is particularly true on social

media. People will look at it and can bounce right off it and never come back. So, make sure your bio is engaging, short and snappy to attract attention. It should tell your story in an engaging way and provide information about you, your location, contact information, and your area of expertise.

- A profile picture and cover photograph are also important to develop your own personal brand identity. Be careful when selecting the image. Make sure your face is clearly visible and there is good picture quality. If you are not sure about whether to reveal your face, perhaps show a side-on view, or use a drawn image of your face, and so on.

Conclusion

In conclusion, remember that people do still use RSS feeds, so make use of them. Consider starting a newsletter for your readers.

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Suggested Tasks

Consider how you might use RSS, social media and newsletters in relation to your blog. Make notes. Spend 10-15 minutes doing this.

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LESSON 10 MARKETING, BRANDING, AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

You have thought of your blog and are planning it, but is it right? As you write a blog, you need to keep re-evaluating and assessing whether the blog is achieving what you want it to achieve.

ASSESSING YOUR BLOG NICHE

You might start your blog and six months later have no regular readers. Or you might start off with a storm and have hundreds of readers quickly. Whichever happens, remember that readers can be fickle, so a hundred readers today could be none tomorrow. And no readers today could be hundreds tomorrow.

- Keep going back to your goals for the blog. If you are getting lots of readers, make sure you stay on track. Don't get tempted to go off and write about other things in your blog. Remember your readers are there to read about what you *said* you were going to talk about. If you want to talk about something else, start another blog. If you don't have any readers, review your goals. Something isn't working, so try something else.
- Identify your strengths and interests. What are you good at? If you have some readers, look at the blogs that most people have read or most have commented on. This might give you some idea of what has worked well and what hasn't.
- Do industry research. Make sure you are up to date with what is going on in your niche area. If you are writing about things that are out of date or no longer relevant, readers will quickly drop away (unless you are talking about retro topics). Just make sure you are writing about what you intend to write about, and what the audience is expecting. If you are aiming for a niche of cutting-edge information on computers, writing about a computer that is five years old will not do it.
- Try and find out your ideal customer. Who are the people who are reading your blog? Why not try and find out more about them? Do online surveys. Post quizzes. Ask questions. Don't make assumptions. For example, there is a lot written about conspiracy theories. The assumption in the past was that the majority of conspiracy theorists were middle aged men. However, more recent research has shown that actually there is an equal number of men and women who are conspiracy theorists, and they cover all age groups. So, don't aim for one age group or gender or type of person until you know more information about who you are writing for.

- Finally, keep testing and adjusting your blog. It is never perfect. Keep looking back at your work. Does it work? Am I getting more readers? Am I losing readers? Why might that be happening? What else can I write about?

Reposting

Another technique bloggers can use is reposting. If you look at many news websites, such as the BBC, you will see that when a new news article appears, they often relate to other articles on that topic. For example, if there is an article on the British Royal Family, you will also see links to other recent articles on the Royal Family.

So, remember to link to older posts. Say you are a whiskey blogger writing about a new Japanese whiskey that has become available, you may have written other blogs about Japanese whiskey in the past. Provide links to these other related articles. This means that old blogs can also be reread and reused.

ONLINE COMMUNITIES

An online community is a group of people with something in common. Communities have been formed around common interests for centuries but have been limited by distance.

In the digital world, communities can be formed regardless of location. This means that any individual with access to the internet can join a community centred on their particular interest. In a blog and business context, an online community is an opportunity for:

- Sharing experiences
- Creating experiences

Sharing Experiences

The most common form of sharing experience communities is a knowledge centre. These can take a variety of forms from a community built around sharing code (e.g. Github), to advice for fixing a computer issue (e.g. support for a word processor or operating system), to narrow-focus questions across diverse channels (e.g. Reddit, Quora).

Sharing experience communities build on goodwill. Users with knowledge engage and share which creates a communal support system. Dedicated users may write quite detailed answers, especially if they have a lot of domain expertise. As a community leader, you can use your content and expertise to facilitate these acts of sharing.

Creating Experiences

Some communities are built around creating experiences. This can mean creating learning experiences i.e. opportunities to learn via a webinar, series of workshops, and more – or creating a sense of working together to achieve a common goal. Working together could mean building a community where people can share ideas to discuss or improve some aspect of their industry or improve outcomes (e.g. increasing diversity in leadership roles, improving higher education access for students in low-income families). As a community leader, you can use your content and expertise to facilitate the creation of experiences.

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Suggested Tasks

Look at contacts or friends you have on a social media account. Take note of how many followers some have and how few others have.

Over the period of a week, take notice of how active different successful and unsuccessful contacts are. Consider why some are more successful than others.

This type of community can also be built around a single creator providing content which is then discussed – much like an online version of a book club, but with a live piece of content provided at regular intervals. This type of community (e.g. Patreon) is usually a paid model. While it is possible for users to engage only with content, the strong community aspect of this type of setup is more likely to keep users engaged and paying to subscribe.

Both types of communities are focussed on 4 core concepts:

- Empowerment
- Support

- Creativity
- Culture

Benefits of Building an Online Community

Online communities drive engagement with your content (i.e. your blog), and service or product. Like blogs, however, an online community needs an overall purpose – without any clearly defined purpose or goal, community members are more likely to disengage and drift to other services.

Once you recognise your online community is a driver for engagement, think about what you want it to drive.

