



The

**Ultimate
Guide to
Blogging**

for Beginners

The Ultimate Guide to Blogging for Beginners

Once you've got your blog setup you can start to focus on what will bring your readers in: the content. There is a lot more for you to consider than just what you are writing about. Your title, the type of images you choose, and even the sources you use can make a difference in whether or not your readers stick around and read more or leave.

GETTING YOUR READER'S ATTENTION

The most successful bloggers know that a critical component of their posts is not just the post idea, but how they execute it. What separates successful bloggers from the average ones is their ability to catch and hold the reader's attention throughout a piece. Here is how you can improve your blogging skills to keep your audience coming back for more.

CATCH THEIR ATTENTION

Your readers cannot pay attention to everything—the mind is not wired that way. To get their attention, readers must be given a reason to focus on what you want, instead of paying attention to everything else.

Your Post Title Matters. The only part of a blog post your reader is guaranteed to see is the title, so make it stand out. Use the title to give your readers an idea of what you will cover without giving too much away. Having a long title may turn readers away, so keep it brief.

A good rule of thumb for length is around eight words or 70 characters.

You can make it clever, but make sure to keep it clear and avoid creating confusion.

The Hook



Be creative with your title. There are many types of titles that you can use to help your readers get a preview of what your post will cover.

- » Create a sense of urgency or importance → Stop Missing Out on Readers With These Tips!
- » Use How To's (or How Not To's) → How to Speak in Public...Even if You Hate Public Speaking
- » # of Ways → Top 10 Ways to Improve Click-Through Rates
- » Be quirky → The Stalker's Guide to Highly Effective Guest Posting
- » Use strong Language → Killer Tips for Starting a Blog
- » Lists and Rankings → Nine Ways to Save Money on Groceries
- » Ask a question → Where Has Social Media Gone Wrong?
- » Include a verb → Overpromoting Your Posts Can Annoy Your Followers

Grab your reader's attention. How you get your reader's attention may vary depending on your audience or the type of post you are writing. You can make them see things from your perspective by telling a story, using descriptions, using case studies and anything else that will put the reader in the right position to see what you see. By using something personal in the title, you will immediately grab your reader's attention; it shows that your post is about something important. Using emotion can also attract readers because it brings clarity to your message, makes it

personal, and gives people a reason to talk about your blog and to share the content. Emotion is far better than logic to trigger centers in the brain that control behavior and decisions.

PULL YOUR READERS IN

After the title, the opening sentence is the second most important part of a blog post. You have half a second to keep your readers intrigued after they read the title. Use the following to pull your readers in and get them to keep reading.



- » Ask a question
 - “What do you think about _____?”
- » Share a quote
 - Choose a quote related to your post topic. For example, if you are writing a post about Facebook Advertising, consider including a quote from founder Mark Zuckerberg.
- » Use an analogy, metaphor or simile
 - “Your topic is like _____.”
- » Use a shocking statistic
 - “X% of _____ do _____.”
- » Communicate the benefit of reading the post
 - “When you’re done reading, you’ll know how to _____.”
- » Make a claim
 - Back up any claims with proof. For example, if you’re reviewing a product that makes you money, show screenshots of your PayPal account to prove the product is working.
- » Be controversial
 - Go against the grain on a subject. Develop your statement (whether for or against the issue). Provide logical support for your statement, but make sure to back it up with research, expert opinion, etc. Good argument: If it rains, the ground gets wet. It is raining, so the ground is wet. Bad argument: If it rains, the ground gets wet. The ground is wet, so it must be raining. (Lots of things can make the ground wet!)
 - Make sure you are genuine with your stance as constantly seeking to be controversial could earn you a reputation as the “boy who cried wolf.” This can cause you to lose credibility and readership.

KEEP YOUR READER’S ATTENTION

Grabbing your reader’s attention doesn’t matter if you don’t keep it. Even after that first sentence, there is always a chance your reader will leave your site.



Make information you offer valuable and avoid using a misleading title. A lack of value will make it harder to capture a reader’s attention the second time around. If you’re lucky enough to get a reader back again, he or she likely won’t take you as seriously.

