TEN POWERFUL WAYS TO MAKE YOUR BLOG POSTS STRONGER

Introduction

Do you want blog posts which readers love? Posts which get retweeted, shared, linked to, bookmarked ... even printed out by your fans?

Of course you do. That's how a blog grows, after all.

Maybe you're trying really hard already. You're writing regularly, you're pouring everything you've got into it, but your effort just doesn't seem to be paying off.

Your blog posts just aren't the compelling, engaging pieces of content you'd hoped for. You get the occasional nice comment, but mostly, no-one seems to be reading.

I know just how that feels. But over the past eight years of blogging, I've found plenty of ways to turn a so-so post into a great one.

None of these take more than a few minutes to implement, but they can make a huge difference to your finished post.

And – even better! – these tips are designed to work *on the posts you've already written.*

You don't need to spend hours and hours writing new posts. There's probably nothing wrong with what you've already got – it just needs a few tweaks.

Of course, these are also great principles to use for future posts: with each one, I've given a "Next Time..." suggestion to help you write better posts as time goes on.

So, let's get started.

(If you get stuck or have questions, shoot me an email any time – I'm ali@aliventures.com – or grab me on Twitter at @aliventures.)

#1: Supercharge Your Title

Many bloggers, particularly newer bloggers, write boring (though accurate) titles.

Even if you've been blogging for a while and got better at crafting post titles along the way, you probably haven't been back to spruce up the titles of your earlier posts?

Titles, or headlines, are immensely important: most readers will only see the title of your post before deciding whether or not to read it.

How I Crafted This Mini-Ebook's Title

If I'd called this mini-ebook "**Improve Every Blog Post**" ... would it have sounded so interesting? The title would have been perfectly accurate, but not especially compelling.

Instead, I called it "**Ten Powerful Ways to Make Your Blog Posts Stronger**". Why does that work?

- **I used a number.** If you look at any magazine cover, you'll see that numbers are particularly engaging for readers (especially big numbers).
- **I used "powerful"** - an attention-grabbing word, especially when combined with "stronger". "Ten Ways" isn't quite so interesting as "Ten Powerful Ways".
- **I used "your"** - because I know you're not interested in the theory of blogging but in practical ways to make your blog even better.

Easy Tricks for Great Titles

If you find it tough to write great titles, don't despair: most bloggers find this hard (me included). It can take time to come up with a really good, attention-grabbing title, though there are a few tricks which you can use to help:

- "How to…" or "How I…" posts are always popular: they make a clear promise of a specific outcome *("learn how to do this thing")* and they're also easy for you to structure, step by step.
- Numbers grab attention and also add specificity: "ten tips" is better than "tips" because you know exactly what to expect.
- Certain nouns are more intriguing than others: *ten secrets* vs *ten ideas*, for instance.

- Adjectives can strengthen the promise of a title: *powerful, little-known, unusual, straightforward* ...
- Questions pretty much force the reader to start engaging. ("Is Blogging Dead?" for instance – though keep in mind that questions can be overused in this way.)

If you come across a title that works well, swipe it! Switch a few words around to create your own unique spin on that title.

For instance: *Ten Powerful Ways to Make Your Blog Posts Stronger* could become:

Ten Powerful Ways to Create a Strong Writing Habit (writing blog)

Ten Powerful Ways to Strengthen Your Child's Self-Esteem (parenting blog)

Eight Powerful Ways to Be More Mindful Today (lifestyle / personal development blog)

Seven Thoughtful Ways to Make Someone's Day (non-profit blog)

Important: Your post needs to live up to the promise made in the title. A post titled "Everything You Need to Know About Ski-ing" that only covers a few common-sense basics will leave readers disappointed.

Exercise #1:

Go through the five most recent posts on your blog. Are the titles as compelling as they could be? Tweak any which aren't: try adding a number where appropriate, an adjective, or a stronger noun.

Further Reading

[How to Write Catchy Headlines and Blog Titles Your Readers Can't Resist](#), Corey Wainwright, HubSpot

Straightforward but detailed advice, with plenty of examples along the way. Corey includes advice on search engine optimisation and on encouraging social shares.

#2: Add an Eye-Catching Image

When I started Aliventures, years ago now, I didn't add images to posts. I figured that readers cared about the quality of my writing – not how pretty my blog looked.

