



THE BLOG COACH'S BLOG GUIDE

Your blog—if done right—can be one of your most important calling cards. Do it wrong and you've wasted more than just your time and energy. You've wasted an opportunity you'll never get back.

In short, if your blog is a dog, you're in trouble.

Let's face it. Even those of us who are patient have the attention-span of a gnat when surfing online. If something doesn't catch us right away, click! We're onto the next page. So you have to grab people right away with content and tone that will keep them reading.

I can help with that, which is why I wrote this blog guide.

I'm a [bestselling writer](#) and an acclaimed [writing coach](#). After noticing how many of my clients, business associates and friends were struggling with their blogs, I launched my [blog coach](#) services. Blogging has become such a critical marketing component that I just couldn't let the people around me flounder.

As a blog coach, I help my clients use their blogs to promote themselves and/or their products or services as effectively as possible.

I hope this guide does the same for you.



Linden

DO YOU NEED A BLOG?

Maybe you don't need a blog. If you're selling carburetors, unless you have a unique technique for restoring them or unless you race or show vintage cars in which you've installed your carburetors, a blog probably won't do you much good.

I may be a blog coach now, but I resisted the idea of blogging like a stiff-legged mule refusing to budge. I didn't read blogs (at least not then). And I sure as heck didn't want to write one. I figured that my professional background was enough of a calling card. After all, how many writing coaches have written a national bestseller or worked as an editor on the staff of the *Ladies' Home Journal* and the *Los Angeles Times Magazine*?

A number of friends from the Web world kept urging me to start blogging. Finally one of them said, "Your website gives people information about your credentials and samples of the writing you've done. But it doesn't give them a real sense of who you are." That's all it took. I started my blog the next day.

If your business, like mine, requires you to distinguish yourself from your competition or relies on your personality in any way, shape or form, a blog could be just the ticket.

Besides, a blog provides your site with fresh new content, which helps with your search engine ratings. And who doesn't need that?

Of course, the operative words here are *fresh* and *new*. Once you start a blog, you actually have to write fresh, new posts on a regular basis. How regular? I tell my clients that they really need to shoot for once a week. More would be great, but unrealistic for most of us. Less than once a week happens, but it shouldn't happen often.

The fact is that you can't develop much of a following if you don't give people a predictable schedule to, yes, follow.

Too bad we can't just push a button and make it happen.



WHETHER YOU HAVE A BLOG OR ARE THINKING OF STARTING ONE, YOU NEED TO KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH WITH YOUR BLOG.

