

Writers & Blogs

by

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[A Writer's Edge](#)

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## Introduction

This publication had its inception in a March 2012 session of #BlogChat on Twitter. The purpose was to provide the best tips on starting a blog, for absolute newbies. I'd begun blogging almost eight years earlier, in June 2004, so my advice just poured out, and when I started to slow down, I realized it was time to share it with a larger audience.



Beginning a blog is simple as sin, or it can be almost as complicated as starting up a website. Indeed, if you do it the most effective way, a blog *is* a website that you host on rented server space, not a collection of web pages nebulously fluttering about in cyberspace. If each post has a unique website address, located on a server you own or rent, the blog becomes a perpetual record of your thoughts and a potential money

maker.

Make no mistake, however, blogging **is** writing. Blog posts showcase how you think and work, as well as the quality of your writing. Therefore, it demands the same level of standards you apply to a manuscript to send to an acquisitions editor or an agent or a report for your board of directors. The writing in your blog is as much a part of your image as your photograph and resume. It compares favorably to a visual artist's portfolio.

## Why Should Writers Blog?

Before I tell you how to blog in sin or do it the harder, better way, more important preliminaries merit your close consideration. The first and most important is:

Figure out why you want to blog. "Cause all the cool kids are doing it" is not a good reason. "I want to" is not a good reason. "I want to express myself" is a tad better, but still not good enough, similar to "I'm not a star, but it's all about me." Specifically for writers, you may have heard that all writers need a blog or a website or both, so you feel you must have a blog because it's easier. True, but still not a good reason.

Good reasons to blog: I want to help ... or I want to sell ... and for writers, I want a way for readers to get to know me better. Readers, especially serial fans, are usually curious about their favorite authors. If you can manage it, interaction with them online will build buzz about your writing and yourself. This is the usual good reason for an author/writer to blog, to build readership.

Decide the specific purpose or goal for your blog. This must come first because it will shape the structure, design, and to a large extent, the content of your blog. Your goal or purpose determines who you link to (and who you don't), what widgets or features you will offer and what kind of services the

blog will need. For example, if you only converse with friends and fans, you won't need a marketing mechanism to transfer funds in exchange for goods (such as, selling books).

If your writing is in support of a movement, whether it's achieving world peace or preserving a tiny piece of wilderness, you'll probably want to display graphics with links to relevant organizations, blogs and websites.

## Getting Started

Several steps can or must take place simultaneously if you are going to host your blog independently. So, first let me give you the "sinful" way to begin blogging:

Visit Blogger.com or WordPress.com and follow the blogging service's instructions. That's it. The company will host your blog on their servers with hundreds of thousands of others. TopTenReviews.com listed nine blogging services as the best in 2012 and included WordPress, TypePad, Squarespace, Blogger, MySpace, AOL Journals, Windows Live Spaces, Xanga, and LiveJournal. You can review a chart of feature comparisons at <http://blog-services-review.toptenreviews.com/>. I also use Posterous.com.

The major disadvantage of this easy blogging is that your blog's web address is buried in Blogger or WordPress. Both allow you to have a separate domain name that points to their servers (which may cost), but you still have no control over the posts stored there. Advertising may appear on your blog without your permission, or the whole shebang may disappear with no warning. You may never see your precious postings again. There may be constraints on your ability to place advertisements on or to use third party services with your blog.

If you want to create your blog on an independent server, you'll need Word Press, Moveable Type, Type Pad or another form of content management software (CMS). More people probably use [Word Press](#) which also can create separate web pages. Host the blog and/or incorporate it into a website if it supports a business. Hosting involves renting server space with a hosting company like LAMPhost.com, the one I've been with for about a decade and placed clients on. Avoid "free" web space or site providers. Here's a list of inexpensive hosting companies: <http://www.consumer-rankings.com/hosting/>.

Pick a good name for your blog and the domain name, if you are going to host the blog on your server. Rent a domain name the same as the blog name. You rent them for a year or more from registrars on the Internet. GoDaddy.com is one of the least expensive and difficult to use. Just Google "domain names" or "registrars" to find others.

What's a good name? Yours. Or something catchy that reflects the purpose of the blog or the topic you're going to write about. I wish now that I'd known I was going to have a Twitter account as "GLHancock." I would have bought a domain name or two with that in it. I had "HancockWebsites.

com” but gave it up when building websites became too time-consuming for the amount of money chintzy authors wanted to pay.

Get your blog listed with the three major search engines and add “sitemap” files the engines request in your root directory. Also list your blog in any specialty search engines, if applicable, and in [DMOZ](#) (Open Directory Project) and all blog and/or topical directories. Some I’ve used may no longer exist:

[All Freelance Writing](#)

[Answers](#)

[Absolute Write](#)

[About Us](#)

[The Writer](#)

[Technorati](#)

[Business Info Guide](#)

[myFeedz](#)

[Amazon Profile](#)

[MyBlogLog](#)

[Stumble Upon](#)

[Blogs for Readers](#)

[Feeds That Matter \(#39\)](#)

[Blogflux](#)

[Blogger Forum](#)

[100 Bloggers](#)

[Frappr](#)

[BlogHer](#)

[Kinja](#)

[FeedBurner](#)