To some extent, that's true – I have a fantastic audience of very literate, engaged readers who enjoy in-depth posts.

However, I've found that adding high-quality images makes my posts look more professional and helps break up the text on the screen (very important – dense pages of grey text are hard to read, and understandably put readers off).

Finding a great image can take ages, though. To speed things up:

- **Use a site that specialises in copyright free images**, such as [Pixabay](). You can also use [Flickr's advanced search]() to find creative commons images which are licensed for commercial use. (If you use Google to find images, you'll either have to check the copyright position for each one, or you'll risk getting sued by an unhappy artist.)
- **Consider having a unifying theme or style for images on your blog**. K.M. Weiland from [Helping Writers Become Authors]() often uses photos of children.
- **Don't get too hung up on finding the "perfect" image for your post**: give yourself a time limit for image-hunting, if necessary.
- If you're writing about concepts (e.g. "changing your life", "coming up with ideas") **think of possible items or situations that could convey that idea.** The image doesn't have to be of something which you directly write about.

Where appropriate, make sure you credit the person who owns the image. Normally, you can do that by writing:

"Image by [name]"

where [name] is a link to the owner's website, or to their Flickr account.

> ## Exercise #2:
>
> Find a post on your blog without an image – either your most recent post, or one of your most-read ones from the archives. Spend five minutes choosing and uploading a great image. *(If all your posts have images, find one you could improve on!)*

Further Reading

[Creating Easy Branded Images for Your Blog and Social Media](#), Kirsten Oliphant, JaneFriedman.com

Lots of great tips on how anyone can create "branded" visuals: consistent images that look great on your blog and on social media.

Further Reading

#3: Hook Readers with Your Introduction

The title encourages a reader to click through. The image draws their eye. They start reading ... **and if you don't hook them straight away, you've lost them.**

The start of your post (the introduction) needs to grab the reader – and set up the rest of the post. You can:

- **Start with a question that gets them thinking.** *(e.g. "Do you ever find yourself procrastinating instead of writing?")*
- **Use the word "you"** – if you're using it in a slightly negative way, position yourself on the reader's side. *(e.g. "Be honest: you procrastinate. We all do.")*
- **Begin with a line of dialogue.** This doesn't always work, but it's an unusual, story-driven approach that quickly gets the reader engaged.
- **Have several short paragraphs.** Plenty of white space is reassuring: it makes it easier for readers to take in the words.
- **Quote someone else.** This could be a blogger or writer who sparked the idea for your post, or any relevant inspirational (or funny!) quote.

Here are a couple of powerful openings:

> You know everyone thinks we're fools, right?
>
> To most of the world, blogging is a joke.
>
> It isn't a career. It isn't a way to make money. It isn't a tool for changing the world.
>
> (*[Make Money Blogging: How This Blog Makes $100K per Month](), Jon Morrow, Smart Blogger*)
>
>
> "What's happened to you is rare," my friend Mark told me in a conversation that persuaded me to quit my job and write full-time.
>
> "Nobody saw it coming. I know you and I didn't see it coming."
>
> That was it. The day I decided to become a writer.
>
> (*[3 Ways Writing Helped Me Build a Business, Launch a Dream, and Find My Purpose](), Jeff Goins, Copyblogger*)

Next time a blog post grabs you right at the start, pause a moment and figure out how the blogger did it.

It won't take you more than five minutes to tweak a sub-par opening paragraph – but those minutes could mean that hundreds or thousands more readers actually make it past the first few lines.

> ## Exercise #3:
>
> Choose one of your recent posts. Re-read the first paragraph. Does it grab attention? Does it fit well with the rest of the post? Revise it – using one or more of the above ideas – and update the post.

Further Reading

[How to Nail the Opening of Your Blog Post](#), Demian Farnworth, Copyblogger

Demian gives a brief recap of great ways to start your post, then dives into ten different examples of effective blog post openings, explaining why each one works.

#4: Use "You" – the Right Way

Unless you're blogging for a very staid corporate site, you'll want to make your posts conversational and friendly. **Talk to your readers just as if you were replying to a comment, answering an email or hanging out on Twitter.**

The easiest way to do that is to use the words "you" and "your" (just like I've been doing in this mini-ebook). Any time you've used a general word like "people" (or "some people"), try replacing it with "you".

