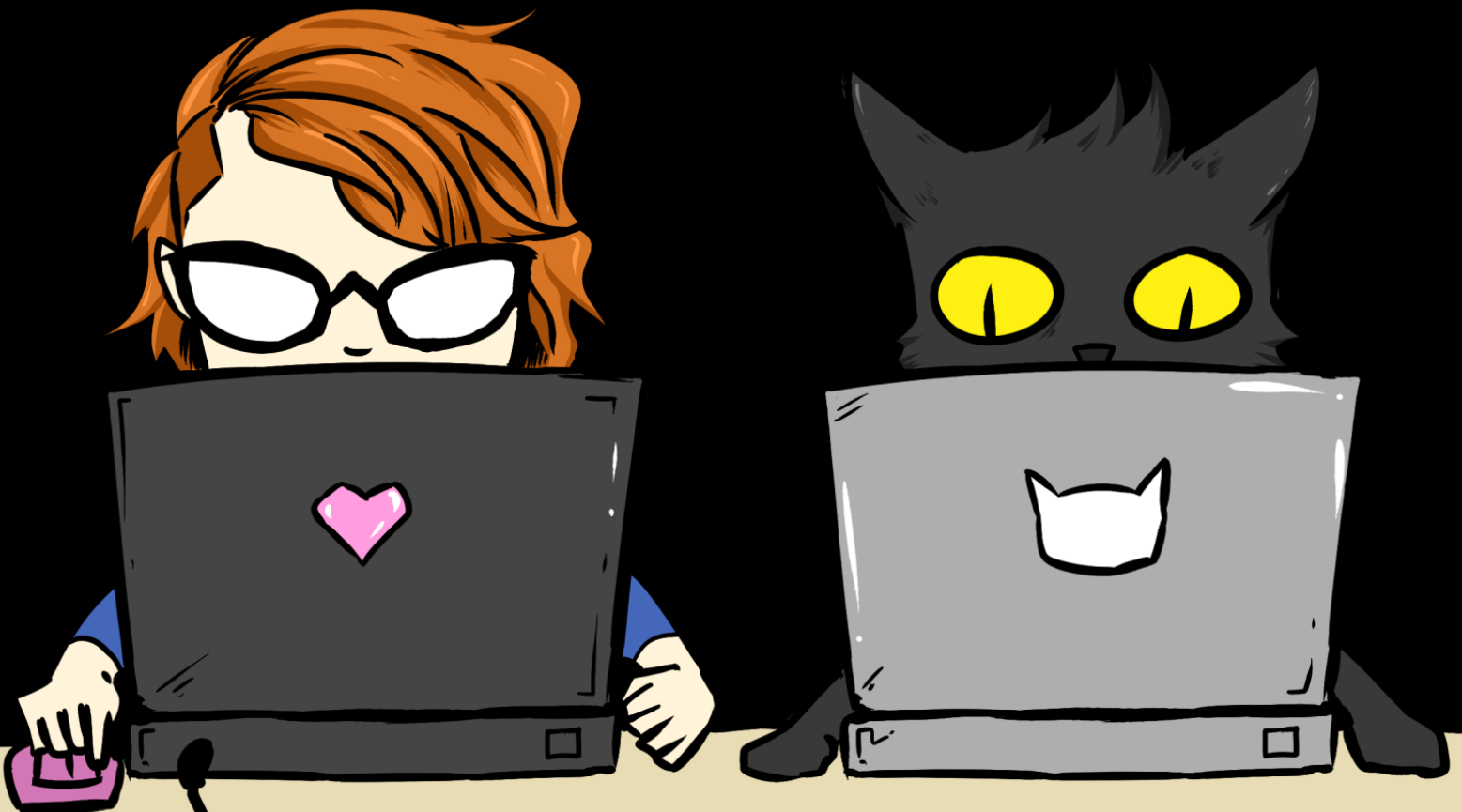


LittleZotz Writing's

Quick-Start Guide to Blogging



Lauren R. Tharp

Introduction

When it comes to blogging, there are three questions I get above all others:

1. *WHY should I should I start a blog?*
2. *HOW do I write professional-looking posts?*
3. *Do I really HAVE TO have a blog if I don't want one?*

This tiny e-book answers each of those questions.

