

# Module #4: Writing a Great List Post That Readers Will Love

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In this week's module, we're tackling list posts: blog posts that are structured as a numbered list. We'll be going through the advantages of this format and looking at how to make the list format work for you, whatever type of blog you have.

After that, we'll take a look at how to structure a list post (hint: it's pretty similar to the classic blog post structure we looked at in Module 2), and we'll examine several list posts in detail to see how they're put together.

List posts look easy on the surface, but it's hard to write a really *good* list post. If you want readers to stick around and read more posts (and ideally sign up to get your posts by email or in their RSS reader), your list post needs to be as well crafted as possible.

I'm sure you've read plenty of list posts, but here are three examples to show what I'm talking about. We'll be returning to all of these later in the module:

- [5 of the best paleo friendly chocolates online](#), Nicole Avery, Planning With Kids
- [How to Grow as a Writer: 5 Logical Steps](#), K.M. Weiland, Helping Writers Become Authors
- [Lessons Learned from 6 Years as an Author Entrepreneur](#), Joanna Penn, The Creative Penn

## Are List Posts Right For *Your* Blog?

When I started blogging on Aliventures, I was a bit of a list post snob. I'd come across rather too many disappointing list posts that had been written by bloggers who were, perhaps, just rushing to get *something* out there on their blog.

**I felt that the list format was shallow – and I knew my readers wanted more thoughtful content.**

But then I published an in-depth list post that got a great reaction from my readers. I realised that list posts can work really well – but they deserve as much care as any other post that you’d write.

If you’re writing a blog to share your expertise or ideas on a particular topic (like “freelance writing” or “parenting”), then list posts often make a lot of sense. “Warning: Five Types of Client to Avoid (No Matter What)” or “Ten Overlooked Holiday Destinations That Are Ideal for Families” could make great posts.

Plenty of other types of blogs can benefit from list posts, though. If you run an author blog, you might want to write a post about “The Best Three Books I’ve Read in 2018” – you can always tie one or more of these back to your own work. If you have a more personal, diary-style blog, you might write about “Seven Surprising Lessons I Learnt When I Started Baking”.

**Another approach, if you still can’t quite see lists working for *your* blog, is to use them in a humorous or wry way.** “Thirty-Five Ridiculous Things My Children Have Shouted At Me About This Week” might work, for instance.

So even if you don’t think list posts are for you, I’d challenge you to give this module a go anyway. The list format is very flexible and you’ll see through the examples that it can be used in quite different ways.

## Coming Up With a Great List Post Idea

What makes a good list post?

Every list post involves a number of different suggestions, tips, ideas, or steps.

These might be stand-alone tips that the reader could pick and choose from (e.g. “Ten Great Tools for Freelance Bloggers”). They might be cumulative steps (e.g. “How to Organise Your Pantry in Five Simple Steps”). Or, they might be a collection of resources (“The Best Ten Books I Read in 2018”).

List posts can become truly epic, with 100, 101, 500 or more items. For the sake of this module (and your sanity), I’m going to suggest that you look for an idea that’s a little narrower in scope! Somewhere between five and fifteen items is probably about right.

Back in Module 2, we saw how important it is to have a title for your blog post that's clear and specific. This is especially crucial for list posts: the title helps you narrow down what you are (and aren't) going to include.

For instance, for Aliventures, I could write list posts titled:

- Seven Tips for Sending Better Emails to Your Freelance Writing Clients
- Ten WordPress Themes for Writers That Will Make Your Blog Look Great (and They're All Free)
- Advertising Your Novel: How to Set Up An Amazon Ad in Six Easy Steps

All of these are fairly small, specific, self-contained topics.

Something like "101 Tips All Writers Should Know" might be on-topic for my blog, but it would be overwhelming for both me and for my readers!

Here are a few partial titles you could use for a list post of your own. Pick one that appeals to you, and fill in the blanks with your own ideas (feel free to change the numbers, or any of the other words, too).

### **Ten Powerful Ways to ...**

e.g. "Ten Powerful Ways to Boost Your Focus When You're Writing"

### **How to .... in Nine Easy Steps**

e.g. "How to Plan a Non-Fiction Book in Nine Easy Steps"

### **Eight Important Lessons Learned From ...**

e.g. "Eight Important Lessons Learned From My Disastrous Holiday"

### **Seven ... Blogs I Love (And Why ...)**

e.g. "Seven Writing Blogs I Love (And Why You Should Read Them Too)"

### **My Ten Favourite ...**

e.g. "My Ten Favourite Cookie Recipes to Try Today"

### **The Three Best Books on ...**

e.g. "The Three Best Books on Money Management I've Read This Year"

If you're struggling to pin down your idea, don't worry: just move on to coming up with the different items on your list, and you can always tweak (or completely change!) the title once you've got more clarity about what's going to be in your post.