Avoid using industry jargon and insider language, unless it’s appropriate for your audience. For example, the term “ideation” means to come together and brainstorm ideas, but not everyone will know that. When people see things they don’t understand, they’re more likely to

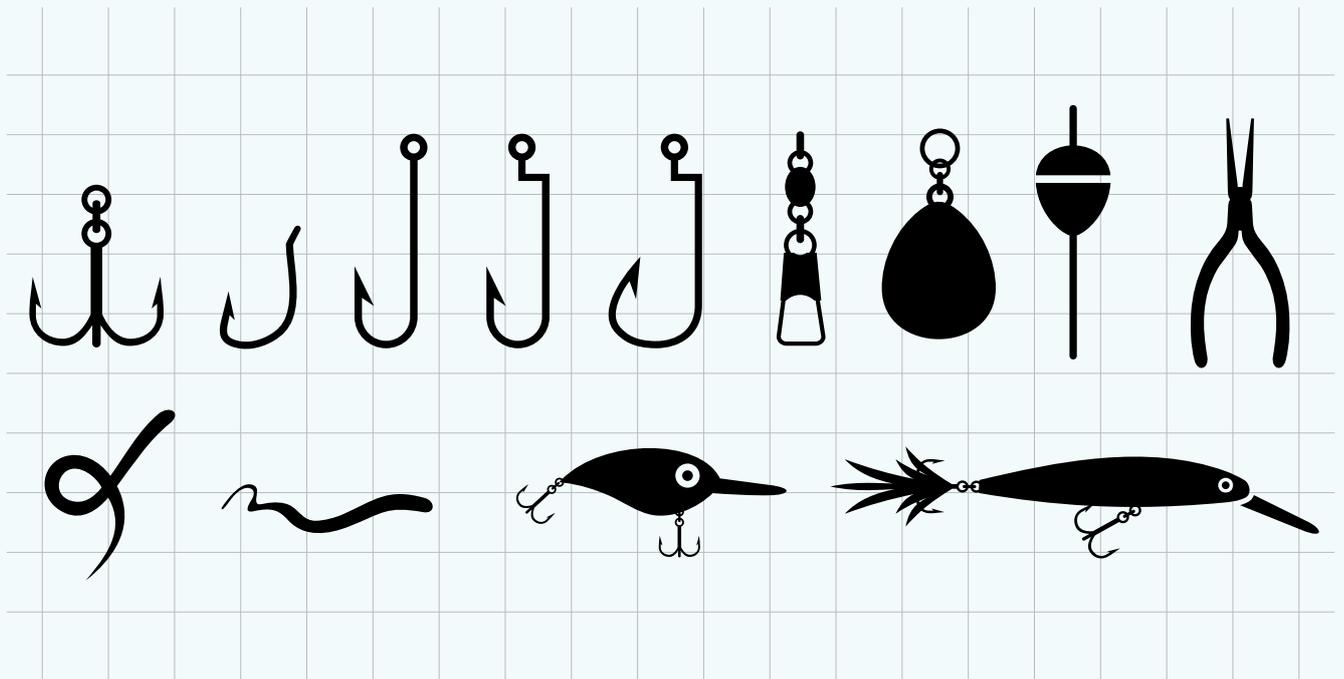


search for a simpler explanation than to take the time to figure out what your jargon means.

Asking questions throughout your post can spark curiosity and keep your readers searching for answers. For example, “What would you do if...?” or “How would X make you feel?” Ask questions that get people thinking about what your products or services can do to solve their problems. For example, “If you could flip a switch and instantly have [insert painstaking task] done, how much would you pay for the switch?” or “What would you do if I told you [product name] could solve your [specific] problem?” Asking questions gets people thinking about how much easier their lives would be if they had your product or service to address the problem. You can also ask questions that explore insecurities. For example, “Are you truly happy with where you are in life right now?” or “Does your fear of [insert problem] hinder your success in life?”

Use specific details—this will hold more attention than longer content providing a general overview of a concept. For example, find data and statistics around your topic: “X% of people who tried this technique found it improved their...” You could also show how your product or service really benefits someone. Instead of saying, “Jane used my marketing services to explode her business,” say, “After using my marketing services, Jane saw a 50% increase in her customer base, jumping from 50 to 100 customers a day.”





