Blog On: Welcome to the Course

Welcome to Blog On! I've put together this .pdf as an introduction to the course: hopefully it'll answer any questions you've got, but please do feel free to email me any time (ali@aliventures.com) if anything is unclear.

The Course Schedule

We're going to work through Blog On by tackling one module each week.

Monday 28th May – Sunday 3rd June
Module #1: What's Your Blog All About ... and Who's Reading?

Monday 4th June – Sunday 10th June
Module #2: Classic Blog Post Structure: How to Get it Right

Monday 11th June – Sunday 17th June
Module #3: Your Contact Page: Clear, Concise ... and Crucial

Monday 18th June – Sunday 24th June
Module #4: Writing a Great List Post that Readers Will Love

Monday 25th June – Sunday 1st July
Module #5: Your About Page: You, Your Blog ... and Your Readers

Monday 2nd July – Sunday 8th July
Module #6: Advanced Formatting: Quotes, Links and Subheadings

Monday 9th July – Sunday 15th July
Module #7: Blog Pages: Services, Products, and Recommendations

Monday 16th July – Sunday 22nd July
Module #8: Creating a Content Calendar Packed with Great Ideas

You can work through each module at your own pace, but I recommend tackling each one in the week it comes out, so you're at the same point as others in the group.

The Weekly Emails

Each week, you should receive two emails from me. Each will have **[Blog On]** at the start of the subject line and they'll come from <u>ali@aliventures.com</u>.

On Mondays, you'll get the module for the week. There'll be a quick introduction to this in the email itself, with a link to download the module .pdf.

On Fridays, I'll send you a quick reminder about that week's module. This will include the download link again, in case you've misplaced it. I'll also share any interesting news from members … so feel free to send in your news by email or through the Facebook group.

Our Facebook Group: Blog On Spring 2018

So that we can get to know one another as a group, I've created a private Facebook group for us:

Blog On Spring 2018
facebook.com/groups/blogonspring2018

This is where you can introduce yourself to other members of the course, chat about blogging, and ask any questions you want. It's a private group: no one will see your posts except fellow bloggers taking the course alongside you.

I'll be popping into the Facebook group every day to answer any questions you've got.

Even if you don't want (or don't have the time) to use the Facebook group on a regular basis, I'd definitely encourage you to pop in once a week to "check in" once you've completed your assignment.

Which leads me on to …

Your Assignments

All modules have a suggested assignment at the end, which will normally take one to two hours.

I strongly encourage you to have a go at the assignment each week, even if you're not able to finish it (e.g. if you don't have time to write a whole blog post, you could at least plan one or write a rough draft).

Once you've completed the assignment, or done as much as you can for that week, come over to our Facebook group and "check in" to let us know you've finished that module.

(If you prefer not to use Facebook, you're welcome to email me at ali@aliventures.com to "check in" instead: please put "Module #1 check in" etc in the subject line.)

To help you stick with the assignments, I've created …

Your Reward Card

New for Blog On 2018, we have a "rewards card" system. Here's your initial rewards card:

As you can see, you start with two stamps on the reward card, just for joining the course. Each week that you check in on time, you get another stamp.

You'll receive your stamped reward card each Monday, as a reply to your "check in" on the Facebook topic, or as a reply to your email, if you checked in by email.

Every stamp you get gives you 5% off any of my online courses courses … so if you fill all ten spaces, you get 50% off. ☺

(In case you're wondering, the next blogging-specific course I have planned is Successful Guest Posting [Blog On #2], coming in the autumn.)

To be eligible for your stamp for the week, you need to check in by the end of the Sunday – i.e. for the first week, you need to check in by the end of Sunday 3rd June.

Getting the Most Out of Blog On

While I hope I've designed Blog On so that it's helpful even if you don't have much time, the more you put into the course, the more you'll get out of it!

To help you make the most of Blog On, I suggest that you:

#1: Set aside a regular time to read through the modules. They come out on a Monday, so you might want to read through on a Monday evening, during your Tuesday lunch break, or whatever works well for you.

Remember, you can download the module .pdf as often as you like, to as many devices as you like – so if you want to read half the module on your phone, half on your tablet, then tackle the assignment at your computer, that's fine.

#2: Find at least an hour a week to work on your assignment. Every week, you'll be making real progress with your blog: writing a post, creating or updating a page, filling in a content calendar, and so on. The assignments should normally take between one and two hours *(maybe less if you tend to write very short posts and more if you write really long posts).*

#3: Ask questions in the Facebook group. Throughout the course, I'm here to support you. If you have *any* blogging or writing related question, bring it to the group – chances are, you're not the only person who's struggling with it, and I'll be glad to help. Plus, other members may have their own ideas and solutions to share with you.

#4: Don't aim for perfection. Blog On is all about making progress. It doesn't matter much if your Contact form looks a bit funny (Module #2) or you can't quite get to grips with blockquote formatting (Module #6) or you only have half your content calendar filled (Module #8) ... it's far better to do *something* than *nothing.*

You can always go back and update a page or post at a later stage, so don't worry about getting every single detail right the first time around.

#5: Support fellow course members. When other members check-in with links to their completed posts, take a look at any that interest you ... and leave a comment on their blog. You might even want to share their posts on Facebook or Twitter.

The more you help others, the more they'll want to help you in return (and you might form some great new blogging friendships).

#6: Take a look at the further reading too. Every module comes with suggested further reading – links to blog posts that tie into the topics covered in that module. If you can find an extra ten minutes, go through some of these resources too ... you may find they give you a new idea or explain something in a helpful way.

Finally ... I am very much looking forward to getting to know you, and to seeing what you're blogging about. Come on over to the Facebook group now and introduce yourself here:

facebook.com/groups/blogonspring2018/permalink/214650019313851

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. *thecreative**penn**.com* or ***ali**ventures.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

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.

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

In today's module, we're looking at classic or essay-style blog post structure. This structure can be used over and over again, on almost any type of blog – and it's the foundation of the more complex structures we'll come onto in future modules.

By the end of today's module, you should feel confident that you know *how* to craft a great title, beginning, middle and end for a post. We'll be going through plenty of examples where we dig into existing blog posts so you can see exactly how they work ... and what you can learn from them.

If you get stuck at any time or if you have questions, just pop on over to our Facebook group (which is the best option as then other course members can chime in!) or drop me an email to ali@aliventures.com.

The Facebook group is here: **facebook.com/groups/blogonspring2018**

The Underlying Structure of a Blog Post: Title, Introduction, Main Body and Conclusion

If you've ever studied story writing or literature, you'll know that stories are supposed to have a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Blog posts are the same – though we tend to call these three elements the introduction, main body and conclusion. If any of these is missed out or falls flat, your post won't be as good as it should be.

Before we take a close look at how to get these right, I want to show you what I mean by the introduction, main body and conclusion.

Here's a fairly short post I wrote for Daily Blog Tips, back in 2013. I've marked the title, the introduction, the main body and the conclusion in different colours:

The Title (Green)

The title is crucial, because some readers will only see the title (e.g. in a feed reader, in their inbox, on Twitter) before deciding whether or not to read your post.

If I'd titled this post "The Pomodoro Technique", that would have been accurate but rather boring! Here, I've tried to make the benefits of the post clear while adding an element of intrigue with "How a Tomato Could Make You MUCH More Productive"

The Introduction (Orange)

This is a short post, so it has a short introduction – just one paragraph. This sets the scene for the post (it's going to be about the Pomodoro technique, and the reader may already have heard of it). There's an implicit promise here about the *benefits* of reading the post: the Pomodoro technique is "a great way to focus your attention and get more done".

Many blog posts will include an image at the start, related to the post topic, which you might want to consider as part of the introduction.

The Main Body (Blue)

The main body of the post is the detailed section. It's invariably the longest bit of the post (if your introduction is longer than your main body, something's gone wrong)!

Here, the main body *briefly* explains the Pomodoro technique (which is pretty straightforward), before going on to explain why it works.

The information about where the name comes from could potentially have gone in the introduction: I put it in the main body to avoid bogging down the start of the post, though.

You can see that there are two subheadings within the main body, helping to break it up into sections and "signpost" what's coming. This makes it easy for readers to skim read – e.g. perhaps they don't care where the name comes from, so they'll skip that section.

The Conclusion (Purple)

Since this is a short, straightforward post, the conclusion doesn't sum up the post itself but instead encourages readers to find out more about the technique if they want to.

The "Your challenge" section is a call to action *(we'll be talking about those later in this module)* that encourages the reader to DO something.

Examples of Classic Blog Posts

Blog posts on all sorts of subjects, and of very different lengths, can be divided into these four parts (title, introduction, main body, conclusion).

Here are some more examples to take a look at – we're going to look at some excerpts from them during the rest of this module, but as you read through them, you might like to think about:

- Does the title interest you – enough that you'd want to take a look at the post itself?
- Where would you place lines to divide them into introduction, main body, and conclusion?
- Does the introduction make you want to read on – and if so, why?
- How is the main body structured?
- Is there a "call to action" at the end of the post – a suggestion that you *do* something, whether implicit or explicit?

Make Your Writing Anxiety Disappear By Thinking Small, Jane Anne Staw, JaneFriedman.com

GDPR and the marketer's dilemma, Seth Godin, Seth's Blog

What You Can Learn From Writers You Hate, Erika Rasso, Craft Your Content

You might want to print out one or more of these posts so you can mark it up on paper, perhaps drawing coloured boxes around the introduction, main body and conclusion.

You're also very welcome to discuss any or all of these in the Facebook group:

facebook.com/groups/blogonspring2018

Examining Each Part of the Blog Post in Detail

In the rest of this module, we'll be taking a detailed look at the four key parts of each blog post: the title, the introduction, main body and conclusion, and how to get these right.

Creating a Great Title

Titles can be tricky, and you may want to give your post a "working title" before you decide on the exact title you're going to use.

Your title needs to catch a reader's interest and make them want to read on. That's not always easy to do, but I find that looking at examples of other people's titles (especially ones that captured *my* attention!) helps me figure out how to write better ones.

Let's take a closer look at the titles of the posts we're using as examples.

Example #1: Jane Anne Staw's Post

Make Your Writing Anxiety Disappear By Thinking Small, Jane Anne Staw, JaneFriedman.com

The title of this post carries an implicit promise: *if you read this post, you won't feel anxious about your writing any more.* There's also an indication of *how* the post is going to help – by teaching the reader how to "think small".

Compare this title with other possibilities that would also fit the topic of the post:

Make Your Writing Anxiety Disappear – not a terrible title, but it gives the reader little to go on, and that may make us feel sceptical about how the post is going to achieve this promise.

The Importance of Thinking Small – again, not a terrible title, but now there's no clear benefit to reading the post.