If you're saying something a bit negative, use "we" and "us" to put yourself alongside the reader.

Avoiding the Plural "You"

The biggest mistake which bloggers make when using "you" is to use the plural "you". This can be jarring and even distancing. For instance, I could write:

"Some of you know that I have two children."

But that's confusing. After all, you're (almost certainly!) reading this on your own, not as part of a group. You may or may not know that I have kids. So instead, I'd be better off writing:

"You may know that I have two children."

Sure, your blog posts might have hundreds of readers. But these people are experiencing your posts individually and separately – so write as if you're writing to just one person. It's much more personal and engaging, and it'll keep your readers coming back for more.

Writing a "You" Focused Post

If I'm struggling to get the right tone for a post, I picture an individual reader – maybe someone who's left a comment or emailed me. **I write as though I'm writing to just that one person.**

Lots of bloggers write great "you" focused posts, but one person who does that really successfully is Naomi Dunford of IttyBiz. She's built up a huge audience of very loyal fans, in part due to her extremely personable writing style.

Here's an example, from [12 Easy Ways to Spring Clean Your Branding Without a Full Redesign](#):

> Consider when **you** created **your** website header. Now consider how much **you've** changed – how much more **you** know about **your** business, and how much more **you** know about **yourself**. Just like **your** wardrobe, **you'll** feel like a million bucks when **your** header reflects who **you** are today.

Notice how often Naomi uses "you" and "your". You don't need to use them *quite* this often to be effective – but this shows how squarely her focus is on the reader.

> ### Exercise #4:
>
> Change three titles on your blog to use "You" or "Your". For instance: "How Anyone Can Write Faster" can become "How You Can Write Faster". If your titles are all looking good, tackle one or two post introductions.

Further Reading

[**Why You Should Use "You" and "I" In Your Posts**](#), Ali Luke, DailyBlogTips

In this short post, I explain how to use "you" and "your", giving examples of titles that use them. I also demonstrate how (and why) to use "I".

#5: Add a Link to Another Post

Readers (and search engines!) find content through clicking on links.

Of course, your blog has plenty of links already – which you might expect readers to use. These links are probably in your sidebar or along the top of the page, leading to pages (like "About" or "Services") and to your archive and category pages.

Often, though, readers need a bit more direction. Get into the habit of putting at least one link into every blog post: look out for moments when you mention something that you've already written about, and add in a link.

Here's an example, from my post How to Get Back On Track When Your Writing Plans Go Awry:

Putting Links Into Old Posts

When you first started your blog, you didn't have many posts to link to. Those early posts, though, might still get plenty of traffic. Go back to them, and see if you can insert some links to newer pieces that you've written.

It'll only take a few minutes – but it can make the difference between a new reader reading one post and reading several. The longer they spend on your site, the more likely they are to become a long-term reader.

Creating a "Start Here" Page

If your blog has been around for a while, create a "Start Here" page (*here's mine*) to help new readers get up to speed quickly. Include beginner-friendly posts, and ones that have gone down particularly well with readers.

Linking Out

You'll also want to think about linking to posts on other blogs, within your posts as above, when you quote other bloggers, or even in a regular round-up of what's going on in your corner of the blogging world.

Note: While there are Wordpress plugins to automatically add links to "related posts" at the end of each of your posts, I still think it's worth adding in links manually. The plugins won't add links in the middle of posts, nor will they know what your strategic plan is!

> ### Exercise #5:
>
> Go back to an early, but strong, post on your blog. Find something more recent which you've written on a similar topic. Update the old post to link to the newer one. (And link back the other way, too, if you want.)

Further Reading

Why Interlinking Your Blog's Posts is a Must (and Not Just For SEO), Daniel Vassiliou, ProBlogger

A detailed post about linking between posts, with some handy specific ideas (like using a "breadcrumb" trail).