CONTENT CREATION

By creating a combination of original and curated content, you can draw in and capture an audience. Consistency keeps them coming back for more. Get the step-by-step breakdown of how to get the job done.

CHOOSING A TOPIC

The topics you choose help you establish credibility within your niche. Write about what you know, and make sure to inform your audience of your qualifications.

Look for a topic where your audience is active. Dig for ideas where they spend time online (e.g. Twitter chats, Google+ circles, LinkedIn groups). Find out what your audience is talking about, their problems, desires and frustrations, then base your post topics on them.

- » Use the following to help you when brainstorming topics:
- » Identify a need that your readers may have.
 - Picture a reader, their needs, challenges, questions and situations. This will help you choose a topic and connect with your readers.
- » Put a twist on hot topics. Instead of reiterating topics that everyone else is already talking about, put your own twist on it.
- » Use your passion. Choose a topic that matters to you, your passion will show in your writing and allow you to connect more with your readers.

ORIGINAL AND CURATED CONTENT

Creating all original content is hard to do for most people; there simply isn't enough time. That's where curated content comes in. You can add your perspective to third-party content and continue to publish new posts consistently.

Focus on the "Four Pillars"



Useful

Create a resource that allows your reader to solve a problem, or achieve something.



Approachable

Pull your reader in and make them want to read the post.



Scannable

Break it up with headings and images. Readers will more than likely click away from large blocks of text.



Simple

- Keep your writing plain and concise.
- You don't have to be boring, but make sure you stick to common sense.
- Be conversational, but not wordy

Curated content can be just as important as original content. Linking to third-party sites and sending readers away may seem like a bad thing, but it can establish you as an expert, increase your readers' engagement and build your reputation. Using curated content is an easy way to get content on your site and get others involved in what you're writing about.

Examples of Curated Content:



Expert tips/stats



Presentations/
webinars



Quotes



Case studies



Industry blogs



Infographics

Original content is a key strategy when trying to drive conversions.

Giving your readers original content creates conversation, it also establishes you as a trusted expert in your niche. If you drive readers to your site and give them good, original content to read, it is likely that they will convert. Create something unique and new that has not been rehashed over and over again by other sites. Add depth by asking yourself how you can add more value and make it more memorable for your readers. Add your opinion, suggest other resources for further reading, add reader comments, explore both sides of an argument, let your posts sit overnight or just a few hours, then come back to them (you may find things that need additional detail or editing). High-quality sites with original content are more likely to be seen by Google, leading to higher rankings.

BE MINDFUL OF SMALL DETAILS

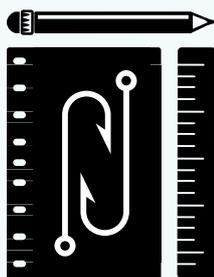
It's easy to get wrapped up in ideas, but execution matters.



Check spelling and grammar. Having spelling and grammar errors on your post may turn readers away from your content. Make sure you proofread your posts for typographical errors. Some words that are misspelled may not show up in a spell check because they are another properly spelled word. For example, "you" could easily become "your." Your eyes can tire easily, making it harder to spot your mistakes, so take other measures to ensure there are no errors. You can ask someone else to proofread the post for you, hire an editor to check your content before it goes live, read the post backward (errors stand out more), read it out loud, or try looking at a hard copy of the post before publishing.

Consider developing a style guide. If you have multiple writers on staff, it ensures each writer is following the rules. Style guides help by establishing quality and professionalism and a core set of "rules" for all writers to follow (to avoid dispute). They also foster consistency in style and tone regardless of who writes the content.

To develop your own style guide, start with something that covers the basics of punctuation, grammar, etc. (AP Style Guide, Chicago Manual of Style). You can also make adjustments or add details based on your vision. Other guidelines to follow include involving your writing team and keeping the guide brief.