## Generating Ideas for Your Individual List Items

I always recommend planning before you start writing – and this is particularly important for list posts. If you just begin, it's easy to end up missing out a point that might have been really interesting – and you can get into a bit of a tangle if you end up drafting your whole post before deciding on the best order for the different items on your list.

**Always try to come up with a couple more ideas than you actually need.** (E.g. if you're aiming for "Ten Great Tips..." then come up with twelve different tips.) That way, you can cut or merge any weaker ones – giving you a much stronger post overall.

So, how can you get those ideas flowing?

### Option #1: Write ... a List!

Sometimes, the simplest way to get your ideas down is just to list them. They probably won't end up in quite the "right" order (we'll come onto ordering your ideas in a moment) – but simply jotting them all down on a piece of paper or into a document on your computer can work just fine.

#### Example:

Here's my list for "Ten Powerful Ways to Boost Your Focus When You're Writing":

1. Set a timer (I recommend this a lot ... because it works!)
2. Write in a different location (e.g. library / coffee shop)
3. Write down your goal for the session (e.g. "finish edits to blog post and publish it")

4. Plan what you're going to write (e.g. write a list of bullet points for the scene of your novel that you're working on)
5. Experiment with different types of music / ambient noise / silence
6. Be accountable to someone else – spouse? Facebook friends?
7. Turn off internet connection if possible
8. Have a notepad to hand to jot down distractions / to-dos that come into your mind
9. Close the door / write in a room away from family noise, distractions
10. Keep a writing journal – record how focused you were, what helped / what didn't help
11. "Bookend" your writing session (e.g. I write between kids' teatime and bathtime) – having a firm stopping point can make it easier to stay focused.
12. Get enough downtime at other points in your day – if writing is yet another chore crammed into a hectic day, of course it's going to be hard to focus.

This is the list exactly as I wrote it, unedited. As you can see, I've not attempted to write in full sentences, and some of the points have examples or details whereas others don't.

I've come up with twelve points rather than ten to (a) push myself to come up with more ideas – the twelfth wasn't particularly obvious, but I think is a really important point and (b) so that I can cut out any weak ideas, or merge together any that are quite similar.

## Option #2: Create a Mindmap

Another great way to come up with ideas is by using a mindmap. I'm sure you've used these before, but just in case you're not sure what I'm talking about, here's what a mindmap looks like:



I wrote this mindmap for "Seven Writing Blogs I Love (And Why You Should Read Them)". As you can see, I've included the names of the blogs I want to include ... but I've also included some extra thoughts on the mindmap about the format of the post itself.

**Mindmaps are great for just throwing everything on the page and organising it later.** If you find it difficult to come up with ideas, give mindmapping a try: it can be very liberating.

Personally, I like to draw my mindmaps on paper – but if you'd prefer to mindmap on your phone or computer, there are lots of great tools available. There are plenty of recommendations in this post by Harry Guinness: [10 Best](#)

[Mind Mapping Software Tools for Better Brainstorming](#). (And note this is a great example of a well put together list post, too!)

## Getting Your List Ideas into a Sensible Order

Now that you've got your ideas, you need to sort them into an order – which is what we'll be tackling next.

Ordering the items is an often-overlooked part of writing a list post. Sometimes, the order is pretty clear: with a “how to” post, for instance, you need to start at the first step and work through to the last. For a list post when each idea stands alone, though, ordering the items can be trickier.

**Yet, order matters – and imposing a sense of order on your post will make it more useful and engaging for your readers.**

Depending on the type of post you've written, you could choose to order it:

- **Alphabetically.** This is particularly useful if your post is a compilation of tips from different people; alphabetical ordering (probably by their name or surname) is a good way to avoid making it look like some people's tips are “better” than others.
- **From smallest to largest item, or from largest to smallest.** That might be in terms of importance, difficulty level, duration... whatever makes sense. For instance, if you're sharing “Ten Tips for Camping With Kids”, you might put the simplest beginner-friendly tips first.
- **Alternating between different types of item.** For instance, I've written several posts which alternate between “Do...” and “Don't...” tips.
- **In time order,** in order from “earliest” to “latest” or vice versa, perhaps working through a day/week/month/year from start to end. For instance, if you're writing about “Seven Surprising Lessons I Learnt This Year”, it might well make sense to go through those chronologically.
- **By dividing your list** into two (or more) parts. This might make sense for some “how to” content, if there are two major tasks to accomplish with different steps for each.