Writers' Block – a much too general (and too short!) title – it doesn't tell us anything about the post

By looking at these not-quite-there-yet titles, it's clearer why Jane's title works: it tells us what the post is going to help us do and, crucially, it hints at how.

Example #2: Erika Rasso's Post

What You Can Learn From Writers You Hate, Erika Rasso, Craft Your Content

Erika's title sets up a sense of opposition – she's suggesting that you can learn from "writers you hate", and this is an intriguing idea ... and possibly one we immediately have a reaction to. A post title "What You Can Learn From Writers You Love" might be just as valuable, but wouldn't seem at all surprising or controversial.

There's a promise implied here, too: we can reasonably assume that the post is going to show us what we can learn and how.

The word "hate" is a powerful one (Erika could have put "dislike") and that creates an additional pull.

The title addresses the reader as "you" twice, making a personal connection, and possibly even issuing a bit of a challenge. If Erika had instead put, "***What Aspiring Writers Can Learn From the Authors They Hate***", the title would be more distancing and less engaging.

Example #3: Seth Godin's Post

GDPR and the marketer's dilemma, Seth Godin, Seth's Blog

This is an interesting title, because it assumes that the reader is already familiar with GDPR and that they identify as a marketer. This is no bad thing, because Seth knows exactly what target audience he's aiming at. If you've never heard of GDPR or if the word "marketer" makes you think of sleazebags you don't want to associate with, this probably isn't the blog for you!

If it *is* the blog for you, then the title of this post is intriguing (mainly because of the word "dilemma"). The reader might be wondering what the dilemma is, and particularly what Seth has to say about it.

This isn't the sort of title I'd normally advise writing, but it suits Seth's audience and style – and sometimes that's what's most important.

Titles can be tricky to get right, so don't spend ages agonising over yours: come up with the best title you can manage for now, then carry on with the rest of your post. You may find that a different title (or a twist on your original one) comes to you as you write.

Crafting a Compelling Introduction

Your introduction is almost as important as your blog post's title. It needs to set the scene for your post, letting readers know what to expect – giving them not just an introduction to your post's subject matter, but also a flavour of its style (serious, light-hearted, ranty..?) and an indication of who it's aimed at (beginners, experts, hobbyists, professionals..?)

When you're crafting your introduction, try to avoid:

- **Giving lots of information about *why* you're writing this post.** Sometimes it makes sense to acknowledge a particular source of inspiration (e.g. if you read someone else's post and it sparked off an idea) ... but generally, it's best to get straight into things.
- **Talking about things unrelated to the post.** If you do need to update readers on, say, the birth of your new baby or the successful launch of your new book, either write a whole separate post (if you feel your news warrants it), or have a section at the start of your post that's separated from the rest by a horizontal line or other divider.
- **Going on for too long.** Once you've set the scene for your post and got your reader interested, get into the actual content – don't waffle!

It can be tough, though, to write a good introduction when you're "warming up" into writing a post. Some bloggers leave the introduction until last, or perhaps write a few rough bullet points to come back to – others draft the introduction first, but are prepared to do some thorough editing.

I often find that the very first paragraph of my introduction (or of the introduction I'm editing for someone else) can be cut completely. See if that applies for your writing too – would the post still work if the reader started with the second paragraph and never saw the first? Would it work *better?*

Good Ways to Begin Your Post

If you're struggling for an opening sentence or two, I've found that these usually make good ways to begin:

1. **Pose a question** (particularly one that has "yes" as the likely answer) – e.g. *"Do you struggle with procrastination?"* This gets the reader mentally responding to your post right from the start.

2. **Make a strong statement** – e.g. *"All writers procrastinate more than they realise."* Your reader may or may not agree; either way, they're likely to read on to see how you back this up!

3. **Tell the reader a short story (anecdote) about your life** – e.g. *"A year ago, I had to finally admit to my chronic procrastination problem when..."* If you're going for this approach, make your story (a) interesting and (b) short! You can also use it to "bookend" your post by coming back to it and resolving it during the conclusion.

4. **State the main premise of your post or the core of the topic** – e.g. *"You can procrastinate far less by making a few simple changes to your workspace."* This can work well for short posts, or for news-type posts where you're following the "inverted pyramid" structure (give the core of the story first, then progressively add details).

Of course, these aren't the only options ... but they can be very useful ones to fall back on if you're feeling stuck.

Here are the very first paragraphs from each of the posts we're looking at, with my thoughts on them:

Example #1: Jane Anne Staw's Post

From **Make Your Writing Anxiety Disappear By Thinking Small**, Jane Anne Staw, JaneFriedman.com

> In college, I struggled mightily with writer's block, although I didn't know it at the time. I thought I was just a lousy writer. All my professors told me so: "Too bad you're such a poor writer," one professor wrote on a term paper. "You have a fine mind."

Jane gets us straight into her post by sharing an anecdote about her struggles with writer's block. She keeps it short – this paragraph and the next – and then explains how it turned out that she wasn't a poor writer at all, she was an anxious writer who obsessively over-edited.

Example #2: Erika Rasso's Post

From **What You Can Learn From Writers You Hate**, Erika Rasso, Craft Your Content

> It's an absolute necessity that anyone who wishes to write must read, and read a lot.

This is a great example of a "strong statement". Erika is going to tell us how important reading is – including reading things you DON'T like – so she starts off by being very clear about just how important reading is to writers: it's an "absolute necessity" for "anyone" who wants to write.

Example #3: Seth Godin's Post

From **GDPR and the marketer's dilemma**, Seth Godin, Seth's Blog

> On the twentieth anniversary of Permission Marketing, the EU has decided to write the basic principles of that book into law.

This is a "main premise" introduction: Seth states the most important thing first, but also does so by giving the gist of his argument – that GDPR is a way to force companies to engage in "permission marketing", which is the title of his book from 20 years ago.

In a single neat sentence, he makes it sound like his book has influenced the EU lawmakers, and also makes it clear where he stands on GDPR. It's also obvious from this one sentence that Seth's blog is aimed at people who are familiar with his work and who have already heard of GDPR – essentially, internet marketers.

The purpose of your introduction is to draw the reader into your post, by setting the scene and "hooking" them with some point of interest. This "hook" doesn't need to be excessive or heavily hyped (*"after you read this post, you'll never procrastinate again!"*) – but there should be a clear reason for the reader to carry on.

Now that we've had a look at introductions and how they work, we'll turn to the biggest part of your post: the main body.

Putting Together the Main Body of Your Post

The main body of your post is everything between the introduction and the conclusion. When you came up with the idea or title of your post, the main body was probably what you were thinking about: the actual *content* of the piece.

In an essay-style post, the main body isn't split into completely separate sections (in the way that a list post might be). Each section should be placed to build on the previous one and to link to the next one. They might or might not have subheadings.

Common Mistakes Bloggers Make with the Main Body of Posts

Some easy ways to go wrong with your post's main body are:

- **Writing without having any plan in mind.** You might *think* you know what you're going to say, or you might be confident you can figure it out as you go along ... but unless you're working on a very short post on a familiar topic, it's easy to lose your way.
- **Going off on a tangent.** Depending on the type of blogging you do, an occasional digression from your main point might be appropriate (or even expected!) – for instance, if your blog is a series of light-hearted posts about your travels, you might not always stick to the point. Be careful that your post doesn't end up as a meandering mess, though.
- **Ordering information badly.** There's rarely a single "right" way to present different points or information in your post, but you definitely want to avoid confusing the reader at the start, only to backtrack and

explain things later on. You may find it's easiest to draft the post in whatever way seems to make sense, before going back to see whether any of the paragraphs might work better if they were rearranged.

Useful Tips to Get You Through the Main Body of Your Post

As you plan and write the main body of your post, it often helps to:

1. **Tie each point to the next.** You don't need to do this in an artificial way (avoid phrases like "in the next section, I will...") – but do make sure that your post avoids abrupt changes in topic, and that you move on logically from paragraph to paragraph.
2. **"Signpost" the reader, using subheadings or bold text.** Not all bloggers use these, but they can be very helpful for breaking your post into different sections (subheadings) and for highlighting key pieces of information (bold text).
3. **Link to other posts where appropriate.** Often, a link can be a great way to offer extra information for your readers. We'll be looking at this when we come to Module #6 in a few weeks' time.
4. **Consider using quotes from other people or other bloggers.** Someone else's words may help you to make a point succinctly, or they may offer a different perspective. They can also help back up your own argument. We'll be going into more detail about this in Module #6.

Here are some great main body techniques in action:

Example #1: Jane Anne Staw's Post

From **Make Your Writing Anxiety Disappear By Thinking Small**, Jane Anne Staw, JaneFriedman.com

> It wasn't until years later, a long time after I had overcome my block, that I understood that behind all that hand wringing and rewriting, a pretty fine writer waited in the wings to emerge. She simply needed to be given a chance.

> Poetry is what gave me that chance. I began writing poetry and found that I was able to create entire poems, with verses and stanzas, metaphors and similes. At the time, I had no idea why I was able to do this, but I remember feeling such great relief. Maybe I could write after all.

These two paragraphs are tied neatly together, with "She simply needed to be given a chance" ending one paragraph and "Poetry is what gave me that chance". The link between them is very clear, and one flows naturally into the next.

Example #2: Erika Rasso's Post

From **What You Can Learn From Writers You Hate**, Erika Rasso, Craft Your Content

Erika uses subheadings to split up this post – which is a wise move, as it's a long post that could end up losing the reader partway otherwise. The subheadings are:

- **Disliked and Discarded** *(this section details Erika's initial distaste for reading in general, which then evolved into her strong opinions about writers who she did NOT want anything to do with)*
- **Swallow Your Pride** *(this section deals with the issue of feeling that you're "better than" the writers who you disliked – and explains that whether you like them or not, they can "teach us a little something about excellence")*
- **The Greats and the Not-So-Greats** *(this section takes a look at Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby and Stephanie Meyer's Twilight)*
- **Do it Differently** *(this section is a look at how you can learn from the things you disliked by avoiding their mistakes, and also by looking at the techniques that helped that writing succeed)*

Example #3: Seth Godin's Post

From **GDPR and the marketer's dilemma**, Seth Godin, Seth's Blog

> There are two ways to look at this.
>
> 1. Lawyers and yield-maximizers can find ways to use fine print and digital maneuvers to get the same sort of low-grade tolerance and low-impact marketing they've always gotten. Industrialise interactions! The marketing machine at their organization has an insatiable appetite for attention, for data and for clicks, and they will skirt the edges to get more than their fair share.
>
> 2. Realize that the GDPR is a net positive for people with something to say, something to sell or something to change. Because the noise will go down and trust will go up. Embrace this insight and you can avoid the hit and run low-yield spam that marketers have backed themselves into.

