

Module #1: What's Your Blog All About ... and Who's Reading?

Welcome to the first week of Blog On!

You might have been blogging for months or even years ... or you might just be starting out. Perhaps you're thinking about a change in direction, or maybe you're hoping to re-energise your blogging.

Everyone in Blog On will have their own reasons for blogging, and their own vision for how best to shape their blog. There's definitely no "right" way to blog ... and I've designed Blog On so it can be used by all sorts of bloggers, for all sorts of blogs. I hope it'll be a great fit for you.

Whatever type of blog you have, it's crucial that you are clear about your blog's goal, its topic and its audience.

And that's what we'll be covering in today's module.

Quick reminder: If you haven't done so already, join our Facebook group to get the most out of the course:

[Blog On Spring 2018](#)

What's Your Main Reason for Blogging?

Blogs are a wonderful tool, with a huge amount of flexibility. They can be used to promote a business (large or small), to start or strengthen a writing career, to build your profile within a particular field, or simply as a great hobby.

Once you know *why* you're blogging, it's much easier to figure out the audience you're aiming for – which is what we'll be coming on to in a moment.

Here are some common – and great – reasons you might be blogging. You might find that more than one of these applies to you, and that's fine.

- **To get into a steady writing routine** – if you've not been writing for a while, you might want to have a blog simply as a way to encourage you to write regularly.
- **To launch or support a freelance writing career** – a blog can be a great way to promote yourself and your work, without having to spend any money or do loads of networking.
- **To build up a portfolio of your written work** – pieces that you've published on your own blog still count, and you can easily send a link to a potential client or editor (if they've asked for samples).
- **To promote a novel, or a series of novels** – while it can be tougher to build an audience as a fiction-writer, many authors do.
- **To get name recognition as an expert within your field** – this often applies to academic bloggers, who might not be interested in making money from their blog but who still want to use it to advance their career.
- **To build a platform to sell non-fiction books** – some non-fiction authors start a blog on their book's topic (often before the book is completed) so they have a ready-made audience when it comes out.
- **To make money through the blog itself** – which could mean directly from advertising revenue or affiliate sales, or more indirectly through selling products (whether virtual or physical).

Do any of those reasons resonate with you? Or is there a different reason why you decided to start blogging? You might want to jot down your core reason(s) at this point – we'll be coming back to this in the assignment at the end of the module.

Who Are Your Readers?

Once you know your main reason(s) for blogging, you can think about your audience. We're doing this *before* looking in detail at blogging topics because your audience will very much shape what topics you cover.

For instance, if your main reason for blogging is to promote your copywriting business, you'll want to write posts aimed at potential clients – not posts aimed at fellow copywriters.

Once you're clear on that, it's easy to see that some topics will make more sense than others. "What to look for when hiring a copywriter" might be a great topic to cover; "how to find freelancing work" probably wouldn't!

Think about your reason for blogging and how that relates to your audience. I'll go through each of the key reasons we looked at above:

Reason: To get into a steady writing routine.

Audience: Supportive readers, perhaps friends/family, who'll leave comments and encourage you.

Reason: To launch or support a freelance writing career.

Audience: Potential clients who might be interested in hiring you (could be small businesses, local shops, big companies – it depends on the type of freelancing you do).

Reason: To build up a portfolio of your written work.

Audience: People who you'll be sharing your samples with (e.g. editors) – you may not be aiming to build a regular readership, but you do need to think about them when you craft and present your work.

Reason: To promote a novel, or a series of novels.

Audience: Readers of your particular genre, which might include readers who're new to you and also your existing readers (to keep them engaged with you as you write more novels).

Reason: To get name recognition as an expert in your field.

Audience: Fellow academics or experts within your field, but quite possibly also people with a more casual interest in the area ... it depends a bit on how you want to position yourself.

Reason: To build a platform to sell non-fiction books.

Audience: People who are interested in your topic and who are at roughly the right level of expertise with that topic to buy your upcoming book(s) – e.g. if you write beginners' guides, you'll want to aim your blogging content at beginners in your field.

Reason: To make money through the blog itself.

Audience: People who'll buy things from you! This could cover a whole range of different people (and the audience will be narrowed down based on topic, e.g. you'd aim for an audience of parents if you want to sell parenting related books and courses).

It will mean having an audience who're willing and able to buy online – so probably not young teenagers or people with very little disposable income.

Without the right audience, you're going to struggle to achieve what you want to achieve with your blog. Of course, you may find that your reasons for blogging shift over time – but it's helpful to at least begin with a rough idea of what you're hoping to accomplish.

What Topics(s) Will Your Blog Cover?

Now that you've got your audience in mind, it's time to clarify your blog's topic (or topics).

One question that a lot of bloggers have is whether they should go broad or narrow in terms of their topic. While there's a lot of leeway here, it's also possible to go too far one way or the other.

Sometimes, I've seen bloggers with blogs that cover almost every topic under the sun. They'll blog about whatever interests them at a given moment: religion, parenting, gardening, travelling, books...

Some bloggers can pull this off. The best way to do so is by having a very defined focus within all your topics, e.g. if you wanted to blog about Christian family life, this could incorporate religion and parenting, both of which you could use as your focus for posts on gardening, travelling and books.