#6: Add a Great Quotation

We touched on quotations earlier as a way to start off your blog post. You can include them at any point in a post, though – and they have a ton of advantages:

- **Sometimes, someone else has found the perfect words** to make a point which you want to convey to your readers. Instead of struggling to reword it in your own way, why not just quote them?
- If you quote another blogger and link to the source of the quote (probably a post on their blog), **they may well come over to leave a comment and thank you.** They might even return the favour in future.
- If you were inspired by a post on another blog (whether you agreed with it or not!) **it can help to put the discussion in context if you include a quote**.
- When you're recommending other posts (even your own), **a short quote is often more enticing than a title alone.**
- **Quotations can help add authority to your posts**, especially if you're quoting from books or other non-blog sources.
- **Short, pithy quotations** can make a great starting point for discussion

It's also worth remembering that posts of quotations (perhaps with images or extra explanation) are often very popular. Check out Charlie Gilkey's <u>How to Flourish: 17 Quotes On Living, Being, and Doing</u> or Tim Brownson's <u>The 20 Greatest Motivational Quotes Of All Time</u> – both of which have significantly more comments and shares than other posts on their blogs.

How to Format Quotations

Whatever blog software you're using, there'll be a way to format text as a blockquote, which makes it clear to readers that you're quoting. This normally indents the text, and may add a quotation marks graphic, italicise the text or change the font size or colour, depending on your blog theme's settings.

In Wordpress, you can highlight the quote and click on the quotation marks button *(shown below)* to format it as a blockquote. (In the Text view, you can wrap the HTML tags <blockquote> and </blockquote> around the text.)
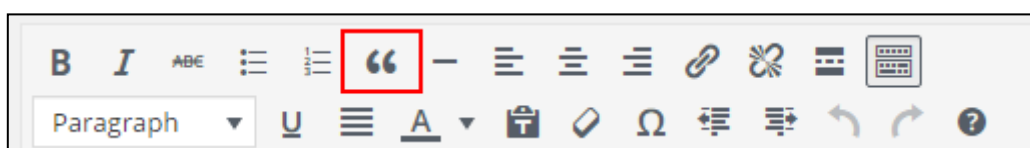
You'll need to cite the source of the quote. If you're quoting from a blog post or website, you can link directly to it – I usually give the name of the writer and of the blog as well. If you're using a famous quote, it's fine to just give the name of the person.

Here's an example where I quote from a book. The quoted words are clearly separated from my own. They have a quotation mark at the left (provided by my blog's theme) and they're indented from the main text.

> **Like me, you probably feel you have an intuitive grasp of what a "scene" is in a short story or novel.** If you feel your scenes aren't quite working, though, or if you struggle to outline your scenes, thinking through what exactly a scene is might help.
>
> Let's take a quick look at a few definitions:
>
> " A scene is a sequence where a character or characters engage in some sort of action and/or dialogue. Scenes should have a beginning, middle and end (a mini-story arc), and should focus around a definite **point of tension** that moves the story forward.
>
> *Teach Yourself How to Write a Blockbuster*, by Lee Weatherly and Helen Corner (pg 40, 2006 edition)

Exercise #6

Find a recent post – perhaps one which feels a little thin. See if you can add in a quotation (from another blog, or from a book) that helps strengthen your own words.

Further Reading

Borrowed Wisdom: How to Use Quotes on Your Blog, Ali Luke, DailyBlogTips

In this post, I explain the *why* of using quotes, and offer practical tips on finding good quotes and integrating them into your posts.

#7: Remove Unnecessary Words

Most of us over-write, often because we're a bit nervous about saying what we think. For instance:

It's my opinion that some bloggers probably won't ever make much money.

That would have a lot more power as:

Some bloggers won't ever make much money.

Unnecessary words draw power away from the words which are necessary. They weaken your sentences and get in the way of your meaning.

Words to Cut Out

You can safely cut phrases like "in my opinion" or "I think" or "I believe". This is your blog, and you can reasonably enough assume that readers *know* that you're expressing your opinions.

You can often cut out qualifiers, like:

- Quite
- Really
- Some
- Very
- Just

(These words aren't forbidden. They might be necessary, depending on the context.)

Instead of writing "very big", write "enormous". Instead of writing "some people" write "people" or (often better) "you".

Cutting unnecessary words doesn't mean that every sentence and paragraph needs to be short. Sometimes, you'll want to explain complex ideas, or take time over a particularly important point.

Make sure, though, that every word counts.