Seth takes a look at two possible sides of an argument here, explaining there are two ways to see the GDPR: the more negative ("use fine print and digital maneuvers") to keep doing the same old thing ... or the more positive ("noise will go down and trust will go up").

It's pretty obvious from the language used – and the way that the second is placed as a rebuttal of the first – which of these options Seth favours! He can then carry on with his post by looking in more detail at the positive side of things, having demonstrated why it's the best attitude to take.

Once you've written the main body of your post, you've got one crucial task left: to end it well – because the conclusion is what readers will remember, and because this is a golden opportunity to get them to *do* something.

Concluding Your Post – Effectively

The conclusion to your post might be a single sentence or it might be a longer summary – but what matters is that it exists!

Some bloggers will simply stop a post after the main body (particularly in list posts, but it can happen with essay-style posts too). Just adding an extra sentence can make all the difference.

When you end a post, it's normally a good idea to:

1. **Sum up what's been said.** You may not need to do this in a short post, but if you've written a really long post, it's helpful to briefly summarise things for the reader.
2. **Give the reader an action to take** – e.g. you could prompt them to leave a comment, to check out your book, or to make a change in their life based on the post they've just read.
3. **Keep it fairly short.** As with introductions, you don't want to end up rambling on at the end of the post ... or the reader will simply click away.

This is how the posts we've been looking at end:

Example #1: Jane Anne Staw's Post

From **Make Your Writing Anxiety Disappear By Thinking Small**, Jane Anne Staw, JaneFriedman.com

> I work with each writer as an individual, but at some point in our work together, and to varying degrees, I suggest they *think small.* To focus on the moment they are writing about—the current word, scene, or paragraph–and not the entire writing project. To have at the most one ideal reader in mind when they write. To concentrate on the process, not the product. To stay with the writing and not the publication of their project. And whenever my clients do this, many of their writing inhibitions disappear.

This final paragraph of Jane's post is a continuation of the previous four paragraphs – a section of the post in which she talks about her work with fellow writers, encouraging them to think small.

I'm not 100% convinced with it as an conclusion, as I feel it stops a bit abruptly, without opening out to the reader and without directly encouraging the reader to take action – though there is a call to action in the "bio" line at the end of the post: "If you enjoyed this post, be sure to check out Jane Anne Staw's Small."

If I'd written or edited Jane's conclusion, I'd have suggested adding a question to the reader as the final paragraph: this could be something very simple, like, "How could you 'think small' in your own writing this week?"

Alternatively, the last paragraph could be tweaked a little to open it out to the reader by rephrasing it to use "you" rather than "they" with something like, "I'd encourage you, like them, to focus on the moment you're writing about – the current word, scene, or paragraph – and not the entire writing project." – and so on.

Example #2: Erika Rasso's Post

From **What You Can Learn From Writers You Hate**, Erika Rasso, Craft Your Content

> So here's my challenge to you.
>
> Hate things. Despise them. Burn an effigy of a writer who has done you wrong.
>
> But then sit down and analyze exactly what made you hate that thing.
>
> Was it the writer's tone, their style; was it the story itself?
>
> What about the story made you hate it? Its predictability? The themes it presented?
>
> Was there a trope utilized that you're tired of seeing?

> Did it perpetuate a societal norm that you'd like to see challenged instead?
>
> Also think about what that hateful piece of writing did right, especially if it's achieved some form of success.
>
> Besides what you don't like and don't want to do in your own writing, what are some techniques the writer used that contributed to the work's success? How can you utilize that to your advantage?
>
> By all means hate things, but don't let the time you spent on them be in vain.

This is a longish conclusion, befitting a long post. It offers a clear "challenge" to the reader, and suggests questions they can ask themselves when analysing a particular piece of writing. It's a practical way to end, and a good "call to action" because it encourages and helps the reader to put into practice what they've just been reading.

Example #3: Seth Godin's Post

From **GDPR and the marketer's dilemma**, Seth Godin, Seth's Blog

> The EU is responding to consumers who feel ripped off. They're tired of having their data stripmined and their attention stolen. (Here's an episode of my podcast I did on this issue).
>
> Marketers don't have to race to the bottom. It's better at the top.

This is a short conclusion to Seth's post – because it's a short post. He sums up his key point (that the EU law is a response to consumers feeling "ripped off") and includes a link to his podcast – a call to action to encourage the reader to check out more of his material.

He also has a pithy ending line – *"Marketers don't have to race to the bottom. It's better at the top"* – which neatly rounds off his post and his argument that good marketers will see the new GDPR regulations as a positive thing.

Module #2: Recap

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

- **The "essay-style" post could be seen as a "classic" blog post**: they have an introduction and conclusion, with one or more key points covered in between. The title should be specific and interesting.
- **The introduction should set the scene and intrigue the reader** – you might open with a question, a provocative statement, an anecdote, or a high-level summary of your main point.
- **The main body should explore your topic** – without wandering too far from it. Each section (whether it has a subheading or not) should be tied to the next section: they should be ordered in a logical way.
- **The conclusion should round off your post** – normally by summing up (even if that only takes a sentence). Often, it's appropriate to include a call to action, perhaps by encouraging readers to leave a comment, check out your new book, or put something into practice.

Module #2 Assignment and Check In

This week, your assignment is to write an essay-style post for your own blog.

It can be as short or as long as you like, but it should include all three elements (introduction, main body and conclusion). Once you've written your post, or once you've got as far as you can with it, come over to the Facebook group and "check in" for this week so that you can get your reward card stamped: **facebook.com/groups/blogon.spring2018/permalink/222958685149651**

If possible, please do share the link to your post with us so we can check it out. If you don't want to publish it yet, you're welcome to share a link to it in Google docs, or you can upload it as document or .pdf to the Facebook group.

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

Don't forget, you need to check in by the end of Sunday 10th. It's fine to check in even if you haven't finished your post – just let us know where you got to.

Module #2: 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.

Inverted Pyramid Style, Jasmine Roberts, PressBooks

This article gives a quick explanation of how the "inverted pyramid style" works for news stories, covering its advantages and limitations.

Anatomy of an Effective Blog Post, Michael Hyatt, MichaelHyatt.com

In this post, Michael details his "blog post template" that includes all the elements that he feels make for an effective blog post. He emphasises the importance of making the main body of the post scannable, using bullets and numbered lists.

Writing an Effective Blog Post, The Writing Centre, University of Wisconsin-Madison

There's plenty of practical advice in this piece: while it's aimed at students, almost everything said could apply to any type of blog. There are some good suggestions about using images and quotes (both of which we'll cover in more detail during Module #6).

What's Coming Up Next Week:
Module #3: Your Contact Page: Clear, Concise… and Crucial

Next week, from Monday 11th June, we'll be creating contact pages. We'll go through everything you need to know: what to call your page, where to place it within your blog's navigation, what to include, and how to structure it.

I'll give you step-by-step instructions on how to create a contact form using the WordPress plugin Contact Form 7 (other platforms / plugins work in a similar way, too).

Module #3: Your Contact Page: Clear, Concise … and Crucial

In this week's module, we're going to look at your Contact page. This is a straightforward page – but one that has a crucial function on your blog, so it's worth spending a little time on. We're going to keep things simple, but if you do get stuck at any point or have any questions, just pop on over to our Facebook group.

To avoid cluttering up the module itself with lots of technical details, there's a separate handout about setting up a Contact form on WordPress. (Whatever blog system you're using, there should be some sort of contact form feature or plugin – but if you get stuck, just come over to the Facebook group and ask.)

What Is a Contact Page?

A contact page is a single page on your site that gives your contact details. For bloggers, that normally means your email address and/or a contact form, plus links to your social media profiles; if you're a freelancer, you may also want to give a phone number and perhaps even an office address.

We'll come onto more about what to include on your Contact page in a moment.

Here are a couple of examples of Contact pages – as you can see, they're quite different, but they both serve essentially the same purpose: they help readers to get in touch.

Ittybiz's Contact Page (ittybiz.com):

Contact IttyBiz

Getting in touch is easy.

For anything administrative or product related, you can contact my assistant Kris Faraldo, who is good at these things. Simply email kris@ittybiz.com.

To reach me directly, email me at naomi@ittybiz.com.

You can also find me on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram. I'll see you there!

Productive Flourishing's Contact page (productiveflourishing.com):

Contact

We love when real people contact us. Ask questions. Tell us we're wrong. Just say hi.

And before you send a question, we'd love it if you'd take a look through the FAQs, below. You might be able to find the answer you need there, and then we all can spend a few more minutes finishing the stuff that matters rather than hanging out in email.

There are several ways to go about contacting me.

1. Email support AT ProductiveFlourishing DOT Com.
2. Use the form below.
3. Call us at (971) 248-0677.

Contact Us

We'd love to hear from you! Please fill out this form and someone will get in touch with you shortly.

Name *

First	Last

Email *

Subject (Choose One) *

I need general customer support!   ▼

Message *

If you're wondering whether you need a Contact page at all … you might manage fine without one, but it's not something I'd recommend.

Some bloggers include their contact details on their About page or in the sidebar. That is an option – but it's not one I'd recommend as it can make it tricky for readers to figure out how to get in touch.

Writing Your Contact Page

You don't need to write much on a Contact page – in fact, it's best to keep the words to a minimum. A single sentence might be enough, e.g:

> I'm always glad to hear from readers – you can email me at
> *ali@aliventures.com* or get in touch by filling in the form below.

Or

> If you're interested in hiring me, or if you've got any questions, get in touch. My contact details are:

Using Your Contact Page to Cut Down on Questions

If your blog has grown to the point where you get quite a lot of emails, you may want to pre-empt some of these using your Contact page. In the example above, Productive Flourishing link to their FAQs to do this.

On my own Contact page, I have a section headed "So You Don't Waste Your Time" to pre-empt some of the questions I used to get a lot:

> ## So You Don't Waste Your Time…
>
> I'm not currently taking on new clients, so…
>
> - If you're looking for an excellent, reliable writer/editor, I recommend Steve Maurer from Maurer Copywriting. If Steve's fully booked, you can find a list of certified content marketers on Copyblogger's site.
>
> - If you're looking for a fiction mentor or editor, I can highly recommend Lorna Fergusson from Fictionfire, who edits my novels. Do contact her well in advance, if you need edits by a particular deadline: she is very much in demand.
>
> I rarely run guest posts on Aliventures (you're welcome to send a post, but even if it's really good, it's unlikely I'll be able to publish it). I no longer run advertising here.

What Information Should Go On Your Contact Page?