It's entirely up to you what pattern you choose, and whether you want to add a line mentioning it in your introduction. An alphabetical or alternating order will probably be pretty clear, but if you're ordering from "easiest to hardest", you might want to explain that up-front.

### **Example: Ten Powerful Ways to Boost Your Focus When You're Writing**

This is a type of list that's quite tricky to order, because there's no "obvious" way to do it. I ordered the list in roughly the way in which the reader would approach these different steps, but another option would be to order it with "quickest to implement" tips at the start.

#### Ten Powerful Ways to Boost Your Focus When You're Writing: Plan

##### Introduction

1. "Bookend" Your Writing Session
2. Write Somewhere You Won't Be Distracted
3. Be Accountable to Someone Else
4. Turn Off Your Internet Connection if Possible
5. Write Down Your Goal for the Session
6. Set a Timer While You're Working
7. Experiment with Music, Ambient Sound, or Silence
8. Rough Out a Plan for What You're About to Write
9. Have a Notebook to Hand to Jot Down Distractions
10. Keep a Writing Journal to Record How Your Session Went

Conclusion: getting enough downtime is important too



While ordering the list, I merged some of the points that were essentially similar (“write in a different location” and “close the door / write in a room away from family noise and distractions”).

I wanted to keep “get enough downtime at other points in the day”, but this was a slightly different approach to the rest of the ideas on the list, so I decided to take it outside the list and put it in the conclusion.

## Structuring Your List Post

When we looked at classic, essay-style blog posts in Module 4, we covered the basic blog post structure:

- Introduction
- Main body
- Conclusion

**This same structure applies to list posts.** I sometimes see bloggers making the mistake of *just* writing a list, without putting any introduction or conclusion. This comes across as rushed or abrupt, and it’s sometimes hard for the reader to take in the list without any context.

Here's how a typical list post looks when split into its three key sections: the introduction, main body and conclusion. (This is my post [12 Wise and Inspiring Quotes About Writing.](#))

December is always a big month for me: I love celebrating Christmas and the New Year, of course, but it's also when my birthday falls (on December 12<sup>th</sup>).

For me, this time of year always involves some reflection on how the past eleven and a bit months have gone ... and some thoughts about what I want to accomplish in the year ahead.

All year, I've been sharing some of my favourite quotes about writing on Twitter ... and I wanted to repost some of the best here, in the hopes that you'll find them encouraging and motivating too:

“

#1: "Writing is a job, a talent, but it's also the place to go in your head. It is the imaginary friend you drink your tea with in the afternoon."

– Ann Patchett

#2: "Write about what really interests you, whether it is real things or imaginary things, and nothing else."

– C. S. Lewis

#3: "Writing is the only thing that, when I do it, I don't feel I should be doing something else."

– Gloria Steinem

#4: "Serious writers write, inspired or not. Over time they discover that routine is a better friend than inspiration."

– Ralph Keyes

#5: "The art of writing is the art of applying the seat of the pants to the seat of the chair."

– Mary Heaton Vorse

#6: "Take the time to write. You can do your life's work in half an hour a day."

– Robert Hass

#7: "We are all apprentices in a craft where no one ever becomes a master."

– Ernest Hemingway

#8: "I try to leave out the parts that people skip."

– Elmore Leonard

#9: "I love my rejection slips, they show me I try."

– Sylvia Plath

#10: "All good writing begins with terrible first efforts. You need to start somewhere."

– Anne Lamott

#11: "The scariest moment is always just before you start. After that, things can only get better."

– Stephen King

#12: "If you write one story, it may be bad; if you write a hundred, you have the odds in your favor."

– Edgar Rice Burroughs

If a particular quote appeals to you, why not write it out and keep it on your desk or in your writing notebook? (And if you have a different favourite quote, do share it with us in the comments!)

During this next part of the module, we're going to take a look at several examples of list posts, examining how they're structured. I've deliberately picked posts that are quite different not only in terms of content but also in terms of the type of list and how they're put together.

I mentioned these posts briefly in the introduction to this module, but here they are again in case you want to take a look through them before moving on:

**5 of the best paleo friendly chocolates online**, Nicole Avery, Planning With Kids

**How to Grow as a Writer: 5 Logical Steps**, K.M. Weiland, Helping Writers Become Authors

**Lessons Learned from 6 Years as an Author Entrepreneur**, Joanna Penn, The Creative Penn

You might like to print each one out and use coloured pens to mark the different key areas – title, introduction, main body and conclusion.