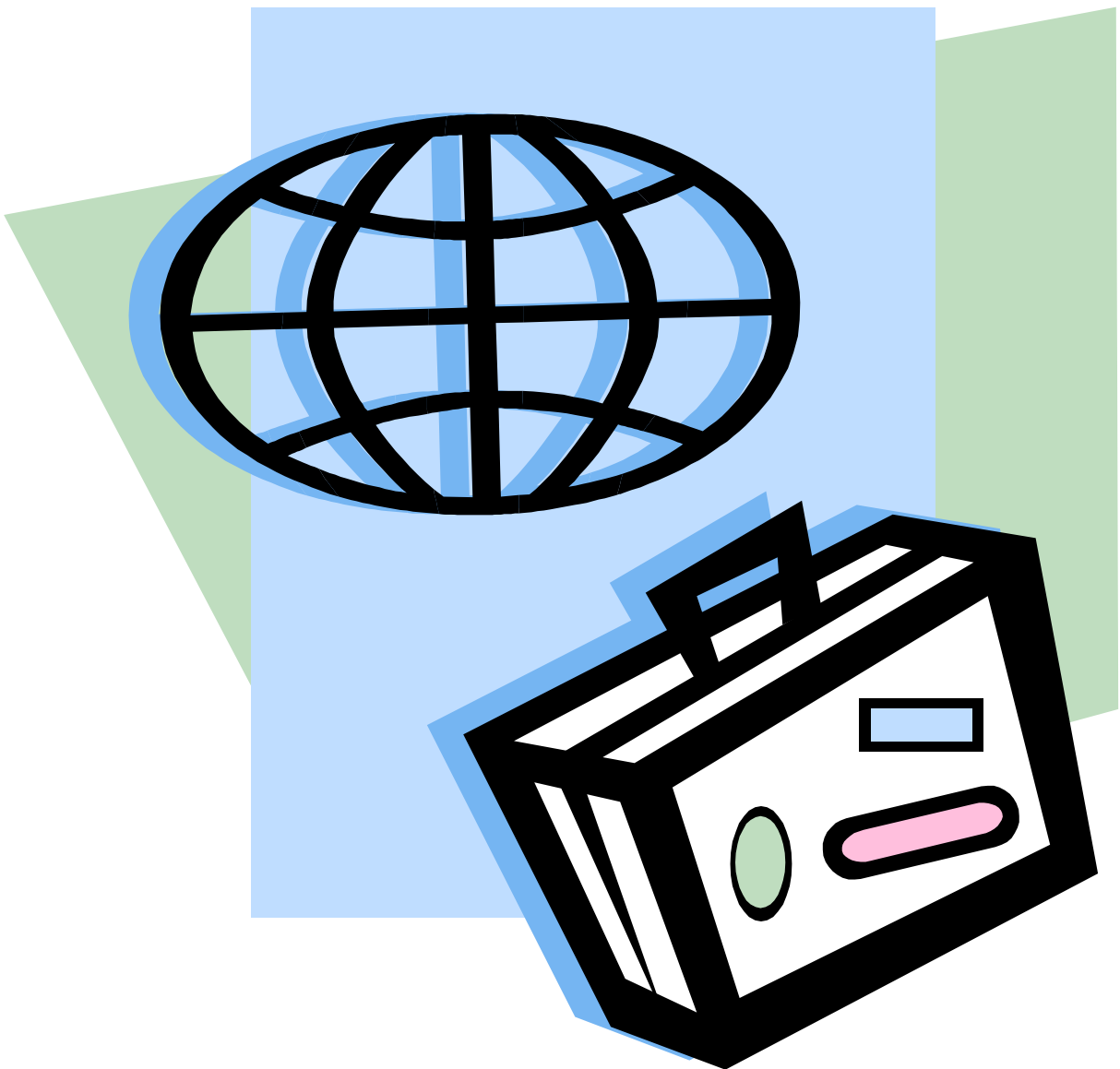


- ✚ Are you trying to increase your revenue by increasing your online visibility and convincing people to buy your product or service?
- ✚ Is your blog providing information to help build your credibility or to get people talking?
- ✚ Perhaps you just want to give people a peek into how you think and what you value so they know who they would be doing business with.

The decisions you make about your blog will vary depending on whether you're trying to get a sale, help build your credibility, introduce yourself on a more personal level, make an online splash or all four.

As with anything else, being clear about what you hope to achieve with your blog is critical. You can't reach your destination unless you know where you're going. So you need to understand why you're writing your blog. That means identifying all your blog-related goals.

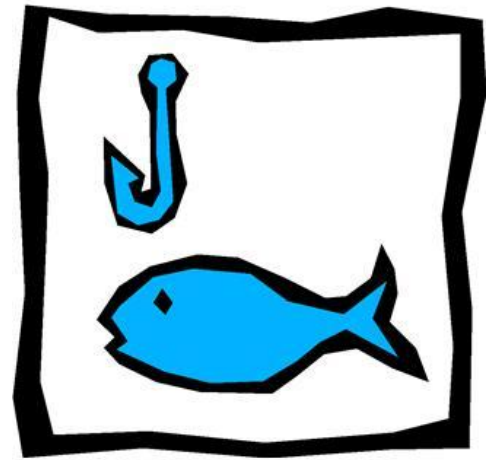
**OKAY. NOW THAT YOU KNOW
WHAT YOU WANT TO DO WITH YOUR BLOG,
LET'S FIGURE OUT HOW YOU'RE GOING TO GET THERE.**



HOW TO BEGIN

Every blog post needs a hook to attract reader attention.

No, I don't mean the kind of hook where they pull you off the stage during the Gong Show.



A hook is what grabs the reader and draws him/her in. Think fishing. Think bait. It's not enough to throw a hook out there. You need the right kind of bait, so that a potential client takes a good chomp.

Maybe the hook stresses a benefit. To publicize my writing coach services, for example, I might talk about how writing a topnotch media release can garner publicity that amounts to free advertising.

Maybe the hook revolves around a social trend or the news. I could use today's high gas prices to say that in an age where telecommuting is the economic way to do business, knowing how to express yourself in emails or on your website is going to pay off.

Your hook could also be about news that's specific to you and your business.

So when searching for a potential hook start by asking yourself:

- ✚ **How does my business or service benefit clients?**
- ✚ **How are current social trends or news stories impacting my business?**
- ✚ **What's happening in my business that's newsworthy?**

And on and on. Any question that pops in your head is fair game, at least during this exploratory phase.