There's no absolute "rule" about what you should include on your Contact page, but I'd suggest giving:

Your email address. Personally, I prefer to contact bloggers by email rather than using a contact form and other readers may well feel the same way. Most email providers are good at filtering out spam these days but if you're concerned about spam, you might prefer not to include your email address.

Your social media links. Include links to your Twitter account and your Facebook page if you have them. I wouldn't recommend linking to your personal Facebook profile – you might be happy to add readers as "friends" initially, but if your blog grows a lot, that could quickly become unsustainable.

A contact form. (See the next page!) This makes it quick and easy for readers to send you a message, and it's well worth including as an option.

(Optional) **A phone number.** If you offer some sort of service, like freelance writing or business consultation, some potential clients may prefer to call rather than email. Make sure you also include your office hours and your timezone, so people know when to call.

It's up to you what order you place these in – though I'd suggest putting the contact form itself last, as readers may not scroll down past it.

Adding a Contact Form to Your Contact Page

You don't have to include a contact form, but many bloggers do: it makes it easy for readers to get in touch and it means you don't have to include your actual email address on your page if you don't want to.

Some blogging platforms and themes come with the option for a contact form already in place, but not all. You may need to use a plugin to get your form set up.

I use self-hosted WordPress and the plugin Contact Form 7: it works very smoothly and allows for lots of customisation.

I've created a handout to walk you step-by-step through setting up Contact Form 7. You can download that here: **aliventures.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/BlogOn-Spring-2018-Module3-ContactForm7.pdf**

If you're using hosted WordPress (WordPress.com), you already have contact form functionality built in. You can find instructions here on setting up your contact form: **aliventures.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/BlogOn-Spring-2018-Module3-WordPressDOTCOM-ContactForm.pdf**

How to Disable Comments on Your Contact Page

It's unlikely to make sense to allow comments on your Contact page – it's not usually an easy way for you to engage with people who have general enquiries.

With WordPress, you can easily turn off comments on your Contact page. The quickest way is to go to Pages –> All Pages then use the Quick Edit link, which appears when you hover your cursor over your Contact page's title.

Find the Allow Comments box (shown below), uncheck it, then click Update (bottom right, not shown).
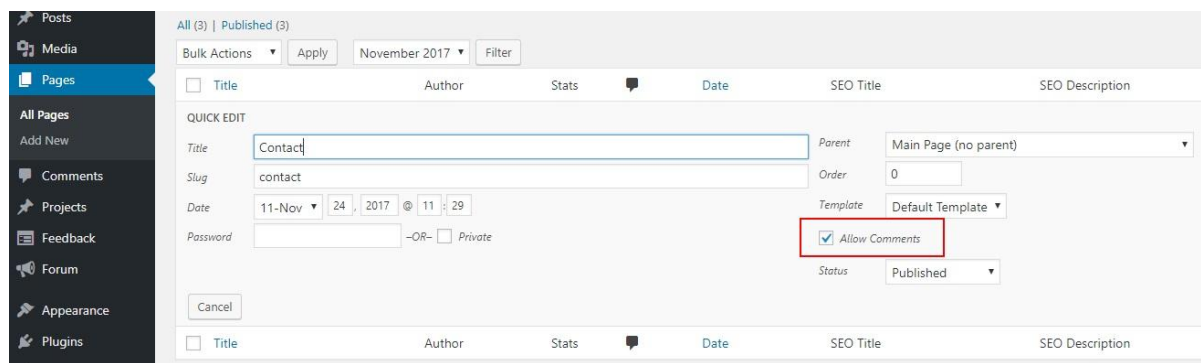
How to Title and Position Your Contact Page

Finally … make sure your Contact page has an obvious title in your blog's navigation menu, like:

- Contact
- Contact me / Contact us
- Get in touch

On the page itself, you can simply use the same title, or you can use something longer if you prefer and if it suits your general blogging style better.

Contact pages tend to be at the right-hand side of left-to-right navigation, or at the bottom of top-to-bottom navigation.

You can see how both Productive Flourishing and Ittybiz position their Contact page on the far right of their navigation menus:

Module #3: Recap

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

- **Your Contact page might be the shortest page on your blog** – but it's still important, because it allows readers (and potential clients / customers) to get in touch.
- **There are no rules about what you include on your Contact page** – most bloggers will give their email address and it makes sense to include links to your main social media profile(s).
- **You may want to include a contact form** – this means readers can email you straight from your Contact page (and you don't need to give them your email address up-front).
- **In your navigation menu, your Contact page should normally be the link on the far right** – this is standard, so it's where readers will look!

If you get stuck, head here: **facebook.com/groups/blogonspring2018**

Module #3: Assignment and Check In

This week, your assignment is to create (or update) your blog's contact page.

#1: Create a Contact page for your blog, with a short introduction and a list of ways for readers to get in touch.

#2: (Optional) Add a contact form to your page, using a plugin like Contact Form 7 if you're on self-hosted WordPress, or the built-in form functionality if you're on hosted WordPress.

#3: Give your page a title (like "Contact") and make sure it's linked to from your blog's navigation.

Once you've got your Contact page online, or once you've drafted it, make sure you come and check-in on Facebook (before the end of Sunday 17th):

facebook.com/groups/blogon.spring2018/permalink/226290868149766

If you don't want to use Facebook, you can check in by emailing me (ali@aliventures.com) with the words "check in" in the subject line.

Module #3: 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.

21 Tips, Tricks & Examples for a Rocking Contact Us Page, Megan Marrs, WordStream

This is a great collection of different types of contact page. A lot of them are from quite big companies, so don't feel that you need to have anything that looks as fancy! Some do a lot with very little, though, so do browse through the examples for inspiration.

How to Create an Efficient Contact Page That Boosts Your Productivity, Paul Cunningham, ProBlogger

Once your blog starts to bring in more readers, you'll find that you're spending more and more time answering emails. A few tweaks to your Contact page or Contact form could help you cut your workload dramatically. Note: if you currently get no or very few emails from readers, don't worry about implementing any of this – just keep the link handy for the future!

What's Coming Up Next Week:
Module #4: Writing a Great List Post that Readers Will Love

Next week, from Monday 18th June, we'll be taking a look at list posts. We'll cover why these are so popular … and how to come up with great ideas for them.

We'll dig deep into the structure of list posts, looking at how to arrange your list for maximum effect, and how you can build lots of different types of posts on an underlying list structure.

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

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:

Seven Writing Blogs I Love (and Why You Should Read Them)

- The Creative Penn
- Helping Writers Become Authors
- The Book Designer
- The Write Life
- Craft Your Content
- JaneFriedman.com
- Live Write Thrive

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 12th).

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):

"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
Pana Eighty %	80%	B	$$$	Agave nectar	21.7
Loving Earth 85% Dark Chocolate	85%	B	$$	Coconut nectar	15.0
Alter Eco Vegan Organic Chocolate - Dark Blackout	85%	A	$	Raw cane sugar	15.1
Chocolate Yogi Astral Caramel Crunch	64%	Not rated as yet.	$$	Coconut sugar	31.6
Coco Chocolate Handmade Cacao Mass - Raspberry	90%	Not rated as yet.	$$$	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

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**

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

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 24th 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 25th 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).

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

In this week's module, we're taking a look at your About page – probably the most important page on your blog. We'll discuss what you might want to put on your About page and how to structure it, and we'll take a look at some examples of About pages from several very different blogs.

Your About page is probably the most important page on your blog. New readers will often go straight there (perhaps after reading a post or two) to figure out what your blog is about and who you are.

So, it's crucial that:

- You actually have an About page – a "coming soon" page doesn't count!
- You use that page to engage readers and draw them into your blog.

Writing your About page is *hard*: you need to think through what your blog is about, what you are about, and how best to convey these to readers who may never have heard of you before.

There's no one right way to write your About page, but in this module, we'll be going through a few straightforward steps that should help you put yours together.

The Purpose of Your About Page

What are you hoping to achieve when readers visit your About page?

Many bloggers never ask themselves this question – but it's a really important one. If your main goal for blogging is to promote your book, for instance, an About page that barely mentions your book won't be a lot of help to you.

Take a look back at what you wrote down for the first module's assignment, where we looked at your reasons for blogging. What's your main goal?

Your About page should be geared towards this goal. For instance:

- If you're blogging in order to get freelancing clients, your About page will probably be fairly professional, with details about your qualifications or past experience.
- If you're blogging purely as a writing outlet, your About page might be much more informal: you might talk about your hobbies, for instance, or take a fairly lighthearted approach.
- If you're not yet sure where you want to go with your blogging, you could use your About page to encourage readers to stick around with your blog – perhaps by inviting them to join your newsletter.

Structuring Your About Page

There's no "right" way to structure your About page, but in this module, I'm going to suggest that you start off by breaking it into two distinct parts:

- One section about your blog
- One section about you

It's up to you which section you put first: I'd suggest that whichever one is more important should go at the top. So if your goal is to get clients, it's probably best to tell them about you first, and about your blog second.

Opening Your About Page

We're going to take a look at three different ways to start your About page:

Option #1: Writing a Mission Statement for Your Blog

One great way to open your About page is with your blog's "mission statement". This doesn't need to be grandiose or full of corporate-speak: it just needs to state clearly what your blog does or who it's for.

Here are a couple of examples:

> Welcome to ProBlogger.com – a Blog that helps bloggers to add income streams to their blogs.
>
> (ProBlogger's About page)

> "Writers change the world one reader at a time.
> But you can't change the world with a book that's still on your hard drive or in a box under your bed."
>
> ([The Book Designer's About page](#) – note that this comes a couple of paragraphs in)

Your mission statement is a bit like your reasons for blogging that we looked at in Module 1 – but from a different perspective. Instead of being about you, your mission statement is about your reader: what will *they* get from your blog?

You might want to use part of your mission statement (or all of it, if it's short) as a tagline for your blog. For instance, on Aliventures, my tagline is "Master the art, craft and business of writing" – it appears just below the site title in the header, which is on every single page and post.

Option #2: Writing a Summary of Who You Are

Another great way to open your About page is by giving readers a quick summary of who *you* are and what you're all about. This is a great approach if your main aim with your blog is to get clients, and it can also make sense if you want to sell books, or if you simply want to use your blog as a way to connect with other people.

Here are a couple of examples:

> I'm a novelist, a copyeditor, a writing coach, a mom, a backpacker, and a whole bunch of other things.
>
> I love keeping busy, but I especially love writing, teaching, and helping writers.
>
> (From C.S. Lakin's [About page](#) on Live Write Thrive)

> Hi. I'm Jeff, the best-selling author of five books including the The Art of
> Work and Real Artists Don't Starve. On this blog, I share my thoughts on
> writing, life, and creative work.
>
> (From Jeff Goin's About page on Goins, Writer)

If you take this approach, the key is to focus on the details about you that will
be of interest to your readers.