## Titling Your List Post

We went through titles back in Module 2, but there are a couple of particularly important things to note about titling a list post:

- Your title should normally include the number of things on your list. (The main exception is the “how to” post – it's often useful to tell people how many steps you'll be giving them, but you may decide that clutters up your title too much.)
- The scope of your post should be clear from the title. Be specific and clear about what the reader is going to get from the post itself.
- Always double-check your title (and your introduction) after writing your post to make sure you actually have the correct number of items on your list. Sometimes, you might find that you remove or add an item while writing – that's not a problem, but you do need to make sure you update every single reference to the number!

## Example #1: Nicole Avery's Post

**5 of the best paleo friendly chocolates online**, Nicole Avery, Planning With Kids

This is a good title: it covers a narrow, specific topic ("paleo friendly chocolates online") and "5" seems a sensible number for the scope of the list. "2 of the best" might seem a bit underwhelming, "15 of the best" would be a bit much.

I had a small but significant quibble with this title: there's a typo in it (in the text heading for the post, but not in the feature image for the post):

5 of the best paleo friendly chocolate  
online

"Chocolate" should be "chocolates". This makes the title confusing (at first, I thought there was a missing word such as "recipes") and the whole title would probably be clearer with a slight addition such as **5 of the best paleo friendly chocolates *available to buy* online**

## Example #2: K.M. Weiland's Post

**How to Grow as a Writer: 5 Logical Steps**, K.M. Weiland, Helping Writers Become Authors

I liked this title, and I think it will appeal to a certain type of writer who takes the business of being a writer quite seriously.

It did strike me as a quite general title, and I might have been tempted to tweak a word or two (e.g. "How to Grow as a Novelist: 5 Logical Steps"). K.M.'s blog is all about writing fiction, though, so regular readers will assume that the post is aimed at fiction-writers without any further clarification – but if the post is shared on Twitter or Facebook, it could reach an audience who are less certain what to expect.

### **Example #3: Joanna Penn's Post**

**Lessons Learned from 6 Years as an Author Entrepreneur**, Joanna Penn, The Creative Penn

This was a perfectly good title except that it doesn't tell us how many lessons Joanna has learnt! I'd have liked the number to be included ("4 Lessons Learned from 6 Years as an Author Entrepreneur"). It's a tiny addition but it gives us a clearer idea of what to expect from the post.

I suspect Joanna has written the title this way, though, so it matches the other posts in the series (e.g. the previous year's post was "Lessons Learned from 5 Years as an Author Entrepreneur").

### **Writing the Introduction to Your List Post**

Your introduction is where you set the stage for your list and orient your readers. You might explain who the list is appropriate for, or what problem it's going to solve.

You might also want to provide some guidance on using the list (e.g. "pick one or two of these ideas to try out this week").

For some list posts, particularly how-to posts, you may need to explain any prerequisites or anything that you've assumed. For instance, "If you don't already have the URL for your blog registered, you'll need to do that first – you can find instructions here." Or "I'm assuming that you have a DSLR camera."

If you're not sure how to begin your post, you could:

- Open with a question that ties into the reader's experience or encourages them to read on.
- Explain why you created the list.
- Tell the reader how the list will help them to achieve one of their goals.

## Example #1: Nicole Avery's Post

From [5 of the best paleo friendly chocolates online](#), Nicole Avery, Planning With Kids

For someone who is following something like a paleo diet it can be a challenge for family and friends to know what to buy them when it comes to chocolate or something sweet for celebrations like a cake or sweet treat.

Even though I have been taking a whole food approach to my diet for nearly four years now, last year for my birthday my husband asked me "what type of cake do you people eat?". He is not a cook and although he sees me make lots of paleo snacks, paleo cakes and paleo desserts, he would have no idea what goes into them or more importantly what doesn't!

So as we are getting close to Easter I thought I would put together a list of some of the best paleo friendly chocolate online that "people like me" eat, so "people like me" can then quietly send this link to loved ones in their life as a little hint about what they could possibly buy them for Easter .

I have listed a summary table below of the five chocolate brands I have selected. ...

This introduction is a bit wordy for my liking, and I felt like it could've used a ruthless edit! On the whole, though, it functions well and does everything an introduction should do.

Nicole starts by introducing a key problem: if you're following a paleo diet, or similar, family and friends may struggle to know what they can buy for you as a treat.