[Meetup \(Writers' Links\)](#)

[Google Directory](#)

[Cyberjournalist \(#109\)](#)

[blo.gs](#)

[SD Union-Tribune](#)

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[GetBlogs](#)

[AuthorsBlogs.com](#)

[Published.com](#)  
[MarketingTool.com](#)  
[Freelance Designers](#)  
[Backspace](#)  
[Blogs by Women](#)

Join SM groups (Social Media like FaceBook, Twitter, Goodreads, Google Plus) sites to promote the blog. Participate in topical forums, chats, and mailing lists, using your blog's website address (URL) in signature files and as a screen name if that seems to fit. Be sure to practice transparency and authenticity in your interactions, postings and listings. That means don't try to present yourself as something or someone you're not. It's the Internet, stupid, you will get caught! On the other hand, you must be selective about sharing personal information both for safety's sake and for credibility and reputation.

**Be an angel!**

Simply put: don't lie or exaggerate.

More tips:

Add your blog's URL to all your signatures, online and offline advertising, and any type of promotional material.

Leave cogent comments on similar blogs.

Get guest post spots & have guests post on your blog.

Post only relevant, interesting, useful content.

Use images but don't clutter pages with them.

Avoid using widgets that draw and display content that isn't "seen" by search engines and may send readers to other sites.

Instead of a blog roll or list of links, place links in posts and try to link to sites with a high Page Rank than yours. Consult Google about page ranking and search engine optimization techniques.

## **Attracting Readers**

Most writers' purpose for blogging is to get people to visit and then buy their books. That is called getting traffic to a website. The best way to do this is to write "rich content" that's relevant to the viewers you want to attract. Allowing comments on your blog posts and interacting with commenters (developing a community) is a most effective activity to hold fans and attract more. Some authors find it worth while to run contests which often result in a viewer winning a copy of the author's book.

Other techniques include using social media to let them know about your blog and interesting posts. Make sure the SM doesn't take up too much of your time, though. Include the blog's URL in your published books, so readers know where to find it. Give them reasons to visit: posts about back stories, settings, and characters; for nonfiction, offer details about the research you did, references and updates on facts or changing situations.

If you're an experienced author, you can provide advice about getting started writing and tips to improve the quality of writing. Craft only helpful and interesting posts—not whining rants. Link to your YouTube videos or book trailers, articles about you or your writing, and interviews with you. You'll see advice to pop in content from other sites, but why send your readers away? Provide information they can't get elsewhere. This will also give you a boost with search engines, which will deliver viewers looking for what you have to offer.

## Managing Time

You can't possibly participate in all available social media (including blogs). Either set a time limit or sign up for only a select few and make the most of them. It might take experimentation to learn which services work best for you. This requires planning and organization to track results. You can't tell what's working if you try too many at the same time, or if there is no way to tell where visitors come from to your blog.

At some points, time to write will be more important than time to blog and promote. If you're the type of writer who is never "between projects" you will have to compromise to keep up a reasonable pace among the various types of writing you must perform for your career. Even if you're a fictionist, you can see now that a lot of nonfiction writing is needed to support the fiction writing.

Blogging can be fun, but if it seems to become drudgery, a few strategies can help manage your time:

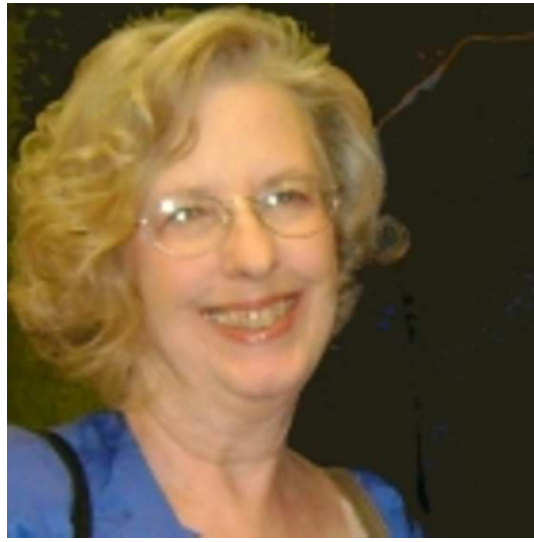
Capture ideas for posts when they come to you. Many writers find software like EverNotes useful for this. You can just open up your blog when you think of an idea and write a few lines or paragraphs to save as a draft, if your service has this feature. Return when you've finished your main writing and polish up the post. It may be a lot easier to write a post if you've already made a start. I saved the URLs of interesting websites as drafts and later write posts about the sites.

For some writers, taking breaks from their main work to blog works well. They alternate the serious

writing with the promotional (but still serious) writing for the blog and SM.

You could set a maximum amount of time you want to spend on the blog and SM each week and discipline yourself. Short, regular posts are better than ones of any length that appear irregularly and weeks apart.

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Georganna Hancock blogged at [A Writer's Edge](#) and [A Writer's Edge \(cont.\)](#) on Posterous.com. She has written several other guides for writers and the ebooks *Writers & Websites* and *Basics for Writers: Starting a Writing Career*. Find them in the [Kindle Store](#) on Amazon and in the Bibliography section of her Amazon [Author Page](#) or in her [Amazon Shop](#).

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