For instance, C.S. Lakin runs an excellent blog for writers, and that's her focus.
She mentions that she's a "mom" and a "backpacker" – but these come after
"a novelist, a copyeditor, a writing coach". If she was instead running a
parenting blog or a backpacking blog, her opening lines would probably be very
different.

Option #3: Focusing on Who Your Reader Is and What They Need

A final way to open your About page is by focusing not on your blog or you, but
on your readers: who they are and what they're looking for.

Here are a couple of examples:

> If you're like most of my readers, you're already a high-achieving leader.
> You're committed to making big contributions at work—and seeing big
> results. But you're not just looking for one-dimensional success.
>
> (From Michael Hyatt's About page)

> Hey you, welcome!
>
> Do you like writing?
>
> Maybe you do, but I bet there are also times when you feel frustrated because you want to write better.
>
> Am I right?
>
> (From [Write to Done's About page](#))

This approach can work well to draw readers into your About page and to show that you've got what they need, but I think there's also a danger here of sounding a little patronising or mis-targeting your audience.

Quite a few visitors to Michael Hyatt's blog, for instance, might not be "leaders" in a corporate sense but might still enjoy his posts (and potentially buy his products). Write to Done's About page implies that the blog is aimed at beginners – which to some extent it is, but again, a broader audience might enjoy the posts there.

If you are going to go with this approach, I'd ask someone very honest (and within your target audience) to take a look at your draft About page and let you know if it was engaging or off-putting. (Feel free to ask within the Blog On Facebook group for help with that.)

What You Might Want to Include On Your About Page

Once you've begun your About page, probably using one of the options above, it's up to you where you go next! At some point on your About page, though, you'll probably want to include at least some of these:

#1: Your Name

This might sound a bit obvious … but readers want to know what you're called! If you're not comfortable sharing your full name, you can give your first name or use a pseudonym.

#2: A Photograph of Yourself

It makes sense to put a photo of you at the top of your About page, or perhaps at the start of an "About Me" section. Don't underestimate the power of a photo to draw readers in – try to make it a good one, though don't feel that you need to run out and pay for a photoshoot! Use a recent photo, too: one from ten years ago will seem a bit odd if readers later see you on video or meet you in real life.

If you're not comfortable with using your photo on the page, that's absolutely fine. You might want to instead use a photo that represents you and your blog in some way – e.g. if your blog is about writing, you might put a photo of your desk or your notebooks. Alternatively, you could use a cartoon or drawing (e.g. if you have a parenting blog, you might use a drawing that one of your kids has done of you).

#3: Links to Your Best Blog Posts

Readers who come to your About page are likely to be new to your blog. Whatever your ultimate goals are, it makes sense to point them towards posts they're likely to enjoy. This can be a great chance to get new readers up to speed on the topics you cover, or even on the style of your blogging.

Some bloggers have a separate "Start Here" page where they list good posts to begin with – and I've noticed in recent years that a few bloggers are doing away with their About pages altogether, in favour of a "Start Here" page that briefly introduces them and the blog before moving on to give links to their best posts.

When you link to your posts, whether it's from an About page or a Start Here page, you can simply give the title (which you should set up as a hyperlink to the post), or you can give a brief summary or quote as well.

#4: Links to Your Books, Products or Services

New readers may have no idea that you've written a book (or several!), or they might not know that they can hire you, or buy something from you. On your About page, explain clearly what you offer. Don't see this as being pushy or "salesy" – instead, think of your ideal customer and how disappointed they

might be to realize, months later, that you were selling something they really wanted all along!

If you have quite a few different things to sell, you might want to just mention the most recent / important ones on your About page, then link to a page that lists them all (perhaps your Shop or Services page, which we'll be covering in Module #7).

How to Actually Write Your About Page

I wish I could give you a template for the perfect About page … but the truth is that there are lots of different formats that work well, and lots of different styles in which people write About pages.

What I do recommend is that you:

- **Write in the first person ("I") rather than the third person ("he/she/they").** So, instead of saying "Ali Luke lives in Leeds with her husband and two children", I'd write "I live in Leeds with my husband and two children."
- **Write in the present tense, not the future tense.** When your blog is very new, it's tempting to write things like, "I will be posting every week" or "Through the newsletter, I plan to share my tips on…" This draws attention to your blog being very new, and it also means your About page will date very quickly. Instead, write as if your blog *is already* fully up and running – "I post here every week" or "Through the newsletter, I share my tips on…"
- **Don't worry too much about getting everything right.** The great thing with About pages is that you can update them over time – in fact, I highly recommend that you do! It definitely doesn't have to be perfect from day one.
- **Write *something*, even if you can't complete the whole page.** It's so easy to put off writing an About page – if you're really short of time this week, find just ten minutes to make a start. Even a sentence counts!

In the rest of this module, we're going to be looking at some examples of different About pages and examining some things that they do particularly well. The pages I've chosen for this are:

- **Ask A Manager's About page**, Allison Green
- **Live Write Thrive's About page**, C.S. Lakin
- **Live Write Thrive's About page**, Gem

I suggest you take a quick look at each of these now and think about whether they'd appeal to you as a reader. Is there anything you'd change, or anything that particularly grabs your interest?

Example #1: Allison Green

Ask A Manager's About page, Allison Green

This page starts off with an "about me" opening, introducing us to Allison and (crucially) her experience of being a manager. Her blog is all about giving advice to readers on workplace dilemmas, so it's essential that she explains why she's well positioned to do this.

There are a few things I wanted to pull out from this page:

- **There's a lovely photo of Allison right at the start of the About page.** While this isn't essential, it's a nice way to help readers connect with you. I felt the photo was in keeping with the blog itself, too: it's fairly professional but not stuffy. (Imagine, for instance, how different the tone would be if this was a photo of Allison in a suit at a desk, or Allison with a drink in hand at a bar.)
- **Allison has a link, "ask away", to where readers can submit their questions.** Since her blog runs on reader questions, this is an important thing to include on the About page (though there's also an "Ask a Question" link in the top menu and in the sidebar).
- **The section "Some of my biases" is a great way to give readers a heads-up about what they'll be likely to encounter on the blog.** All of these "biases" are also really quite reasonable positions that most readers would struggle to disagree with – so I think this section also serves well to show that Allison is a sensible, honest person.

- **The whole page is relatively short.** There's no need for About pages to go on for ages, and if your page is similarly concise, that's fine!

The one thing I think Allison has missed here is the opportunity to link to her book "Ask a Manager". (I wonder whether, like many bloggers, she wrote the About page a few years ago – before she published the book.) If I were her, I'd probably update the page to add a sentence or two at the end of about the book.

Example #2: C.S. Lakin

Live Write Thrive's About page, C.S. Lakin

Like Allison Green, C.S. Lakin starts off her About page by talking about herself (as we saw earlier on in the examples). Her page is quite long and introduces new readers to various things they might be interested in – particularly her services.

Here are a few things I wanted to mention:

- **There really is quite a lot going on in the first paragraph**, with links to C.S.'s writer group teaching, her online school, and her one-to-one Skype appointments. I'd be tempted to focus on just *one* thing here and perhaps list these in bullet point form later on the page.
- **While I quite like the personal touch of "I am also quite the expert on pygmy goats," it's slightly at odds with the more distant, professional tone of the rest of the About page.** I'd probably be tempted to cut the whole paragraph about guest posting as C.S. is a great writer who's been blogging for ages and I'm sure she can have her pick of any guest posting opportunities she wants!
- **The section "I really love my day job" is positive, enthusiastic, and clear about what C.S. offers in terms of critique services.** I think this is well-positioned, but as I've said, I'd be tempted to cut down what precedes it a bit – as I'm sure being hired to critique is more important to C.S. than being invited to guest post for free.
- **At the end of the About page, C.S. links to her various books**, giving the cover images too. I think this is a great move: it not only encourages

readers to check out (and hopefully buy!) her books, it shows that she's a professional working author who knows what she's talking about.

As I mentioned, the one change this page might need is to move some of the earlier links and mentions of things like guest posting and writing talks – all of this could come after the sections about C.S.'s critique / editing services.

Example #3: The Organised Mum

The Organised Mum's About page, Gemma Bray

I came across this blog from a link on a parenting forum – not from a guest post, or from any former knowledge of the blogger. I mention this because it's the way in which many readers will stumble across new blogs … and it illustrates why your About page needs to introduce you and who you are very clearly!

There are a few things to think about here:

- **This About page is the most informal and chatty of the three we've looked at.** That's a good fit for Gemma's style and also for her purposes in blogging (she's not selling a book / product / service, though it looks like she does work with companies for sponsorship). The number of exclamation marks, for instance, suggests a certain degree of informality.
- **Like C.S. and Allison, Gemma explains her credentials for blogging about her topic (in this case, cleaning).** She does this in a fairly casual and informal way – but it's still clear to readers that she has thoroughly used the cleaning routines she talks about. (Or as she puts it, "I live and breathe the method.")
- **There's a generally reassuring tone throughout the page**, with phrases like "if you're in a bit of a muddle with the housework and don't know where to start".

If I were Gemma, I'd probably add a bit to this page that encourages sponsors to get in touch. If Gemma goes on to write a non-fiction book (which would be a good fit for this type of blog) or to sell anything, I'd obviously expect that to get added to the About page too.

You might well have been struck by some different things on these three About pages – do feel free to come and share your own impressions and insights in the Facebook group:

www.facebook.com/groups/blogonspring2018

Titling, Publishing and Positioning Your About Page

Once you've written your About page, you'll need to think about how best to publish it on your blog.

Here's what you need to know:
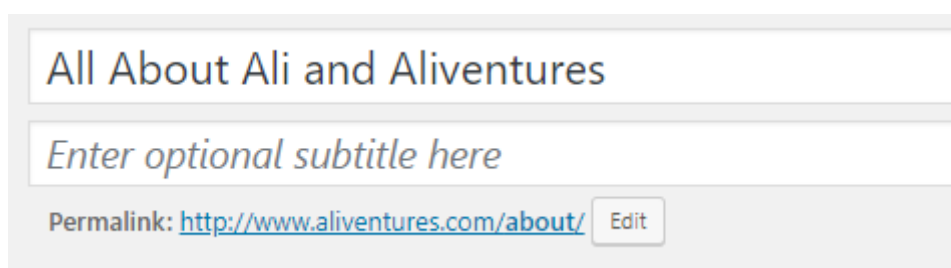
#1: Your About page should be published as a *page*, not as a blog post. (Creating it as a post is an easy mistake to make.) Pages are slightly different from posts because they don't go out to subscribers by email/RSS, and they don't have a category and a date stamp like posts do.