The second paragraph then gives a quick anecdote (about Nicole's conversation with her husband), which can be a good way to form a stronger connection with your reader. There's also a clear purpose for the list: it's something that people can send to "loved ones in their life" as a hint for what

to buy them. Nicole then begins to introduce the list itself, explaining that there's a summary table after which the reader can "find a small write up about each of these brands".

As I said, the main problem is that the introduction is too wordy. It goes on for too long, and I imagine most readers would end up skimming to get to the summary table and the actual list. That isn't a disaster, but it also doesn't create a good first impression (especially if someone is new to the site, or someone has come to this page because a paleo family member sent them the link) – so this really highlights how important it is to check that the length of your introduction works with the rest of your post.

### Example #2: K.M. Weiland's Post

From [How to Grow as a Writer: 5 Logical Steps](#), K.M. Weiland, Helping Writers Become Authors

Writers are students. Sometimes this is the result of nothing more than sheer necessity: we seek answers for our questions because writing has turned out to be far more difficult than we anticipated. But often, writers are students first and writers second. If this is you, then concentrating on how to grow as a writer isn't *just* about improving your writing; it's part of a personal manifestation of learning and growth.

I fear nothing more than stagnation. Every moment standing still is a moment I've wasted by not learning something about this deliciously mad world of ours. (This isn't to say we can't learn—a lot—by the physical act of standing still, but if you're learning, are you really standing still, hmm?) I feel this challenge as a person, and I feel this challenge as a writer. I've always said, tongue in cheek, that the moment in which I know everything about being a writer will be the moment I flat-out quit.

Although K.M.'s post is titled "How to Grow as a Writer: 5 Logical Steps", quite a bit of the post takes place before she actually gets to the list. That's fine – this is appropriate for the type of post K.M. is writing (thoughtful, in-depth), and it's also in keeping with her usual style of digging deep into topics.

I'd say that the main body of the post begins with the first subheading, "Growth: A Journey of Personal Honesty"; the paragraphs before that are the introduction. You might have a different opinion, though.

These first two paragraphs set up the rest of the post. They explain why growth is important (to the imagined reader and to K.M. herself) and frame growth and learning as, in itself, a good and important thing – indeed, to K.M., growth is *more* significant than writing. ("I've always said, tongue in cheek, that the moment in which I know everything about being a writer will be the moment I flat-out quit.")

### Example #3: Joanna Penn's Post

From [Lessons Learned from 6 Years as an Author Entrepreneur](#), Joanna Penn, The Creative Penn

Six years ago, in Sept 2011, I left my day job to become a full-time author entrepreneur. Every year since I have reflected on the journey and what I learn along the way.

**My challenges change and grow along with the business** and you will likely be at a different stage, but I hope that you find my lessons learned useful along your own author path.

You can read [all my lessons learned from previous years on my timeline so far – remember, I started out with writing my first book and no audience back in 2006!](#)

Here are my lessons learned from the last year.

Jo introduces her post by setting the scene – briefly giving her own background ("Six years ago..."). She links back to previous posts, which is a really helpful thing to do in your introduction if your list post is part of a series. (Which Jo's is, albeit a series in annual instalments.)

There's an indication of how the reader might use the list – "I hope you'll find my lessons learned useful along your own author path", and Jo finishes the



introduction with a segue into the list itself – “Here are my lessons learned from the last year.”

This is a concise, functional and effective introduction that quickly sets the scene for the post ... then gets on with it!

## Writing the Main Body of Your List Post

With an essay-style post, you can have sections of varying lengths, or ones that are structured in different ways (though the more consistent you can be, the better).

In a list post, it's important to try to format each list item in the same way. You want your post to be consistent, so that it's easy for the reader to take it in, and you want it to look reasonably polished rather than hastily thrown together.

Normally, it's good practice to:

- **Start each item on your list with a number.** (If you're using a number in your title, always number the items in your post: readers can easily get lost partway if you don't.)
- **Be consistent.** If you use “Idea #1” or “Tip #1” then make sure you follow this pattern for every “idea” or “tip”. I know this sounds obvious, but it's easy to get wrong if you draft your post across several days.
- **Phrase each item in the same way.** For instance, if you're writing about your “top ten books for freelance writers”, you might have the number, then the title, then the author for each one. Don't suddenly switch what you're doing midway (e.g. giving the title and not the author name).
- **Use the same subheading style** (or bold text) for the title of each item on your list. I normally use Heading 2.
- **Use images consistently** – perhaps one for each item on the list, if you've got a shortish list. If you're writing a how-to post, it's fine to have some steps with a screenshot / image and some without.