It will help if you involve your writing team, keep the guide brief (no more than four pages) and include the following:

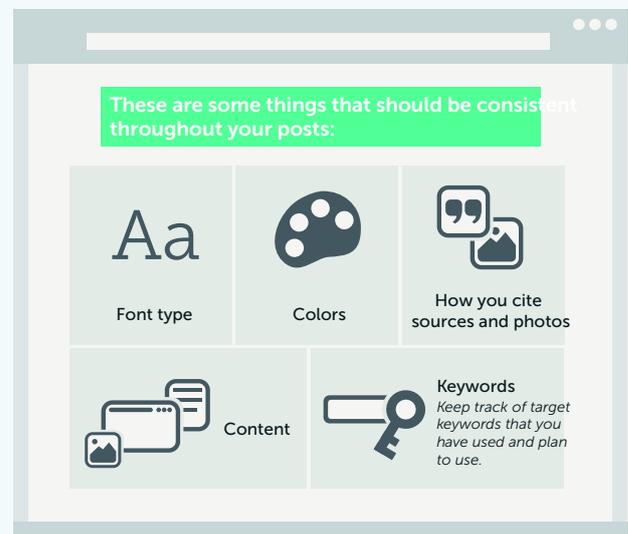
- » An introduction
- » Rules for capitalization, grammar, punctuation, and grammar
- » Style and tone
- » Formatting
- » Images
- » Optional specifics for your blog/company.
 - Rules for sourcing
 - Approved/Unapproved content