You can create a page in WordPress (both the .com and the .org) versions by logging into your dashboard and going to Pages → Add New. Note that there's a good chance you already have an About page that WordPress has set up for you: you can find that under Pages → All Pages. Click on the title to edit it.

#2: Your About page should have a clear and obvious title. The two options I'd especially recommend are "About" or "Start Here" (the latter is best for a page that's focused on the blog and on links to useful posts). You could also use "About Me" or "New Here?"

The permalink (URL) for your About page should be something like /about or /start-here (e.g. aliventures.com/about is my About page). If WordPress has set the permalink to something different, click "Edit" to change it:

#3: You shouldn't allow comments on your About page. This might seem like a weird rule, but readers tend to leave weird or not-very-valuable comments on your About page (e.g. "Hello, nice to meet you!" or detailed questions about some aspect of your topic. Also, your About page will be visited by readers for years to come – so it can quickly end up with lots of low-value comments that just distract from your page.

If comments aren't already turned off on your About page, you can switch them off while you're creating or editing it: scroll down beneath the box where you write the page and you should see this section. (You may need to click the little arrow on the right to expand it.)
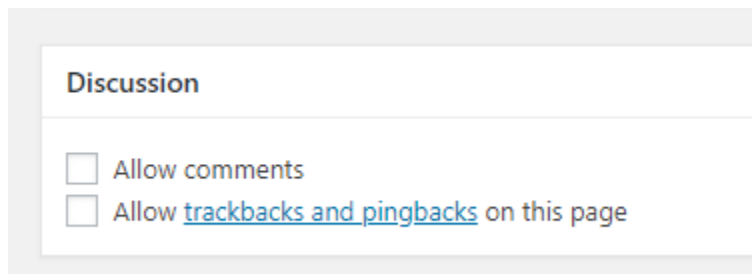
Untick the box "Allow comments".

If you're using WordPress.com, you can find the Discussion section in the right-hand sidebar under "More Options".

Updating Your About Page Regularly

Surprisingly frequently, I come across blogs (often very well established blogs) that have woefully out-dated About pages.

It's very easy to create your About page and then forget about it – but of course lots of the details there will need to be changed as time goes by. For instance, if you mention that you have "two preschool-aged children", that's not going to still be the case in five years' time!

Even if you don't have specific personal details on your About page, the details about your blog might change. You'll definitely write new posts (some of which you may want to link to from the About page), but you might also change your blogging focus a little … or a lot.

It can be tricky to remember to update your About page when you've got a lot going on, so I'd suggest having a regular reminder in your diary/calendar to check it and update it if necessary. I'd suggest once every 3 months to begin with: if you find that you rarely need to change anything, go for once every 6 months.

Creating an About Widget

Not all readers will bother clicking on your About link in your menu (they might miss it, or they might not want to look at a whole page about your blog).

This means it's a great idea to also include an About widget – a very short summary of you and your blog that goes in your sidebar, and appears on every page/post on your blog.

Here's my About widget on Aliventures:

On your WordPress blog, you can create your About widget by:

- Logging into the dashboard and going to Appearance → Widgets. *(If you're using WordPress.com, you'll need to click "WP Admin" at the bottom of your sidebar first.)*
- Adding a "Text" widget *(unless your theme has a specific About Me or similar widget, in which case, use that!)* You drag-and-drop the widget from the left hand side to add it.
- Typing in the text you want to use. You can add images, and some formatting (like bold and italic text, links and lists).
- Clicking the blue "save" button directly beneath the widget.

It's up to you what you include in your About widget. **At a minimum, I'd suggest giving your name, a quick summary of what your blog is about, and a link to your full About page.**

In my About widget, I also include my social media and contact details to make it very easy for readers to get in touch.

Module #5: Recap

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

- **Your About page is really important.** It's where new readers will often go first to figure out whether they want to stick around.
- **Normally, it makes sense to start your About page by telling readers a bit about you or a bit about your blog** (though some bloggers start their About page by focusing on the reader instead).
- **There's no one "right" way to structure an About page**, and different bloggers take very different approaches. It's often best to start off with a fairly concise page and add to it over time.
- **Key elements to include on your About page are**: your name, a photo of you, links to your best posts, and links to your books/products/services.
- **You should ideally also have an About widget**. This goes in your sidebar and acts like a mini About page, very quickly introducing new readers to who you are and what your blog's about.

About pages can be tough, and if you feel stuck at any point or would like some feedback on yours, head here: **facebook.com/groups/blogonspring2018**

Module #5 Assignment and Check In

This week, your assignment is to create (or update) your About page.

It doesn't matter if your page is short and sweet – what matters is that you get *something* up there on your blog. Don't feel that you need to spend ages on this: you can set aside a little bit of time each week to refine it, if that suits you better.

Once you've written your About page, or got as far as you can (e.g. made a plan or a list of what you're going to include), check in here to get your reward card stamped:

facebook.com/groups/blogon.spring2018/permalink/237637780348408

If possible, please share the link to your About page 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 a draft 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 1st July**. (It's fine to check in even if you haven't quite finished your About page.)

Module #5: 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 Write a Killer About Me Page for Your Blog, Melyssa Griffin, MelyssaGriffin.com

This post covers similar ground to the module, but offers a slightly different perspective in some areas – e.g. Melyssa emphasises the importance of having a call to action on your About page (something I'd agree is a good idea but not necessarily essential for every type of blog).

5 Ways to Eliminate About Page Anxiety, Natalie Gowen, ProBlogger

There are lots of good tips here on things you can include on your About page: again, this covers similar ground to the module. One small thing: I wouldn't recommend putting a contact form on your About page, as Natalie suggests – much better to have this on a separate contact page (see Module #2).

What's Coming Up Next Week:

Module #6: Advanced Formatting: Quotes, Links and Subheadings

Next week, from Monday 2nd July, we'll be digging into ways to make your blog posts look great ... and seeing how these can help you reach your goals, too.

We'll cover quotes, links, subheadings, and more ... and I'll give you step by step instructions on how exactly to *do* all this formatting within WordPress, as well as guidance on when best to use the different types of formatting. There'll be plenty of screenshots and examples along the way.

Module #6: Advanced Formatting: Quotes, Links and Subheadings

In this week's module, we're looking at ways to take your blog posts further. We've already covered classic blog posts (Module #2) and list posts (Module #4) – the different techniques we'll go through in this module can work well for both those types of posts.

Everything we cover this week will not only help your posts to look great, it'll make them more useful for readers (and for you!) as well. We're going to take an in-depth look at blockquotes, links and nested subheadings … and we'll also touch on other types of formatting, like bold text, bullet-pointed lists and images.

Take a look at these two blog post excerpts (from my post How to Expand a Too-Short Piece of Writing). The text of each is almost exactly the same … but which one would you rather read?

Version A:

Expand Your Work

There's a crucial difference between expanding and padding, even if the two look similar at first glance.

Expanding your work means going deeper. Padding it means staying on the surface.

When you expand a piece of fiction, you can add a relevant sub-plot: one that sheds light on the themes, heightens the tension in the main plot, or reveals crucial information about the characters. You could include the next part of the story: take it further in the character's lives (perhaps what you think is a finished novel is just part one).

You could look for places to add more tension and conflict. A minor incident could become something much worse. You could turn important passages of summary ("telling") into action and dialogue ("showing"). If your hero did something terrible in the past, show us the event or the effects of it, don't just tell us in a sentence or two. Read Understanding the "Show Don't Tell" Rule for more help on this.

Version B:

> ## Expand Your Work
>
> There's a crucial difference between *expanding* and *padding*, even if the two look similar at first glance.
>
> **Expanding your work means going deeper. Padding it means staying on the surface**.
>
> When you expand a piece of fiction, you can:
>
> - **Add a *relevant* sub-plot**: one that sheds light on the themes, heightens the tension in the main plot, or reveals crucial information about the characters.
> - **Include the next part of the story**: take it further in the character's lives (perhaps what you think is a finished novel is just part one).
> - **Look for places to add more tension and conflict.** A minor incident could become something much worse.
> - **Turn important passages of summary ("telling") into action and dialogue ("showing").** If your hero did something terrible in the past, *show* us the event or the effects of it, don't just tell us in a sentence or two. Read Understanding the "Show Don't Tell" Rule for more help on this.

Version B looks instantly more attractive. There's more to engage your eye – and plenty of white space (the blank space around the words) to make it look like an attractive read.

The differences aren't just about looks, though. Version B is a more *useful* post: it's structured in a way that makes it easy to engage with, includes links to other posts, and brings in opinions other than the author's.

In the first part of this module, we're going to take an in-depth look at three formatting features that you might not yet be using to their full. They are:

- Quotes, which might be from fellow bloggers, from books, or from speakers
- Links, which could be to your own posts or to resources elsewhere
- Subheadings, particularly nested subheadings

Using Quotes in Your Blog Post

> Before we take a look at some of the factors that affect writing speed, I've got a few quotes from you from different writers about how fast they write:
>
> 66 400 or 500 words is an OK day, 700 or 800 words is a good day, and anything over 1,000 words is an astonishing, greased-lightning, festal superfluke of a day.
>
> Francis Spufford: How I write, Francis Spufford, The Spectator
>
> 66 10k a day is my high point as a professional author whose child is now in daycare (PRICELESS). I write 6 – 7 hours a day, usually 2 in the morning and 4-5 in the afternoon, five days a week.
>
> How I Went From Writing 2,000 Words a Day to 10,000 Words a Day, Rachel Aaron, Pretentious Title
>
> 66 If the material fails to convince me after several sessions I put it aside but if direction and form begin to emerge a point will come when the notes merge into drafting. Whether there are ten drafts or over a hundred I carry on until the poem feels settled.
>
> How Long Does it Take to Write a Poem, Myra Schneider, Poetry Magazines
>
> 66 So [my wife] and I came up with a plan. I would, for a four-week period, ruthlessly clear my diary and go on what we somewhat mysteriously called a "Crash". During the Crash, I would do nothing but write from 9am to 10.30pm, Monday through Saturday. I'd get one hour off for lunch and two for dinner. [...] I kept it up for the four weeks, and at the end of it I had more or less the entire novel down: though of course a lot more time would be required to write it all up properly, the vital imaginative breakthroughs had all come during the Crash.
>
> Kazuo Ishiguro: how I wrote The Remains of the Day in four weeks, Kasuo Isiguro, The Guardian

This screenshot is from my post **Why Some Writers Are Much Faster than Others: Four Quotes and Six Key Reasons**.