- **Try to keep items at a similar length.** Avoid having some one-line items and some which take up five paragraphs. If you do find that some things on the list take up a lot of space (this can happen in how-to style posts), split it into two different items/steps.

You can also include material before or after the list, if that's appropriate for the scope of your post. (I've sometimes done this in a "How ... and Why" type post, so that readers get the rationale of *why* the list is important.)

Again, we'll take a closer look at each of the three example list posts.

## Example #1: Nicole Avery's Post

From [5 of the best paleo friendly chocolates online](#), Nicole Avery, Planning With Kids

Brand	Cacao Percentage	Ethical rating	Price	Sweetener used	Sugar content per 100 grams
<a href="#">Pana Eighty %</a>	80%	B	\$\$\$	Agave nectar	21.7
<a href="#">Loving Earth 85% Dark Chocolate</a>	85%	B	\$\$	Coconut nectar	15.0
<a href="#">Alter Eco Vegan Organic Chocolate - Dark Blackout</a>	85%	A	\$	Raw cane sugar	15.1
<a href="#">Chocolate Yogi Astral Caramel Crunch</a>	64%	Not rated as yet.	\$\$	Coconut sugar	31.6
<a href="#">Coco Chocolate Handmade Cacao Mass - Raspberry</a>	90%	Not rated as yet.	\$\$\$	Dried raspberries	8.0

### Pana Chocolate



Pana Barbounis founded Pana Chocolate in Melbourne, so I do have a soft spot for this

This is an interesting example because there's a summary of the five chocolates in the table before the list. (From Nicole's introduction, I think she considers the table to be the main part of the post, with the list as an addendum. This illustrates how flexible the "list post" format can be.)

If you have a list of resources, like Nicole does, providing a brief summary before digging into the details can be helpful. For instance, if your post included ten brief reviews of ten books, you might want to list the books by title and author, with links to find them on Amazon, before launching into the reviews themselves.

## Example #2: K.M. Weiland's Post

From [How to Grow as a Writer: 5 Logical Steps](#), K.M. Weiland, Helping Writers Become Authors

### Growth: A Journey of Personal Honesty

What is growth?

Growth is change certainly (just ask that protagonist of yours about his character arc). But it's more than that. Just as your story's plot can't be advanced by any old flurry of activity, your own story can only be moved forward by the kind of personal changes that redefine everything you know about life: your identity, your personal narrative, your understanding of the world.

If that sounds super-dramatic, it's because it is. This is life, baby. Biggest stage in, well, life.

But most of this drama—including the drama of learning how to grow as a writer—will occur in such minute moments that you don't even notice the changes building. For the sake of our sanity, that's probably a good thing. Our poor little conscious brains aren't always so good at swallowing the huge revolutions and intuitive leaps that our subconscious take for granted.

So where is all this change taking us? Is it random? Or—like any good story—is it headed for a point? I think it's headed for a point, and I think that point is personal honesty. It's the ability to look past all the static and conflicts with which life distracts us, to face the difficult emotions that prompt us to believe in the lies that hold us back, and to face the truths we find.

No surprise Flannery O'Connor said it best:

“To know oneself is, above all, to know what one lacks. It is to measure oneself against Truth, and not the other way around. The first product of self-knowledge is humility....”

As writers, we should be intimately familiar with humility. Most of us discover early on that learning how to grow as a writer is a bumpy journey marked by disparaging road signs that offer such enlightening messages as: “This stinks!” “No one will read this!” and “Turn back here, all ye faithhearts!”

It's rough. But it's also pretty awesome. However treacherous the caverns, deserts, and switchbacks we're exploring in our writing journey, we are exploring. We're adventurers. We're pioneers. We're astronomers and astronauts all rolled into one.

We're discovering how to be better writers, and in discovering how to be better writers, we're discovering how to be better people. In learning about ourselves, we're learning about the whole world, and in learning about the world, we're taking not one single moment of this life for granted.

### How to Grow as a Writer in 5 Logical Steps

We're all destined for change whether we're consciously open to it or not. Even when we're resistant, life itself forces us to evolve, day by day. However, when we open ourselves to the possibility of growth, this evolution becomes an adventure in which we get to take part. And when we start consciously pursuing it, that's when things really get rolling.

Growth may feel like some airy-fairy thing over which you have no control. But that's not entirely true. Become an active participant. Learn to recognize the patterns of growth. Rather than resisting the challenges of personal honesty, start pursuing them with a stick.