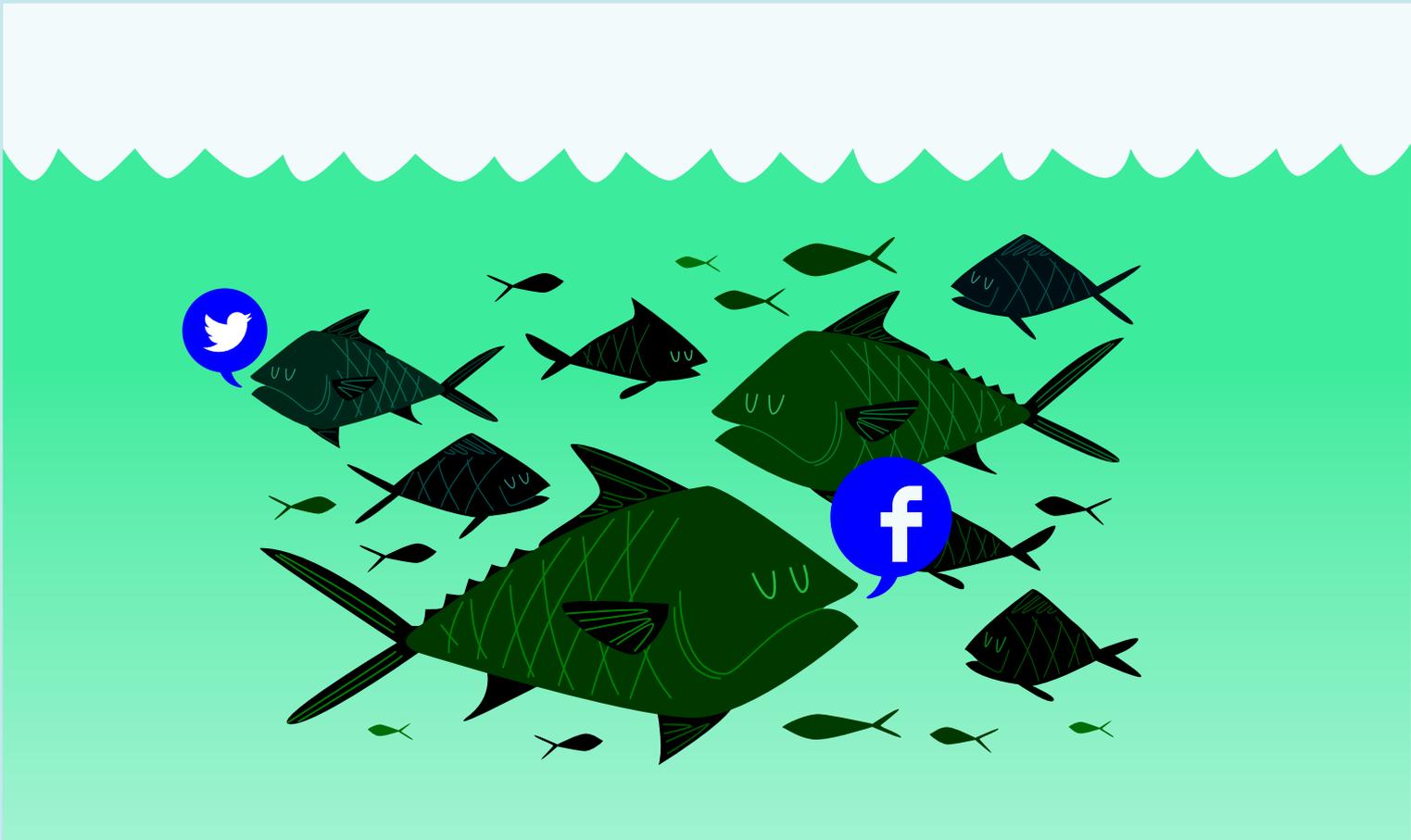
BE CONSISTENT

Keeping a consistent, clear vision for your blog is extremely important. Your readers will rely on you for a certain type of content. It may not be a good idea to write about politics one day and then give advice on baking an apple pie the next.

Editorial calendars can help you keep your content consistent. Planning an editorial calendar gives you a clear picture, and allows you to write material in advance, so you avoid hitting a lull in your content production. When planning your calendar think about what you want to talk about.

- » What topics can help you connect with your audience?
- » Are there any holidays or events you want to capitalize on?
- » Are you promoting specific products or services?





FINDING THE RIGHT REFERENCES

Great content doesn't just come from words on the screen. It comes from research. Where you find your sources and how you use them can affect whether or not your readers find you credible. If they see you as credible they are more likely to read and trust your content.

RESEARCH FOR CONTENT

Even when you are just sharing your opinion, you can use other sources to improve your work. You can do this by using an expert's statement to back up your thoughts or using statements from those with differing opinions. There are many other ways you can enhance your blog posts to make it more enjoyable for your readers, including the use of infographics, events, breaking news, expert opinions/quotes and statistics. For example, if you are writing about the job market in your area, use the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) to find the area's unemployment rate for several months.

When searching for these things, make sure you use reliable sources and information. Open-sourced sites like Wikipedia are not credible sources. Even Jimmy Wales, the founder of Wikipedia discourages the use of Wikipedia as a source. He said he gets about 10 emails a week from students that have received bad grades for using incorrect information from Wikipedia. Instead of using this type of site as a source, dig deeper; there are reliable sources beyond page one of the search results. You can also look to news sites for stories related to your topic. These will give you the hard facts, not opinions. Referencing or quoting industry experts can also add depth to your post. No matter which type of source you use, it is important to always provide proper attribution for the information you use (more on that below).

SEARCH VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

In addition to your usual research tactics, consider doing research on social media sites.

StumbleUpon allows you to search through blog posts with their search option. You can use what you find there for inspiration, quotes and post round-ups.

You can use **Delicious** to find quotes for your blog post, posts for a post-round up and infographics. The infographics can be used to add statistics to your post or complement your content. You can embed the infographic in your post and provide a link, of course.

Use **Twitter** to search strings to get breaking news, and other things related to your niche. For example, search "football" in advanced search, and choose positive, negative, or select both, to get a selection of tweets where the word "football" is mentioned. You can also find quotes to use in your posts.

Facebook and Plancast can be used to help you find events related to your niche. Plancast helps you find local events and things to do. You can use both of these platforms to arrange interviews with attendees beforehand. If you have a Facebook fan page for your blog, pay attention to what readers are saying there. It can help you adjust content and plan future posts.

Use **LinkedIn** to find and connect with industry experts. Ask them questions like "What is the best way to go about [insert industry related task]?" or "How long were you in the industry before you [insert task]?"

When appropriate you can use **YouTube** to search and find funny videos to complement your post. You can also include your own commentary on the video for a different type of post.

EVALUATING YOUR SOURCES

If you're not sure about the credibility of a source, use these tips to see how well it stands up.

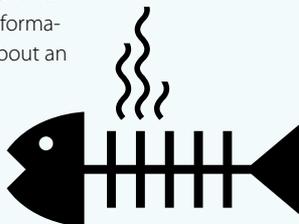


Understanding the type of domain can help you understand a lot about the site you are using as a source. Make sure that the domain type matches the type of content on the page.

Knowing who published the content can also help you figure out the credibility of the source. Find the agency or person that published the article. If the publisher is reliable, then the content and authors are also reliable. For example, Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and BLS are both reliable government websites. To find who the publisher is you can look at the first part of the URL between `http://` and the first `/`.