With a topic like this, I wanted to go beyond my own experience of writing speed to look at the (very wide) range of what's "normal" for other writers. I did some digging around to find different writers talking about how fast they write, and came up with – I hope! – some interesting quotes illustrating the wide range of different writing speeds.

Why Use Quotes?

Whether you're quoting another blogger, a book, or a speaker, bringing in quotes can make your own work seem more authoritative. Using quotes demonstrates that you know what others are saying about your topic – and a

well-chosen quote can back up what you're saying, or round out your post by adding a different angle or opinion.

If you're struggling to know what to write about, quotes can also be a great way to produce a post. Some blog posts consist mostly or entirely of quotes (and these can become surprisingly popular).

When you want to look at a range of opinions, ideas or experiences, like I did in the example above, it also makes sense to use quotes. Yes, you could link or paraphrase instead – but it wouldn't be so direct and powerful.

How to Use Quotes Within Your Blog Post

There are two key ways to bring quotes into your text: you can use an "inline" quote or a "blockquote".

When you're quoting less than a single sentence, it normally makes sense to work that quote into a sentence of your own. For instance, if I'd wanted to do this in my post about writing speeds, I might have written something like this:

> For literary author Francis Spufford, "700 or 800 words is a good day". But SFF author Rachel Aaron explains that "[10,000 words] a day is my high point as a professional author."

When you're using an inline quote like this, you need to make sure that:

- You put the quotation words around the whole quote alone – not around your own words, or around only part of the quote.
- Your sentence actually makes sense! (It's OK to change a word or phrase in the quote by putting it in [square brackets], as I did with the original "10k" in Rachel Aaron's quote.)

If you're quoting a couple of sentences or more, though, or if you want a quote to stand out, a "blockquote" makes most sense. You may well be familiar with this format from writing essays at school or university: the quote is presented in its own paragraph, normally with a left-hand indent.

Different blogs display blockquotes in different ways. You saw how my current blog theme displays them, in the example above – but here are a couple of examples from other blogs:

> Whatever the underlying problem, you won't overcome writer's block by moaning about it with author friends for weeks on Facebook … or by any other distraction mechanism.
>
> **The only way to overcome it is through taking action to fix the underlying issue … and get back to writing.**
>
> " "I deal with writer's block by lowering my expectations. I think the trouble starts when you sit down to write and imagine that you will achieve something magical and magnificent—and when you don't, panic sets in. The solution is never to sit down and imagine that you will achieve something magical and magnificent. I write a little bit, almost every day, and if it results in two or three or (on a good day) four good paragraphs, I consider myself a lucky man. Never try to be the hare. All hail the tortoise." *Malcolm Gladwell*

(From [Writing Tips: How to Deal With Writer's Block](#), Joanna Penn, The Creative Penn)

2. Break the routine

Routine can be a blessing. It helps us focus on what we're doing and allows us to build consistent, healthy habits. Routine is a great productivity hack, but not every day needs to be a productive one. Take time to break the routine. Try something new. Better yet, try something that makes you just a little apprehensive.

Routine is a great productivity hack, but not every day needs to be a productive one.

ERIN WILDERMUTH

(From [The Science of Curiosity](#), Erin Wildermuth, MichaelHyatt.com – note that here, the blockquote format is being used for a "pull quote" from the post itself,

and with additional "tweet this" formatting: the little bird icon allows readers to instantly tweet the pull quote.)

To create a blockquote in WordPress:

1. Go to the editing view of your post (in the WordPress dashboard)

2. Type or copy your chosen quote into the correct place in your post.

3. Highlight the quote by clicking and dragging with your mouse, then click the "blockquote" button, which looks like this:
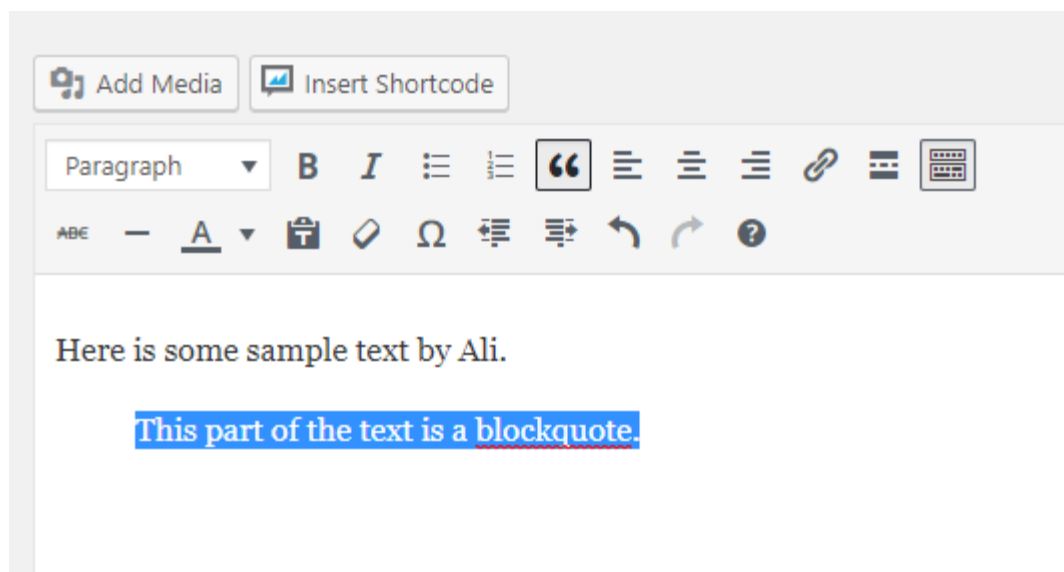
If you prefer to use the Text (HTML) editing view of your post, you can create a blockquote by placing the opening tag <blockquote> at the start of the quote, and the closing tag </blockquote> at the end of the quote.

Immediately before or after your quote, you should provide a reference to where it's from – with a link to the source, if possible. (We'll be covering links later in this module.)

Where to Use Quotes Within Your Post

Quotes can be useful at *any* point in your post.

Back in Module #2, we broke down post structure into four key parts: title, introduction, main body and conclusion.

You could potentially use a quote in any of these four parts.

Using a Quote in Your Title

If your post is a response to (or rebuttal of) a particular point, it might make sense to quote it. You can often see this in action in news articles:

'Ebooks are stupid', says head of one of world's biggest publishers
(from The Guardian)

Secondary school pupils 'not reading challenging enough books'
(from BBC News)

Using a Quote in Your Introduction

A quote can be a great way to open a post, and some bloggers use quotes at the start of every post. Again, this is a good technique to use if you want to write a post that spins off from someone else's point.

This post on Daily Blog Tips has a quote (doubling up as a link, too!) in the first paragraph:

Jack Ma, the charismatic CEO of Alibaba, said this year at Davos that "when trade stops, war begins," and selling globally is no longer a right solely of big companies. Technology makes the Earth smaller, and you can buy from Europe even if you are based in Australia.

Using a Quote in Your Main Body

Quotes can be used to bolster particular points that you're making, if you're writing a classic post. In a list post, you might want to use quotes fairly consistently: adding a quote for each of the items on the list, for instance. Of course, some list posts are entirely based around quotes – like this one from Copyblogger, sharing some of their writers' favourite classic quotes:

Stefanie Flaxman

Stefanie's favorite is an artful bit of philosophy:

> *"We write to taste life twice, in the moment and in retrospect." – Anaïs Nin*

Chris Garrett

This one has been attributed to Mark Twain, T.S. Eliot, Cicero, and others, but it turns out it was originally written by Blaise Pascal. *"Je n'ai fait celle-ci plus longue que parce que je n'ai pas eu le loisir de la faire plus courte."*

> *"I only made this so long because I didn't have time to make it shorter." – Blaise Pascal*

Using a Quote in Your Conclusion

You might want to be a little cautious about giving someone else the last word in your post, but if there's a quote that's particularly apt or that you want to leave readers with, there's no reason not to use it here.

The example we looked at earlier from The Creative Penn ends with the Malcolm Gladwell quote (before a brief call to action to buy Joanna's ebook):
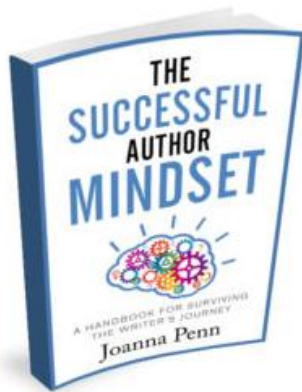
> " "I deal with writer's block by lowering my expectations. I think the trouble starts when you sit down to write and imagine that you will achieve something magical and magnificent—and when you don't, panic sets in. The solution is never to sit down and imagine that you will achieve something magical and magnificent. I write a little bit, almost every day, and if it results in two or three or (on a good day) four good paragraphs, I consider myself a lucky man. Never try to be the hare. All hail the tortoise." *Malcolm Gladwell*
>
> *This is an excerpt from The Successful Author Mindset. Available now in ebook, print and audiobook formats.*

Many bloggers rarely or never bother using quotes. By taking a few extra minutes to incorporate quotes into some of your posts – particularly longer posts, or ones that you link to from your "About" or "Start Here" page – you can really help your blog to stand out.

Using Links in Your Blog Post

Without links, there'd be no internet at all. Links allow us to move from one page or post or site to another, like pathways.

On your blog, you'll have lots of links already. You almost certainly have a navigation menu, for instance, that links to pages like "Home" and "About". You'll have blog categories, which link to posts within those categories. Each post's title provides a link to that post.

It's still important to use links *within* your blog posts, though. Keep in mind that a lot of readers won't actually be reading your posts on your blog itself.

They might have subscribed by email or through an RSS reader for updates – in which case they'll just see the post, not your menu and sidebar and so on.