WHAT TO WRITE

Catching readers is hard enough. But then you have to hang onto them with content that leaves them wanting more. So think about your clients' needs and interests at least as much as your own when coming up with topics for your posts.

Ask yourself:

- ✚ What is it about me that will appeal to my clients?
- ✚ Is my business changing in a way that will impact my clients positively?
- ✚ Do I offer a unique product or service that will benefit my clients?
- ✚ Are multiple clients expressing interest or concern about the same issue?

Let me elaborate. You want to write about your own experiences, interests and passions, but only as they relate to your business if that's what you're trying to promote. Either way, you're looking to share content that will come across as entertaining, helpful, insightful or valuable and that uniquely reflects you.

Is your business evolving? Write about what that will mean to clients.



People need to know why they need your product or service, and why they want to buy from you. By answering both questions, your blog can help seal the deal.

Pay attention to comments and questions from your clients. If you start hearing the same thing over and over, that may clue you into a trend or a need for information. You might even want to poll them to find out what interests them about your business or what questions they have. Then use their answers as fodder for posts.

STILL NOT SURE WHAT TO WRITE?



Then just start by writing a brain dump, also known by my clients as *The Big Sloppy Letter to Linden*.

The rules for the sloppy letter are simple:

- ✚ Don't worry about spelling, grammar or how it sounds.
- ✚ Don't worry about whether you've said something before or the order.
- ✚ Don't worry about anything but getting everything inside that brain of yours on paper.

Writing as fast—and as sloppily—as you can, describe your business, why you got into it, how it's changed, how it's different from your competition, why you think what you do is important, how it benefits your clients, favorite moments, and whatever else comes to mind.

Write for as long as you have anything to say or until you run out of gas. Then start again.

Try writing on your computer. Try writing long hand on a legal pad away from your desk. Wherever and however, just write. Or should I say scribble?

Remember, this is not the time to edit yourself so don't sweat the small stuff (like spelling, word choice or grammar) until you've got the whole brain dump written. As I tell my writing coach clients, tie up and gag your inner critic and shove him in a closet during the creation process. There will be plenty of time for refining. There will be plenty of time to bring a critical eye to the project. But for now, let 'er rip.

IDEAS: EASY PICKINGS

When you've finally run out of things to say, go back and read through your pages. Remember, you're not looking at the quality of the writing. If you did this right, it'll be sloppy. That's a given. You're looking for hooks—ideas for blog posts.

You may find that certain blog post ideas start in one place and then get derailed. Fine. You can always finish what you started. You may also find that two or three seemingly unrelated thoughts that occur in different places in your writing actually support a single premise. Or that you got distracted when writing about one thing and then came back to it. So you're going to want to shuffle your sloppy writing into more cohesive packets.

Ready to start organizing your material? Try my *Cut and Pile* method:

- ✚ **Print out (one-sided) what you've written.**
- ✚ **Read through the pages with scissors at hand, and cut up your pages thought by thought and topic by topic. Some of the sections may run on for pages. Others may just be a paragraph or a sentence that's buried in a paragraph where it doesn't belong. No matter. Just plunk each cut-out section into an appropriate pile of like-minded material.**
- ✚ **Once you've cut everything up and are surrounded by piles, figure out what goes with what and clip that material together.**

And voila!

You now have the better part of a number of rough blog posts. Yes, you still have plenty of writing, editing and polishing to do, but it all gets easier from here.



Now What?

Of course, you'll want to make sure that each blog has an appropriate beginning, middle and end. That's where an outline comes in handy.

Why do so many people try to write without an outline? In most cases, it just doesn't make sense. Say you want to drive from San Francisco to Manhattan. You know that you have to head east, so you jump in your car and start driving. You may eventually reach your destination without consulting a map, but you're sure going to waste a lot of time and gas with all the wrong turns along the way.

Writing is no different. And yet so many writers—whether experienced authors or novices—plunge in with only a vague idea of their destination and no plan for how to actually get there. When they eventually reach a dead end or get hopelessly lost somewhere around Nebraska, they finally realize they need a roadmap.

Whether you've written lots of blog posts or are just embarking on your first, two analogies can help explain the proper structure of an outline.

- ✚ **Picture a train. The locomotive (or introduction) pulls the various cars (independent ideas) which are linked together (with transitions). Last comes the caboose (the conclusion).**
- ✚ **Thinking about a lawyer in court also helps. The lawyer—or writer—states the case (the introduction), makes the case (the body of the piece), and sums up the case (the conclusion).**



Making the effort to outline each blog post once you have enough background information to work with will save time and aggravation, and help ensure that you actually end up where you want to go.