Generally, though, it's better to have one key topic in mind, or two or three closely related topics. This allows you to build up an audience of readers who are interested in *everything* you write, rather than having a lot of passing

traffic from people who like a few of your posts, but aren't interested enough to stick around.

Don't define things *too* narrowly, though: you might find that after a year or two, you run out of steam. For instance, "growing organic tomatoes" would probably be a bit too narrow; "growing organic produce" could work instead.

Different Topics, Same Goal

Here are some examples of writing-related blogs and their niches. All of these blogs have essentially the same goal – they're all businesses of varying sizes, aiming to make money through sharing great content – but they all have a different focus:

The Creative Penn – writing, self-publishing and marketing, with a focus on fiction

Copyblogger – content marketing, writing for the web, doing business online

ProBlogger – professional (i.e. money-making) blogging

Aliventures – writing, blogging and self-publishing

The Book Designer – book self-publishing, particularly design issues

What Should You Call Your Blog?

You probably already have a name for your blog, but if you're thinking about changing it or you're just getting your blog set up, this section of the module is for you.

When it comes to choosing your blog's name (title) and URL (web address), you have several options:

Option #1: You could use your own name

e.g. *janefriedman.com* or *michaelhyatt.com*.

If your goal is to create a brand around yourself (as an author or as a freelancer) then this can work very well. It gives you the most flexibility regarding your topics.

Option #2: You could incorporate your first or last name into a brand

e.g. *thecreativepenn.com* or *aliventures.com*.

This option isn't one I see many people taking ... but it can be useful if you want the blog's name to hint at what content people will get, while retaining a fair amount of flexibility.

Option #3: You could use a name that describes the blog itself

e.g. *makealivingwriting.com*, *helpingwritersbecomeauthors.com*, *productiveflourishing.com*.

This helps readers know instantly what your blog is about, plus it allows you to potentially sell your blog in future (as it won't be tied to your own name).

Whichever option you choose, I recommend that you:

Keep your blog's name short – three words at most.

Match the URL to the name. If your blog is called "Ali's Writing Adventures" and your URL is "aliventures.com", that's hard for readers to remember.

Check out available URLs before setting your heart on a particular name. You can find out whether or not a URL is registered by going to whois.net and typing it in the search box. (You could also type the URL straight into the address bar of your browser, but this won't tell you for certain if it's available, as someone might have registered the URL but not yet created a website.)

The Blog On Assignments

Each week, you'll have an assignment to carry out (based on that week's materials). Blog On is a practical course, so even if you don't have much time, do as much as you can on the assignment – you'll get a lot more out of the course that way!

I suggest keeping your assignment answers in a single document, or in an Evernote notebook or similar – or, if you prefer, in a physical notebook. That makes them easy to find if you want to refer back to them at a later point.

Module #1 Assignment and Check-In

Your assignment this week is in three parts:

#1: Write down your *main* reason(s) for blogging – no more than three.

#2: Write down a couple of sentences, or a few bullet points, describing your audience.

#3: Write down (a) the core topics you'll cover, (b) the topics you'll occasionally cover and (c) the topics you won't cover.

Once you've completed the assignment (or done as much of it as you're going to manage this week), come and "check in" on Facebook here and you'll get your reward stamp for Week 1. You're welcome to share your answers to the assignment questions there, but you don't have to.

[facebook.com/groups/blogon.spring2018/permalink/219819155463604](https://www.facebook.com/groups/blogon.spring2018/permalink/219819155463604)

If you prefer not to use Facebook, you can simply email me (ali@aliventures.com) with "check in" in the subject line.

Remember to check in by the end of Sunday 3rd June to get a stamp on your reward card for this week.

Module #1: Recommended Further Reading

All of the further reading is optional, but if you want to find out more about something we've covered in the module, it's highly recommended! If you find other useful resources, you're very welcome to share them in our Facebook group.

3 Ways to Define What Your Blog Is About, Darren Rowse, ProBlogger

If you're struggling to narrow down a specific topic for your blog, you might want to focus more on your audience itself (e.g. their lifestyle or interests). Darren goes into some detail about different approaches in this post.

4 Considerations in Picking a Website Name, Michael Hyatt

Michael runs through different possibilities for naming your website, taking a slightly different approach to my suggestions in the module. If you're struggling to decide on a name for your blog, this post may help.

Can blogging be a hobby?, Tseen Khoo, The Research Whisperer

If your blog is (maybe) a hobby, this post is an interesting and nuanced look at how a blog might fit in with other areas of your life – Tseen is specifically thinking about academics who blog, but there's a lot here that could resonate with other types of bloggers too.

What's Coming Up Next Week:

Module #2: Classic Blog Post Structure: How to Get it Right

Next week, from Monday 4th June, we'll be taking a look at the classic or "essay-style" blog post structure. We'll break posts down into their core elements (title, introduction, main body and conclusion) and examine different examples of how these elements work in different types of blog posts.

I'll be giving you tips on how to achieve what you need to with each section of your post, from hooking the reader at the start to ending your post well.