Here are five steps to get your started.

#### 1. Be Brutally Honest

Learning to be honest with ourselves is all about learning to see through the subtle defense mechanisms we erect to protect ourselves from the parts of ourselves we are ashamed of. But like all Lies, these mechanisms hold us back from growth and improvement.

The first step in creating an environment for learning how to grow as a writer is to get real about the areas in which you actually need to improve. We're all familiar with that icky feeling that something is drastically wrong with what we're writing. Something is off. It just isn't working.

← The first list item begins here

Like Nicole, K.M. has quite a bit of material prior to her list. I think K.M. pulls it off successfully as this material is more analytical than introductory, though there's still a danger of the reader starting to skim to get to the list they were promised in the title.

The post has an interesting structure, with two subheadings:

- Growth: A Journey of Personal Honesty
- How to Grow as a Writer in 5 Logical Steps

This indicates that the “Growth: A Journey of Personal Honesty” is an important section of the post in its own right – not simply an extended introduction.

The items on the list itself are given as sub-subheadings, with several paragraphs beneath each one. All the list items are instructions starting with a verb (e.g. “Be Brutally Honest”) and each is numbered.

### **Example #3: Joanna Penn’s Post**

From [Lessons Learned from 6 Years as an Author Entrepreneur](#), Joanna Penn, The Creative Penn

Jo structures her post with subheadings for each point on her list, and includes at least one image in each section. Since the list takes up almost all the post, each section is quite long – which is fine!

The subheadings she uses are:

#### **(1) More co-writing means more books and helps more people**

**Co-writing for fun and travel.**

**Co-writing to help family and expand into new genres.**

**Co-writing to help more people.**

#### **(2) Embrace the continued demand for print**

#### **(3) Focus on what really matters. Don’t create another job. Say ‘no’ more.**

#### **(4) Investing for longer term streams of income**

Her first point is split into three subsections, but the other points aren’t. There’s nothing wrong with this, but it makes sense to put this one first as it’s slightly longer and differently structured from the other three points.

I would have liked the subheading for point 4 (“Investing for longer term streams of income”) to be phrased as an actual lesson learned, i.e. as “Invest” rather than “Investing”. That’s a very picky point, though!

Three of the points (1, 2 and 4) end with a question (or more than one question) in bold text, but point 3 doesn’t. This is again a picky point, but I’d have liked *all* the points to end with a question for consistency’s sake.

Since Jo is rounding up a whole year’s worth of activity, this is a great opportunity for her to link to all sorts of things – past blog posts, books she’s written, books she recommends, and more. This helps make her post far more than a diary entry: it’s a useful resource for readers to come back to.

## Writing the Conclusion to Your List Post

As with any blog post, your list post should have a conclusion – an ending. I’m often surprised how frequently bloggers give a list and then simply *stop* ... without even a single closing sentence. This can seem weirdly abrupt to the reader – plus it’s a missed opportunity.

Some great ways to end your list post are to:

- **Encourage readers to put your post into action.** Ask them to pick one idea to try out (if that’s appropriate to your post), for instance.
- **Ask readers to leave a comment.** List posts are a great chance to do this, because you can often ask people “Which is your favourite idea here?” or “Do you have any suggestions to add?” – giving them easy ways to join in the conversation on your blog.

We’re going to take a look at how each of the list post examples finishes:

### Example #1: Nicole Avery’s Post

From [5 of the best paleo friendly chocolates online](#), Nicole Avery, Planning With Kids

What do you rate as the best paleo friendly chocolate online?

This post ends with a single sentence after the last item in the list (Coco Chocolate). It's a good question to get the reader thinking and potentially to get comments, though I'd have been tempted to add just a little more here – perhaps “leave a comment below”.

Since the introduction to the post had a strong “share this post with your loved ones” call to action, I might also have repeated that in the conclusion of the post, too. Even something like “which of these paleo friendly chocolates are you hoping your loved ones will buy for you?” would tie back in to the introduction and the professed purpose for the post.

### Example #2: K.M. Weiland's Post

From [How to Grow as a Writer: 5 Logical Steps](#), K.M. Weiland, Helping Writers Become Authors

Learning how to grow as a writer is your highest artistic calling. Identifying, accepting, and moving past your current weaknesses not only makes you a better writer, it is also part of the framework of growth within the larger story of your entire life. I believe most of us become writers because we are interested, on some level, in understanding life. How awesomely meta is it that the writing itself provides such a wonderful opportunity for doing just that?