Example

Aaron is an app developer. Aaron has built a popular app and receives many support questions. As the sole developer, he cannot handle the number of new users looking for support and cannot afford to hire an assistant. As a result, Aaron has created a detailed set of how-to articles, but new users rarely find them. Aaron decides to create an online community to help provide support for his app:

Problem: High number of users requiring support

Solution: Link up new users with experienced users via online community

Online Community Purpose: Drive new users to how-to blog posts and support; have experienced users answer more specific questions to free up Aaron so he can develop his next app.

Online communities can also be rich sources of data. An established online community can act as:

- A focus group.
- Beta testers for products and services.
- A suggestion box for new ideas and features.

This type of community can also give insight into:

- How people use your content.
- The effectiveness of your content.

As a result, you can continue to provide targeted content and rework – or

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Suggested Tasks

Find a successful online community.

As far as is possible, look into their activity and identify why they might be successful.

iterate – ideas and strategies that are not working as effectively. Both actions serve your audience, which creates a cycle of engagement you can continue to leverage.



Where to Build Your Community

There are no hard and fast rules to where you can build or host an online community. Users comfortable with coding may opt to install forum specific software on their blog. This is called an owned community platform. Many technology companies use owned community platforms.

While an owned platform gives you complete control over your community, it is resource-heavy – it has a high set burden, and you must invest in driving users to the community space. That said, complete control means you can set the space up however you like, using your brand colours and styling and including key messaging wherever

you like. You'll also be able to integrate specific analytics tools to see how your users are engaging with each other and your content, and to watch for usage patterns. These patterns can help you make better marketing decisions in the long term.

The higher cost of owned platforms means most bloggers opt for free community platforms – i.e. social media platforms or networking apps that can be used to connect groups. Free platforms require little set-up and already have a user database which means that while you will still need to drive users to your specific corner of the platform (e.g. your Facebook group or page), many will already be active on the main site (i.e. Facebook).

The comments section on most platforms is technically an owned platform, i.e. you can directly manage it. Without additional plug-ins or software though, comment sections can quickly become hotspots for spam and difficult to manage if you are time poor. Some blogging platforms allow users to post without harvesting data (i.e. name and email address), which means it's difficult for you to use comments to your advantage. Other platforms do require users to register which can drive them away because it is another hoop to jump through, and they lose motivation when faced with the additional sign-up time. As a result, some bloggers opt to integrate Facebook comments, Gravatar (native to WordPress), or similar systems to improve data collection while reducing the load for the commenter.

BRANDING

Branding gives meaning to a specific business or individual. It is a means of differentiating between different businesses through their logo, name, product designs, messaging, and so forth. When you think of any brand, you automatically create an image of that brand in your mind. Likewise, if you want to create your own brand, you need to mould people's perceptions of how they view your brand. Branding is important because it helps your readers or customers to work out who you are and what makes you different.

Building a brand is not something you can do overnight. It takes time. Some ways to establish your brand include:

- Work out what it is about you or your business that your audience connects with.
- Create a message which tells people what you are all about.
- Use consistent visuals to promote your brand (logo, colours, signage).
- Match visuals with messaging.
- Have consistent standards (for businesses these can be adopted by employees).

Personal vs. Professional Branding

Personal branding, as you might imagine, is about branding the individual as opposed to the business or business's products. In blogging, it could help to make you more well-known in your niche area, it might

cement your place as an expert that people turn to, or it might raise your profile by ensuring a greater following on social media. It could also help with career advancement and open doors with regards to marketing partnerships.

To develop personal branding, you might:

- Develop a short brand statement - which sets out who you are writing for, what you can offer your audience, and why they should read your blog (or follow you).
- Promote your brand – through Vlogs, blogs, public speaking, websites, etc.
- Check how your brand is received – monitor feedback, deal with negative comments or complaints promptly.
- Set targets – decide how you will measure success for your brand e.g. increased readership, sales, positive feedback, reaching KPIs, being asked to be a guest blogger, being consulted by others in your industry.

Key Points

- Market niches are important in blogging – learn the difference between category/genre, and drill down to some very key points and core ideas. For example, 101 Cookbooks, Happiness Project (Gretchen Rubin), the Julie and Julia project vs. Seth Godin, company blogs, etc. Even businesses need to stick to their niche because it builds on earlier material.
- Branding – involves working around

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Suggested Tasks

Find a blog where branding is under developed. It might be your own, or one operated by a business or individual you know, do business with, or are in some way familiar with.

Identify two things that could be done to improve their branding.

Consider how those actions might best be undertaken with a minimal requirement of resource input i.e. if money and time is limited, how could the branding still be improved?

your niche to pinpoint what is different about you and how you want to be perceived by others. Developing your brand also builds on earlier material.

- Segue branding into the online community – you can use your brand to attract and interact with like-minded individuals, and create opportunities ranging from networking to publishing a book, or employment to exploring freelance avenues.

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FINAL ASSESSMENT

Having completed all of the lessons, you should now be ready to undertake a final assessment.

This “exam” will operate in much the same way as the end-of-lesson assessments you undertook throughout the course, except that this time you are being examined on content from all of the lessons (rather than just one lesson).

To be successful here, you need to have retained what you learnt in your long-term memory. If you worked through the lessons too fast, you will not have achieved that outcome, and it would be advisable to return to earlier lessons and review them before attempting this final assessment.

Here is how this assessment works:

1. Ensure you are on a computer that has an active connection to the internet, then click on the ‘start examination now’ button which follows.
2. Answer all of the questions.
3. After completing the questions, follow the instructions. You will be able to:
 - ◆ See your test results.
 - ◆ Save a PDF copy of your ‘Certificate of Completion’ if you pass.
 - ◆ Print a copy of your ‘Certificate of Completion’.

NOW YOU CAN
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SET OF QUESTIONS

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