Who wrote it? It's important to find out who the author or organization is that is responsible for the content. Once you figure out who wrote it, look for a link or About Me/About Us/Background page that will tell you more about them. You should then look for information on their education and experience. Once you find out some information on the author or publisher, evaluate the information and decide if you believe they are qualified to write about the topic. For example, if you are writing about food, look for qualified chefs, nutritionists or other hospitality professionals.

Timeliness matters. When a piece was written can help you determine the credibility of a source as well. When searching for sources for a current topic, publishing dates are important. For example, writing about the road to the 2016 presidential campaign? Keep the information as current as possible, even though there are a lot of unknowns. Update frequently as new information becomes available. When writing about an outdated topic, the date should be near the time the content became known. For example, writing about the Y2K craze? Information dated late '90s to early 2000s is acceptable.



CITE YOUR SOURCES

An amazing asset of the Internet is that many people are willing to share their information, but at a small cost, of course. They are going to at least expect a link back or some kind of attribution. There are copyright laws, but no strict rules about how exactly you should attribute the sources.

Follow copyright laws. Assume that the content you are quoting or using as a source is copyrighted. Exceptions to copyright infringement include using the content for criticism, review, parody, research and reporting and is referred to as 'fair use' or 'fair dealing.' You can use quotes in your post, as long as they are not a substantial part of the original work. Substantial in this case refers to something essential, distinctive or important. In other words, don't copy and paste an entire paragraph into your post and add quotation marks. Copyright only applies to the material form of an idea, fact of style (not the actual idea, fact or style), meaning that you can write about ideas and facts in your own words.

Attribute your sources. When using outside sources on your blog, you must provide the appropriate attributions. Here are ways that you can provide proper attribution:

Ego-baiting - the best [and easiest] way to get credible sources to share your post! When citing an expert source, ego-baiting is a very effective tactic. For example, if making a list on the Top 10 Best Blog Posts, linking back to each post within your post is sufficient for citing the source. This also provides the opportunity for the experts mentioned in the post to link to your blog post and expose you to the readers.

How to Attribute Your Sources:



Quote the person in your post, and include a hyperlink text back to their site.



Create copy on your post that makes the quote or statistic stand out, include a hyperlink back to the original source (not just the homepage).



Choose a phrase relevant to their content and link back to the original source.



When citing something on Twitter, include the original sharer in your tweet using their handle (@twittername).



If a news story, always give credit to the original source, not the one where you first found it.





THE PERFECT PICTURE

The appearance of your blog post can make or break the experience for your readers. It's important that you take the appropriate steps when choosing the right photos for your post. Everything from image quality to photo placement can affect whether or not your readers will continue to read your post.



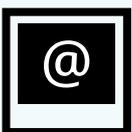
QUALITY COUNTS

The quality of your images reflects the quality of your blog, so when choosing images make sure you look for ones with high quality.

Readers are more likely to read your post if an image catches their attention. High quality images can also help you receive more Facebook shares. When readers share your post they are given the option to include an image, if the image is great then it is more likely to be shared.

WHERE TO LOOK

As easy as it might seem, you can't just take any image you find in a Google search, you need to understand which images you can and cannot use and what a copyrighted image is.



Copyright is used to protect original works for authorship. As soon as you write your blogpost, or take an image, what you are creating is copyrighted, whether it is published or not. Copyright laws allow the creator to distribute the photo through sale or transfer. When searching through photos always read the fine print and know what type of copyright the image has. There are many types of licenses, but these are the ones you will need to understand when looking for a photo for your blog post:

- » **Creative Commons:** A nonprofit organization set this up to allow photographers to easily license their work. The images are not always available for commercial use. You do not have to pay to use an image but you must provide photo credit.
- » **Royalty Free (RF):** You will come across these on stock photo sites and only have to pay for the license to use them once.
- » **Public Domain:** There are no licences or purchases necessary for use of public domain photos. These photos have been placed in the public domain by the photographer and for anyone to use.

Avoid copyright issues by using a stock photo site that, with payment, allows you to search and use copyrighted images. Be careful when using this type of site; the photos are usually unoriginal and not always of the highest quality. Some stock photo sites include Shutterstock.com, iStockphoto.com and Gettyimages.com.