Editing Your Post

Don't worry about making every sentence perfect as you're writing your post: leave a few minutes for editing at the end, and go back through to cut out any unnecessary words.

Try cutting 10% of the words from your post when you edit. (E.g. 70 words from a 700 word post.) This forces you to take out words and phrases which aren't needed – so that what's left gets the attention that it deserves from your reader.

When Not to Cut

Almost every post *could* be shorter. You only want to cut words, though, if you can still maintain the same effect.

Sometimes, you'll want to make a point twice in different ways – to ensure that it sticks. Other times, you'll have a phrase like "free gift" where one word is redundant (all gifts are free) – but where it will get a more positive reader response.

Copyblogger has a great post on this: [Here's How Brevity Can Crush Your Copy](.).

> ### Exercise #7:
>
> Choose a recent post on your blog. Copy the first 300 words into a separate document, and see how many you can cut out. Does the writing seem stronger as a result?

Further Reading

[297 Flabby Words and Phrases That Rob Your Writing of All Its Power](), Shane Arthur, Smart Blogger

This is a great list of words and phrases to watch out for when editing (though keep in mind that *sometimes* redundant words can help to get people to subscribe to your email newsletter or buy your products, e.g. "free gift" or "added bonus").

#8: Give Clear Action Points

Depending on your blog's topic and style, readers might stop by for all sorts of reasons: for information, entertainment, a distraction from work, or a solution to a particular problem.

Why Action Points Help

Unless your blog exists purely to entertain, readers will love content which directly helps them. Motivational posts can be encouraging to read – but they don't really have much practical benefit, beyond giving the reader a temporary warm fuzzy glow.

Action points give readers something solid to do – increasing their engagement with you and your blog, and increasing the chance of them coming back. They also make your posts look more interesting and valuable.

What to Call Your Action Points

It's helpful to label your action points. (If you have several points within one post, use the same label for each.) Try:

- Action Point
- Over to You
- Your Turn
- Try This
- Homework
- Exercise

You might want to tie your action points into the title. For instance, in my post [7 Habits of Serious Writers](), I used "Get Serious" for each action point.

Think carefully about using words like "homework" or "assignment" – will these resonate with your readers or turn them off?

How to Write an Action Point

Keep your action points fairly short. Make them clear and specific, and use the word "you" to encourage the reader to take action.

Usually, you'll want to give actions that won't take very long, and which don't require previous experience. For more complex posts, you could give alternatives – offering readers a basic action plus a "bonus" or "extra credit" suggestion.

Where appropriate, you can give a link to extra resources that can help.

Exercise #8

Choose an existing post and add an action point for each major section (that might mean one action point at the end, or several points throughout).

Further Reading

How to Create Compelling Content by Inspiring Action, Darren Rowse, ProBlogger

Great tips from Darren about giving "homework" to your blog readers (he also covers other ways in which you might want them to act – which links in with section #10 in this mini-ebook).

#9: Format Your Post for Easy Reading

Have you ever looked at a post of grey, blocky paragraphs and thought *"too much effort?"*

A long unbroken mass of text looks offputting on the screen. Readers want blog posts which they can take in easily, with formatting used to help highlight important points.

Good formatting doesn't just make a post easy to read – it also indicates that the author has put some thought into the structure of the piece.

How to Tweak Your Posts for Readability

It takes minutes – perhaps just seconds – to make a post far more attractive to readers. Here's how:

- **Break up long paragraphs.** In blogging, it's fine to have paragraphs that are a single sentence (or even a single word).
- **Add in subheadings if the post makes several distinct points** – these help readers who might be skimming for information.
- **Use different levels of headings where appropriate.** You're not limited to just a title and a couple of first-level subheadings – you can have smaller headings too. For instance, you might break a post into two halves, but have two sections within each part.
- **Consider putting a couple of key sentences or phrases in bold.** This can get annoying for the reader if you do it too much – but it can be very effective in small doses.
- **Where appropriate, turn long sentences or paragraphs into bullet-pointed lists** (like this one)!
- **Add images.** This takes a little longer, but can be very effective. See section #2 for more on this.

Making these changes can dramatically improve the appearance of your post, making readers much more likely to stick with it.