Wordplayers, tell me your opinions! What lesson has been most valuable to you in your journey of learning how to grow as a writer? Tell me in the comments!

K.M.'s post ends with what I think of as a “proper” conclusion – a paragraph that sums up the post and reminds readers why it matters. The call to action comes in a separate paragraph after this.

If you look at the post, you'll see that K.M. sets off her conclusion by including three centred asterisks on the line before it: I don't think this is absolutely necessary, but it's helpful as this is quite a long post and it clearly marks the end of point 5 and the start of the conclusion.

The “Wordplayers, tell me your opinions!” paragraph serves a couple of different purposes. It reminds K.M.’s readers that they’re part of a community (that she calls “wordplayers”) and it encourages them to reflect on the post and to leave a comment. It’s also in bold text so that it stands out.

### Example #3: Joanna Penn’s Post

From [Lessons Learned from 6 Years as an Author Entrepreneur](#), Joanna Penn, The Creative Penn

OK, that’s my lessons learned for the last year. Thanks for joining me as I head into year 7 ☺ Please do leave any answers to the questions above or any comments below.

This is a very brief conclusion to the post, but there’s not really a lot of summing up for Joanna to do here. Thanking the readers is a nice touch, and helps give the sense that the readers will be sticking around for a while! The call to action invites readers to comment. It’s a fairly functional conclusion but it does its job.

## Module #4: Recap

Here’s a summary of what we’ve covered in this week’s module:

- **List posts can work for lots of different types of blog.** The list post structure is very flexible, so there are plenty of ways to make it work for you – whatever sort of blogging you do.
- **Your title, introduction, main body and conclusion all need to be carefully crafted.** Sometimes, bloggers rush list posts, thinking they can be dashed off in a hurry. Just like classic (or essay-style) posts, your list needs to be put together with care.
- **Try to structure each list item in the same way.** For instance, you might have an image for each item, or you might end each one with a question in bold text.
- **Title each list item in the same way.** Think of your list as a series of bullet points: ignore everything except the headings of the list. Do they all make sense together? E.g. you might phrase each one as an



instruction to the reader, or you might have a book title and author name for each one.

- **Don't forget to include the numbers in your list.** Make sure you use a number in your title if possible, and number each list item. If you've changed how many items are on your list while drafting, double-check any references to the number – e.g. in the introduction – to make sure you've updated them all.
- **Remember to give a conclusion.** It doesn't need to be long, but it should be there!

If you get stuck, head here: [facebook.com/groups/blogonspring2018](https://www.facebook.com/groups/blogonspring2018)

## **Module #4 Assignment and Check In**

**This week, your assignment is to write a list post for your own blog.**

It can be as short or long as you like, though I'd suggest a minimum of three items, or it's not really a list! Make sure you include the title, introduction, main body and conclusion.

Once you've written your post, or got as far as you can, check in here to get your reward card stamped:

[facebook.com/groups/blogon.spring2018/permalink/231131860999000](https://www.facebook.com/groups/blogon.spring2018/permalink/231131860999000)

If possible, please share the link to your post with us so we can check it out. If you don't want to publish it yet, or don't yet have your blog online, you can upload it to the Facebook group.

If you prefer not to use Facebook, email me with "Check in" in the subject line.

Don't forget, you need to check in by the end of **Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> June**. (It's fine to check in even if you haven't quite finished your post.)

## **Module #4: 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 welcome to share them in our Facebook group.

**How to Use Lists Effectively in Your Blog Posts**, Darren Rowse, ProBlogger

You don't have to write your whole post as a list in order to get some of the benefits of lists in your posts. Here, Darren explains different types of list (ordered vs unordered) and makes some good suggestions on how to format a bullet-pointed list that appears within your post.

**The 7 Keys to List Posts that Are Worth Writing (and Reading)**, Sonia Simone, Copyblogger

Although this is a slightly older post (2014), list posts haven't really changed much! Sonia shares some great insights here, and some thoughtful tips on how to write a list post that will be worth your reader's time (and yours).

### **What's Coming Up Next Week:**

#### **Module #5: Your About Page: You, Your Blog ... and Your Readers**

Next week, from Monday 25<sup>th</sup> June, we'll be taking a look at your About page. This is a crucial page for your blog, but it's one that many bloggers struggle with. We'll look at what to include on your page, and go through several examples of About pages that you can learn from or get inspired by.

Module 5 will also include step-by-step instructions for setting up an About widget on your WordPress blog (a little section in your sidebar to give readers a very quick introduction to who you are).