- » **Creativecommons.org** is a free way to find photos. You can search Flickr, Google, Yahoo, Pixabay and other photo sites for photos based on the type of license you are looking for.
- » **Compfight.com** is a database dedicated to helping bloggers find photos for their posts. This Flickr search tool allows you to search through photos, but you still need to make sure to choose the right license and properly attribute the photographer.

Create your own image if you can't find the right photo for your post. You can add some originality to your post by using a photo you have already taken or one that you take specifically for your post. Use these basic tips when taking your own photos:



Create a screenshot to help explain what you are discussing. Be careful with resizing and make sure you don't make it awkward. Try to resize the images evenly (50%, 25%) and avoid making the sizes awkward. It's also important not to show all of your toolbars, bookmarks and other unnecessary information in your screenshot. Try to keep it as generic and simple as possible.

CITING THE PHOTOS

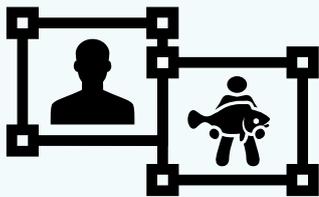
No matter where you find your images, you must always give credit where credit is due. Including a photo credit will give your blog a sense of professionalism.

There are many ways to source the original artist with a link back to their work:

- » Originally uploaded by author-name/url" (link)
- » An embed code provided by the photo source
- » This photo, "title of image" is copyright © 2011 author-link and made available under a attribution-type-here" (link)
- » "HT author-name" (link)
- » "via author name/url" (link)
- » A link in the post that references the original creator.
- » Add a description with the text and link.
- » Link directly to the Creative Commons license you are using.

IMAGE SIZING

The size of images in your blog can affect the load speed of your page and how your readers view your post.



When thinking of image size you also need to consider the resolution of the image. Image resolution affects how the image performs on a website and is measured by dpi (dots per inch) across the page. Images being printed may need a different resolution than one being used online. Images with higher resolution have better quality, but take longer to load. Low resolution images may load faster, but they are lower in quality. The recommended resolution for images being used online is between 72 and 96 dpi, anything higher than this will take longer to load.

The recommended size for images on your blog is 500 pixels; this allows for the image to be easily resized. To cut down on page load time you can reduce your image size without affecting quality by compressing your images. You can use compression tools such as SmushIT, JPEG Optimizer, Image Optimizer, and TinyPNG to help with lossless or lossy compression. Lossless image compression removes some of the image's data but does not affect the image quality. Lossy image compression removes more data and lowers image quality.

Lossless image formats include:

- » BMP
- » TIFF (can also be compressed to create a lossy image)
- » PNG

Lossy image formats include:

- » JPEG/JPG
- » GIF

PNG is a format created just for sharing images on the web. It supports transparency, so your image will work seamlessly on whatever background you put it on. Remember, lossless formats generate large file sizes, which increase page load time. If your page takes too long to load, you'll risk losing visitors. Try multiple image formats to see what produces the highest quality image in the smallest file size. Typically, JPEG and PNG work best for blogging.

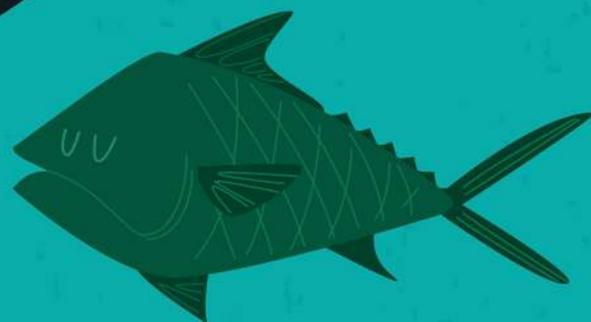
IMAGE PLACEMENT

Where you place your photo throughout your post can determine if your readers stay engaged and continue reading, or go to another site.



“Don't focus on
having a great blog.
Focus on producing
a blog that's great
for your readers.”

Brian Clark



While planning the details remember that your end goal is to create something great for your readers that will keep them coming back for more.



WholsHostingThis.com is a webmaster tool that lets you discover which web hosting company any site is hosted with. We also publish web host reviews, coupons and a blog.