Here's an example of how formatting can be used, from **How to Create Compelling Content by Inspiring Action**:

Your Homework Today

Today your homework is twofold:

1. Read 12 Tips to SNAP Readers out of Passivity – this post is all about calling readers to Action. It shares WHY Calls to Action are important on a blog but also gives 12 tips on HOW to do it.

2. Call Your Readers to DO something – the action that you're calling people to DO will vary a lot from blog to blog.

- it could be to call them to answer a question and leave a comment
- it could be that you want to give your readers a little homework to do (as I'm doing here in this post)
- it could be calling them to buy something from you (or an affiliate product)
- it could be to vote in a poll

You can see how the subheading, the numbered points, the bold text and the bullet points all make this very easy to read and take in.

> ### Exercise #9:
>
> Look for a recent post on your blog without any subheadings, and add at least two. Pick one key sentence in each section and make it bold.

Further Reading

A Comprehensive Guide to Formatting Your WordPress Posts and Pages, Pamela Wilson, Copyblogger

Pamela's tips on formatting apply to any blogging platform, but she gives screenshots from WordPress to make it super-easy to see *how* to put the formatting in. *(Note that WordPress has updated their interface since Pamela wrote this post, so the icons you see will have a slightly different design.)*

#10: Tell Readers What to Do Next

When readers get to the end of your post, what do you want them to do?

You might be hoping they'll:

- Subscribe to your blog
- Buy one of your products
- Join your newsletter list
- "Like" your post on Facebook
- Leave a comment

Ask Your Readers to Do Something

It's fine to ask readers to take action. This isn't pushy or rude – it's just a way to help them engage with you and your blog. Often, there'll be a benefit in it for them, too.

Be totally clear about what you want readers to do next:

- "Enjoyed this post? Make sure you don't miss out on future ones – subscribe to the blog today (it's free)."
- "If you found this how-to guide helpful, check out my ebook…"
- "Do you agree with me, or think that I'm crazy? Either way, I'd love to hear your thoughts. You can leave a comment below…"

You might have heard these types of prompts described as "calls to action", an advertising term.

Being Strategic About Your Calls to Action

Blogging isn't just about writing great content. If you want to make money (or just gain more readers), you need to think strategically.

Maybe you want to build up your audience before launching a product: you could encourage readers to subscribe to your newsletter or blog.

Maybe you have an ebook that sold well when it launched, but doesn't make much money any more. How about prompting readers to check it out?

You can even chain actions together – for instance, on one post, you might say "If you enjoyed this, read the next post in this series..." Then, at the end of the series, you could encourage the reader to take a bigger step, like subscribing to your blog or buying a product.

Exercise #10:

Decide what you want readers to do after reading your most recent post.

Add a sentence or two asking them to do this. Make it easy and give them clear directions. For instance:

"Please tweet this post by clicking the green button below."

"Get free updates straight to your inbox by entering your email address here:"

"Click here to find out all about my latest ebook."

Further Reading

[15 Call to Actions for Blog Posts that Convert](#), Jasmine Henry, writtent

Lots of ideas and examples for different types of calls to action that you might include at the end of your blog posts.

Where Next?

Congratulations on making it to the end of this ebook!

To take your blogging or writing even further, make sure you keep reading the Aliventures blog regularly (you can get posts straight to your inbox – note that this is separate from the newsletter).

Also check out my Blogger's Guides, particularly **The Blogger's Guide to Effective Writing**, which is jam-packed with in depth tuition to help you write stronger posts.

It also comes with templates to make crafting your posts super-easy, and with bonus videos where I analyse a number of blog posts to show you what they're doing well and what could be tweaked.

Colin Beveridge from Flying Colour Maths described The Blogger's Guide to Effective Writing as:

Clear and direct, with enough humour to keep it light and entertaining. It's full of the tricks the pros use so that bloggers like me can put together posts and series that look halfway competent – and it's left me itching to resurrect any number of my dead blogs.

You can find out more and get your copy here.

Don't forget to use the code *alinewsletter* to take 35% off the standard price.

About Ali

I've been blogging for eight years now, and I've written for many big sites – including writing/blogging sites like Copyblogger, ProBlogger, Daily Blog Tips, Write to Done and The Write Life, and personal development sites like Dumb Little Man, Pick the Brain and The Change Blog.

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