But what if you don't think in a very linear manner? How do you get from a mess of ideas to the point where you have an outline that adheres to one of the above analogies? That's next.

MAKING SENSE OF IT ALL

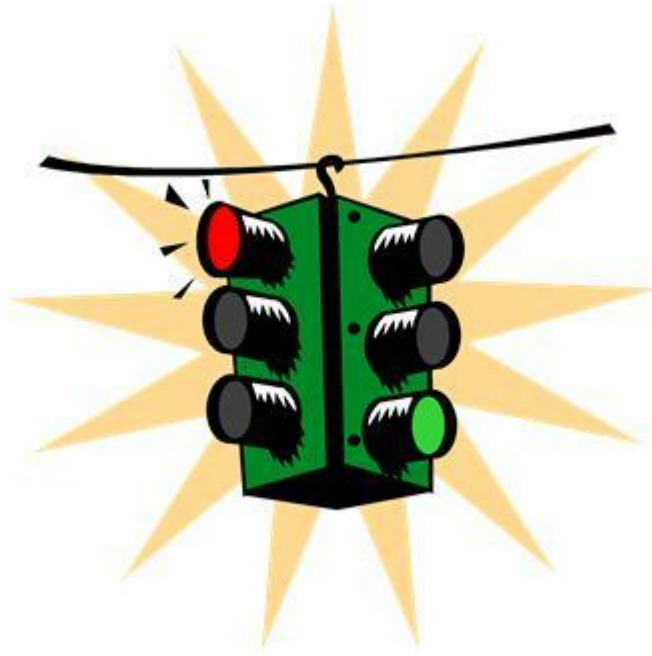


Hopefully you've spent time writing your sloppy brain dump and have torn apart all that writing you did and organized it into piles. If you've done that, then just shuffle the pieces of paper in each pile until you've got an order that reflects whichever one of the two above analogies most appeals to you.

If you just can't bring yourself to do the sloppy writing or to follow my cut- and-pile method, try this:

- ✚ **Start by jotting down all your ideas. You can even try using a mind map to spark new ideas and make interesting connections.**
- ✚ **Group all the ideas that seem to be related into categories.**
- ✚ **Organize your idea categories into a list.**
- ✚ **File any material you may have written—even the odd sentence that's been scribbled on a scrap of paper—under your various idea categories.**
- ✚ **Create a new idea category for the material that doesn't fit into the list.**
- ✚ **Organize each idea category so that all related material is filed or clipped together.**
- ✚ **Write a topic sentence (i.e.: the introduction) that sets forth your case and a sentence that sums it up (i.e.: your conclusion) for each idea.**
- ✚ **Fill in the rest of the copy.**
- ✚ **Celebrate the fact that you now have a first draft of your blog post.**

All too often the problem that stymies writers isn't one of writing, but one of thinking. This holds true whether you're writing a blog post or a book. That's why this idea work is so critical. The fact that it will save you time in the long run is just a bonus.



WAIT!

THERE'S MORE.

So you've got a draft of a blog post—or maybe even several posts. Great job!

As much as you want to pull the trigger and hit that *publish* button, don't. You're not done. You know that inner critic you threw in the closet? It's time to fish him out, dust him off and let him do his thing.

Most of us have inner critics on steroids. So you would think that finally letting your overly developed critic get to work would be easy. Think again. Chances are by the time you've carved out a number of blog posts from your sloppy writing, you will have fallen in love with your prose. While that's a great indication that you've finally found your voice (congratulations!), you still need to edit your raw copy until it's strong and sounds professional.

Sorry about that.

On the other hand, you really do want your prose to pack a punch. So it's time to fall out of love with your prose just long enough to make it better.

POWER EDITING



The following tips will help you during this editing phase.

- ✚ **Choose dynamic action verbs that make your text come alive instead of weak favorites like “to be” or “to have.”**

Weak: They have many great deals.

Strong: Great deals abound.

Weak: The farmers were fearful that families would starve.

Strong: The farmers feared that their families would starve.

- ✚ **In addition to using power verbs, you also want to avoid passive sentences in favor of more vigorous sentence construction:**

Passive: This charming house will save you money.

Active: Save money and buy this charming house now.

Passive: My family’s history is long, extending back to 18th century Scotland.

Active: My family’s long history extends back to 18th century Scotland.

Passive: It wasn’t a big surprise to me.

Active: I wasn’t surprised.

- ✚ **Avoid qualifiers. State your position as fact. Qualifiers (such as *I think, I feel, I believe, it seems to me*) just weaken your argument.**

Qualified: We feel that this is the time to buy.