So, without further ado...

8 Great Reasons to Start Blogging

1. Blog clips are better than no clips.

If you're truly a newbie, chances are you don't have any clips (writing samples) to show off yet. If you stick with it, you'll have some soon... But what do you show prospective clients in the meantime? Your blog!

I ended up getting a job working in the marketing department of a TV mini-series thanks to my personal blog. Yeah. It wasn't even *this* super awesome business-y blog. It was my silly diary of day-to-day events. But it worked because...

2. Maintaining a blog shows you're able to meet deadlines.

Ideally, you're going to be updating your blog on a set schedule. And, if you succeed in doing so, that's something you can show off to potential clients. A big part of being successful in the writing biz is having the ability to meet deadlines—to write on a schedule. Proving you can meet regular deadlines (even if they're self-enforced) is a HUGE plus!

3. Blogging shows your ability to focus/stay "on brand."

The best blogs are the ones that tackle a consistent theme, week after week after week. Are you able to stay on track? On message? Potential clients need to know you can do this. Even if your blog isn't talking about their particular product/genre, they like to know that you *could*. Branding is very important to businesses...and great branding is consistent.

4. It shows your level of dedication.

Related to the above, if you can get your blog up and *keep it going*, it goes a long way toward showing your dedication level. Do you miss updates without stating why? Does your blog gather cobwebs for weeks on end before you suddenly make a reappearance? **Having a neglected blog is worse than not having one at all!** Whether it's true or not, people will see you as sloppy and undependable. (Aka: Not someone they want to work with).

On the flip side, if you have a well-maintained blog with regular updates and audience engagement, expect to turn some heads.

5. You'll (slowly) build a following.

Blogs are a wonderful way to grow your business and engage your audience. What could be better than that? How about... the **potential for a book deal**? 148 bloggers landed book deals in 2012. Why? Because they had agents. Why else? Because they already had a built-in audience, someone to market to. And *that* is very appealing to publishers.

6. It's a must if you want blogging gigs.

What kind of a blogger doesn't own a blog? I mean, come on! Carol Tice recently pointed out that you technically **don't have to blog**. But, if you want blogging gigs, you really, really do. It's a must.

Also, if your excuses for not blogging include "I'm bored" and "I don't know what to post/write about" then are you sure you really want to be a writer? **If you truly love writing, blogging should be fun.** It's the chance to write about whatever you want. As a writer, that's the most fun, rewarding experience you can have! As **Dana Sitar recently said**, "Why do you need motivation to write? This isn't required of you. This is the passion you chose to pursue. If you don't want to do it, do something else."

7. Blogging shows your competency as a writer.

Think spelling and grammar errors on your blog are "no big deal?" Think again! I'm going to **quote myself** for a second to save time:

“If you make a spelling or grammar error (or any sort of typo), your readers will notice. It’s a distraction. It’s a blip of static during their favorite song. Or a rock on an otherwise smooth path.

They notice.

The real problem comes when they don’t stop noticing.

Once a reader/potential customer comes across a spelling/grammar error, they start looking for other spelling/grammar errors in your writing.

What they aren’t doing? Reading your message!

There’s no way for your readers to fully absorb your message if they’re caught up in a tangle of errors.”

And these are the mistakes you’re making on your blog. On your passion project. On your ongoing portfolio piece.

If you’re making careless mistakes on your own work—the work you supposedly care the most about—how many more errors will you make when working for a client?

Sure, maybe you do “better” work for your clients... But how are *they* supposed to know that?

On the other hand, if you make an effort to keep your blog looking polished, clients start to think “I wonder if he/she could do the same for me...?”

8. Your blog shows who YOU are.

These days, one of the quickest ways to get familiar with a freelance writer’s writing style (and personality!) is to read their blog. And that’s a wonderful thing.

You don’t want clients to hire “any” freelance writer, you want them to hire YOU.

Why wouldn’t you want to make use of an easily accessible platform that shows them just that?

How to Blog in 10 Easy Steps!*

*This section originally appeared as a guest post for [The Write Freelance](#).