Strong: This is the time to buy.

Qualified: I believe that my family’s story typifies the immigrant experience.

Strong: My family’s story typifies the immigrant experience.

- ✚ **Cut the fat. Tightening your writing by eliminating repetitions or ~~all those little~~ filler words that don’t enhance meaning adds power to your text.**

Wordy: She was thinking about all this as she wandered along the mountain trails when she stumbled on the hut.

Powerful: Lost in thought, she stumbled on the mountain hut.

THE *WRITE* TONE

Tone is another challenge for many because getting it right is so important. You want your blog to give people a sense of the person behind the business, the product or the service. How you write will convey that as much as what you write.

Blogs are all about transparency. So you want the real you to show through. Your blog needs to be approachable and needs to sound like you only better.

The fact is that once you find your voice, the writing gets pretty easy. The hard part is trying to sound like someone else. And that's precisely what you don't want to do in your blog. Here's the irony:

If you worry about how your blog post sounds as you're writing, I can almost guarantee that it won't reflect your voice and you won't achieve that uniquely personal quality you need to properly position yourself and your business.

So I will once again make my pitch for that long and incredibly sloppy brain dump.

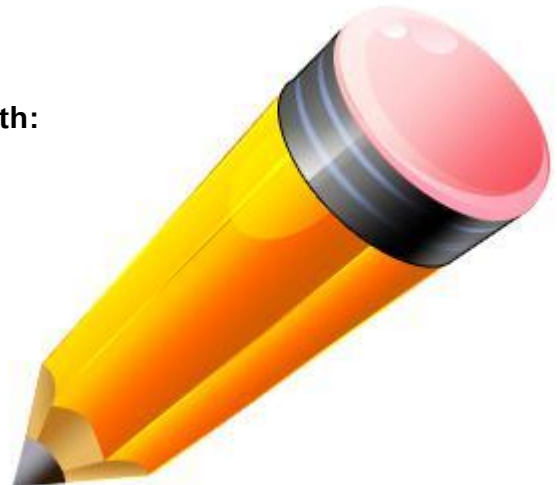
I can hear you already. "I just need to get my blog written," you're saying. "I need to be efficient." I get that. Some days I even try to figure out how to be more efficient in the shower. Too much information but you get my point.

Back to blog posts. Here's what I know. Try to bang out your blog post by post without having invested in your sloppy brain dump or, at the very least, your ideas list, and you're going to wind up working a whole lot harder than you need to. And in the back of your head you'll have that nagging feeling that you still haven't quite nailed the tone you want.

So invest in yourself and your blog by playing with:

- ✚ Your ideas
- ✚ Your words
- ✚ Your writing.

It will pay off, I promise.



FINAL BLOGGING TIPS

You're almost there. These final tips will set you up for blogging success:



- ✚ Make sure you **set up a regular blog schedule** so that your audience learns to expect new blog posts on certain days. I post a blog every Friday (or as close to that as I possibly can). That works for me. Figure out what works for you and then stick to that schedule.
- ✚ Don't forget that you can **incorporate video and photos** into your blog.
- ✚ Take the time to **proofread your blog** and run a spell check at least twice—once as you see mistakes and again after you've made all the corrections. There's nothing that spells amateur more quickly than errors in spelling and grammar.
- ✚ If you're hoping that your blog will drive Internet traffic to your site, then you need to **think about SEO and keywords**, especially when you write your headlines. As always, however, remember that your headlines have to catch your readers' attention. That's your first priority.
- ✚ Dropping your keywords into the body of your posts is also a great way to increase your blog's online visibility. But **don't overdo it**. Cramming your posts too full of keywords will not only turn off readers, you'll lose points with the search engines as well.
- ✚ **Invite guests to post** as long as their topics relate to your business and blog. Every guest post means one less that you have to write yourself.
- ✚ Offer to **write posts for other people's blogs**, especially if they have audiences who might be interested in you or what you have to offer.

READY, SET, BLOG!

Yup.

Blogging is a commitment, one that's hard to keep even for those of us who aren't commitment phobic.

It can also be challenging to figure out what to write about week in and week out.

So just remember.

Brainstorming with a blog coach like me who's also going to hold you accountable can make the whole blogging experience more manageable and even downright fun at times. Really.

Want to explore the possibilities?

Shoot me an [email](mailto:linden@OneStopWritingShop.com) (linden@OneStopWritingShop.com) and let's talk.

Until then, happy blogging!

Linden