When I first started getting articles published back in the early 2000s, print publications were still the reigning king. Obviously, things have changed since then.

These days, online/web writing has become the norm. And, thanks to blogging, the newest generation of freelance writers can make a great living – [\\$100 an hour or more!](#) – doing what they love.

Blogs rock.

And creating one of your own can *majorly* boost your writing career.

What's that? You've heard this before?

Now you want to know where to start? And you want to know what goes *into* creating a great blog?

All right, Smarty-pants. I can help you with that. ;)

The 10 Elements Every Blog Needs

1. You need a headline.

[Copyblogger](#)'s Brian Clark recommends writing the headline first before writing your body/post content. Headlines are important. From a copywriting standpoint, headlines are the *most* important part of your article with a whopping 80% of visitors reading only the headline and merely skimming the body copy. Ouch!

Put some thought into your headlines – give them your all and really focus on creating something that will catch your audience's attention! There are several [headline styles](#) that work consistently. When in doubt, use a "How to" headline. (Like I did for this article!).



2. You need an image.

As writers, we tend to place more emphasis on the [power of words](#); however, images are incredibly important for drawing in readers.

Most people will shy away from large blocks of text with no visual

interest. Including an image with your blog posts can liven them up, and even help to (literally) illustrate your point.

I prefer to hire freelance artists in order to give my blog a unique look and feel. But there are plenty of free stock photos online that can give your posts a “sleek” look without having to break the bank. I found the image on the top left of this page on [freeimages.com](#)!

3. You need to break up your paragraphs.

Web writing reads differently than traditional print writing. Put simply: It's harder on the reader's eyes.

In order to make your posts easy to read, break up the paragraphs. Stay away from giant walls o' text.

4. You need relevant links.

Including hyperlinks in your blog posts are now the accepted standard. Not only for search engine optimization ([SEO](#)) purposes, but to add an extra element to your written content. Almost like the extras included on Blu-Ray movie discs – the links are additional “features” that enhance the information you're providing.

Use them sparingly. Keep them relevant.

(Note: A “hyperlink” is a word or phrase that, when clicked, takes you to another website – or a section of the one you're already on. They're usually blue and underlined, like the links on this page!)

5. You need to update on a set schedule.

Search engines no longer care if you're updating daily or weekly. What they look for now is that you update *consistently*. But updating on a schedule isn't just for the magic robots that rank your site – they're for your human readers as well.

I got my first major gig thanks to my personal blog. I was chronicling the silly day-to-day events of my life, but I made it a point to update consistently. This was something my client found very desirable.

When you [update on a set schedule](#), you're not only increasing your search engine ranking, you're also proving to potential clients that you're able to meet self-enforced deadlines. That you're reliable. And that goes a long way toward getting you paying gigs.

6. You need to allow comments on your posts.

Letting your readers comment on your posts is a great way to get them engaged in your writing. As is allowing them to share your work on their social media networks.

That said, you shouldn't allow comments on pages. It looks tacky and unprofessional.

You don't want commentary – unless they're official [testimonials](#) – on your business pages. Those are there for your clients to read and, hopefully, hire you. That's the only “engagement” you need there.

7. You need to share your work.

Once you write something, share it. Don't keep it to yourself! And don't expect that others will find it just because it's there. Make an effort to get your work in front of your readers, whoever or wherever they may be.

8. You need to remember who you're writing for.

It's all-too-easy to be self-indulgent when it comes to writing blog posts. Always remember who you're really writing for: Your audience.

Keep your posts on target.

9. You need to proofread.

Before you hit “Publish,” you need to proofread, spell check, and edit your work. Seriously.

My advice? Sleep on it, if at all possible. Waiting a while to proofread/edit your work will give you a fresh perspective on it the next morning, making it easier to spot errors.

My second favorite proofreading technique? Reading the piece aloud. If it sounds strange when you say it, it will sound strange when your readers read it.

10. You need to not be careless.

Please don't be careless. An embarrassing number of people end up getting themselves into trouble each year thanks to things they've written about on their blogs. Remember: It's not just you on the Internet—it's EVERYONE! That means that your mom, your boss, and a slew of other people have the potential to read whatever you choose to put out there.

Don't say anything you don't want anyone and everyone reading.

There you go! The 10 steps to creating a professional-looking blog post. Woo-hoo!

And here's a bonus:

11. Have fun.

If you have fun writing your blog, your audience will have fun reading it.

Do You HAVE to Have a Blog...?

Does this sound like you?

"I hate my blog. I have nothing to say on it. I only have it because I think I have to."

Well, this is going to seem strange coming from someone who earns her living writing blog posts for other people, but... No.

You really don't *have* to have a blog.

I would say that there are two types of people who "have" to have a blog. And that would be:

1. Blog writers. Not writers in general. You can have one if you want one no matter what kind of writer (or business owner) you are, but you don't *have* to have one unless you're aiming to be a professional blogger. In which case, you want to show your clients "Look! Look at my blog! I know how to blog."

Note 1: Alternatively, you can work hard pitching guest posts to *other* blogs/publications and then list them on your website's Writing Samples page; however, I would still recommend having a blog of your own.

Note 2: Unsure where to send in pitches to land guest posts? I recommend getting a free copy of [The Ultimate List of Better-Paid Blogging Gigs](#) from Be A Freelance Blogger!

2. Someone with something to say. And not just "something to say" – something to say *on a consistent basis*. Because if you've only got one thing to say, just make it a page on your website (not a series of posts). Or write a book, if you've got one very large thing to say!

In other words, if you've got something to say on a weekly, bi-monthly, whatever basis, then go for it. Get a blog.

But if you have nothing to say, if you hate blogging, and/or you're in a business that isn't *blog focused* then you don't have to have one. You can find and connect and engage with people in other ways.

If you're afraid of people not showing up or not knowing about updates in your business, you can put a calendar on your website for [upcoming events](#).

Having a blog is a lot of responsibility. If you have one, **you need to update it on a consistent basis.**

For example, [my business blog](#) on LittleZotz Writing updates every other Wednesday. If you come on a Wednesday and then come again on the next Wednesday after that, you're going to see fresh content.

I also have a blog on my personal website [LaurenTharp.net](#). That one is my "News" blog where I tell readers about articles I've written where I actually have a byline – because most of my work is ghostwriting – and I also make little updates about my life in general and whatnot.

Many of those life posts are on my blog because, as a ghostwriter, I constantly fear losing my own identity because I'm taking on so many other people's! But it's also because I don't want there to be any large gaps in my updates.

The last thing you want is for someone to come to your website, see that your blog hasn't updated in months, and assume you're no longer active in your field.

I would rather have somebody come and see my random updates about how amazing my new nail polish is or how adorable my cats are than to have them come and see *nothing*.

So if you're the kind of person who just wants to make little updates like that about your life or whatever, then that's fine. But that may not always be a viable option, depending on what field of work you're in. I'm very lucky in that I get to goof around a bit with my business (it's one of the perks of being the owner!). But if you (or your blogging client) is more traditional/serious, you'll need to put more planning into your updates.

Again: You don't "have" to blog unless you're a blogger or unless you have something to say on a consistent basis.

Or, if you do have something to say on a consistent basis, but you don't want to write it yourself: [Hire me](#).

And that's it for now. Thanks for reading!

Still have blogging questions?

One on
One
Mentoring
for New Freelance
Writers
Available
Now!



[I can mentor you.](#)

I totally get what it's like to be a newbie. To be so full of fear. To have oh-so -many questions with no one to turn to for answers.

Reading books (like this free e-book!) and blogs is wonderful. **But you can't ask a book or a blog a question.** And sometimes... you really, really need to.

- “How do I get started writing online?”
- “How do I get testimonials?”
- “How do I set my rates?”
- “Do I need a website?”
- “Where should I look for clients?”
- “What does [insert writer jargon here] mean?”
- “How do I get paid?”
- “Should I start right away or wait a while?”

Sound familiar? **That's where I come in.**

I can answer those questions. *And more!*

Being a “newbie” doesn't have to be overwhelming.

I can give you the knowledge you need to help you feel unafraid.

I can answer your questions.

Let's talk.

Send me an email at littlezotz@gmail.com to [book a mentoring session!](#)

--Lauren*