This is what I see when I read a blog post in Feedly (an RSS reader). This one is from C.S. Lakin's Live Write Thrive blog:
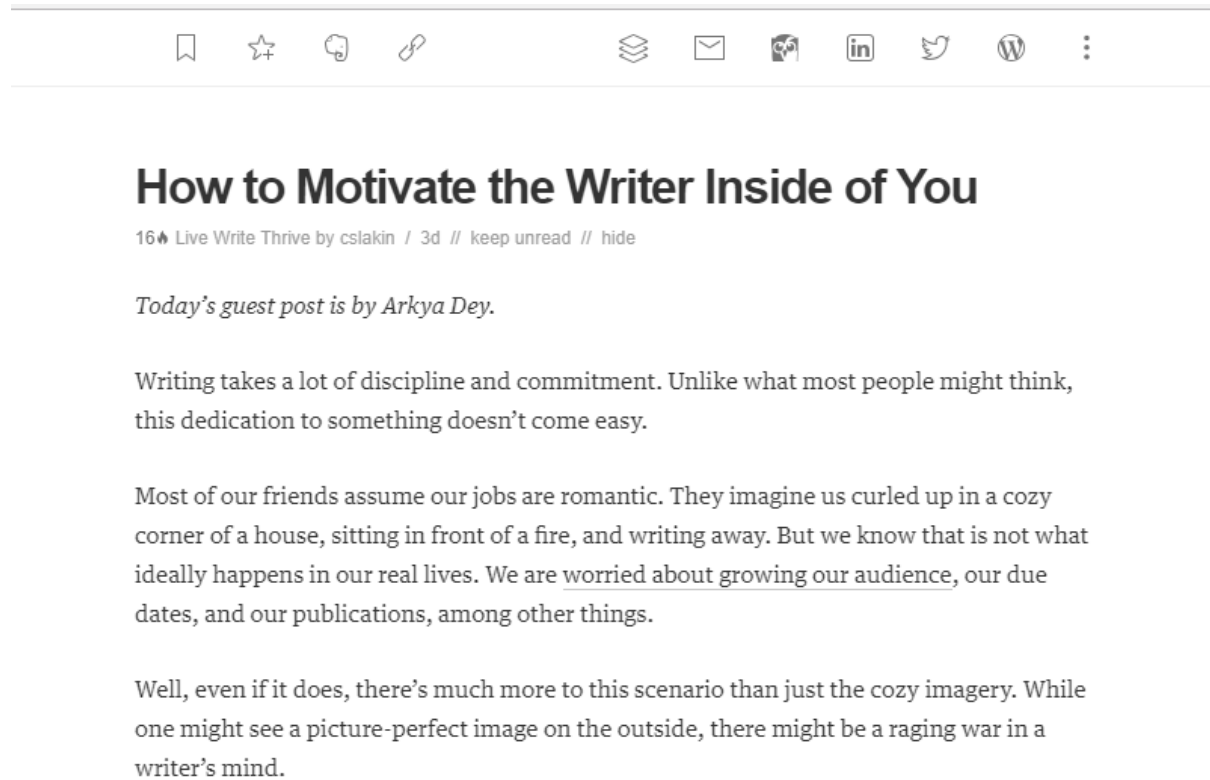
This is how the post looks on the site:
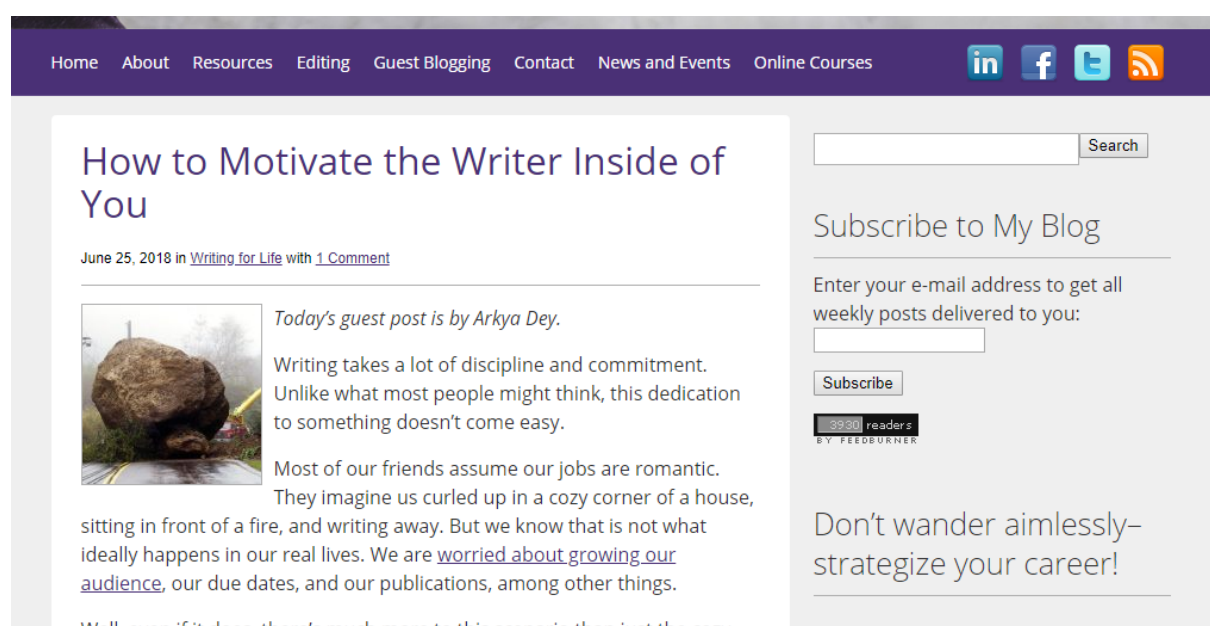
If your readers are on a mobile or tablet device, they may too only see the post itself. So these links can be vital ways to lead readers further into your site.

Plus, links are useful for *all* readers. They give you an opportunity to point out further information you have on a topic – you can do this to help new readers get up to speed, or to help experienced ones go further with the topic you're discussing.

Links to other people's blogs can also save you having to write a post about something that you're not all that interested in (or that you don't really have any expertise on).

And ... linking to other people's blogs is a nice thing to do! It might send them some new readers, and it also demonstrates to *your* readers that you're someone who (a) knows what's going on within your bit of the blogging world and (b) gives credit where credit's due.

How to Use Links Within Your Blog Posts

Before we go further, I want to give you a few bits of vocabulary about links that'll help make this discussion easier:

URL – this stands for Uniform Resource Locator *(in case you ever need to know that for a trivia quiz!)*

It's the web address of the resource that you're linking to. For instance, www.aliventures.com/blog-on-2018 is the URL for the Blog On information/sales page.

Anchor text – the text which a link is attached to. E.g. in the following sentence, "click here" is the anchor text:

You can click here for more information about my books.

Link – this can mean slightly different things to different people: in this module, I'm using "link" to describe the combination of URL *plus* anchor text.

How Should You Display Links in Your Posts?

As with quotes, there are a few different ways in which you might display links within your posts. Here are the three main options (all these links point to the same place).

Option #1: Give the URL

> For more about dialogue, check out my post
> http://www.aliventures.com/everything-writing-great-dialogue

Option #2: Give the title and make it into a link (the title is the anchor text)

> You can find more about dialogue here:
>
> Everything You Need to Know About Writing Great Dialogue

Option #3: Incorporate the link into a sentence ("more about dialogue" is the anchor text)

> I've written more about dialogue, if you're interested in going further with yours.

Option #1 is normally best avoided in blog posts. It tends to look a bit amateur, and it's normally more reader-friendly to have some "anchor text" for the link instead of just copying the URL itself into the post.

It can be a good option, though, if you've written something that's designed for readers to print. If you want to include URLs there, they'll need the actual web address!

Option #2 is a good one if you're giving a list of resources, or if you want to make sure a particular resource really stands out. It's a bit like using a blockquote: the link is set out on its own line. You can use any anchor text you want, but it often makes sense to use the title of whatever you're linking to.

If I think a particular link will be especially useful, this is the option I go for: I think it's the most reader-friendly because it creates a link that's easy to click on even if you're on a tiny mobile device!

Option #3 is useful if you want to give a link, but you don't want to break the flow of your text to do so. You can use a single word (or even a single letter!) for the link, though I'd recommend having at least a couple of words to make it as easy as possible to click on.

One of the blogs I write for, Craft Your Content, prefers to give links in this way – it's part of their house style.

You may well find yourself using all three of these options at different times, but any time you want to include a link, think about which will make the most sense.

A final possibility is to add a link to an image. I wouldn't *only* use the image as a link (except for "buy" buttons and similar), but it can be useful to allow readers to click on the images in posts like this one:

(If you visit that post on my blog, you'll see that you can click the titles that are in blue text or on the images to visit the relevant post.)

How to Create a Link in WordPress

Now that we've explored how you might use links, here's a quick guide to how to create them in WordPress.

1. Open up your post or page to edit, in the WordPress dashboard.

2. Type (or copy) the word or phrase that you want to become the link's anchor text.

3. Copy the URL (I normally open up the post / website / etc that I want to link to in a new tab).

4. Highlight the anchor text then either:

a) Click the "link" button in WordPress and paste your URL into that box (use Ctrl+V on Windows):
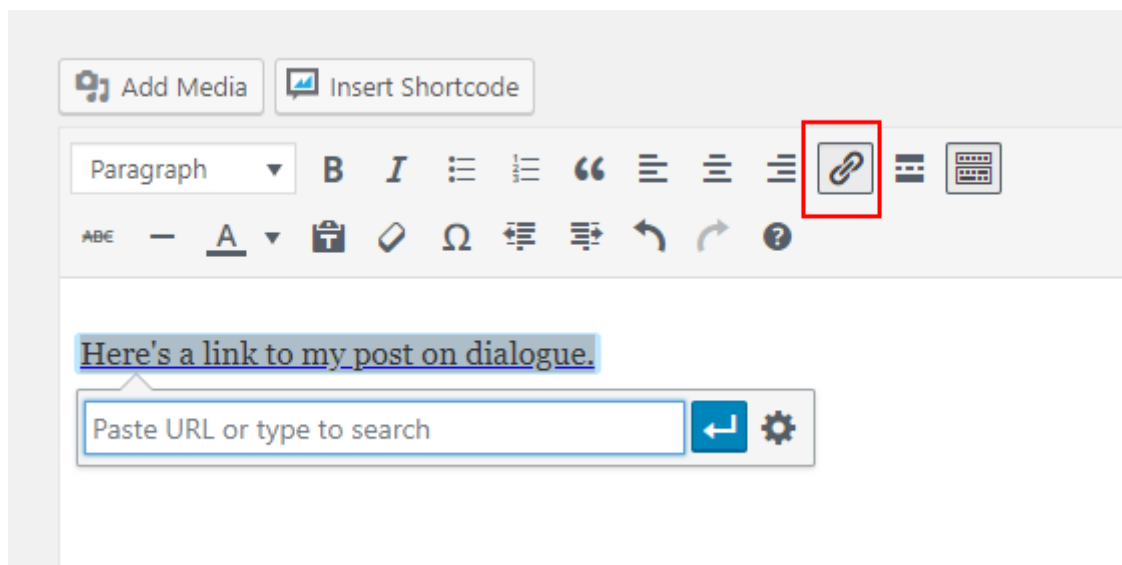
Once you've pasted in your link, click the blue button with the white arrow (or hit Enter) to insert it.

b) *(Even quicker!)* Simply press Ctrl+V while the anchor text is highlighted to create the link.

Alternatively, instead of pasting a URL, you can search for the post on your blog by typing in a word or phrase after clicking the "link" button. This will bring up a list of posts to choose from:
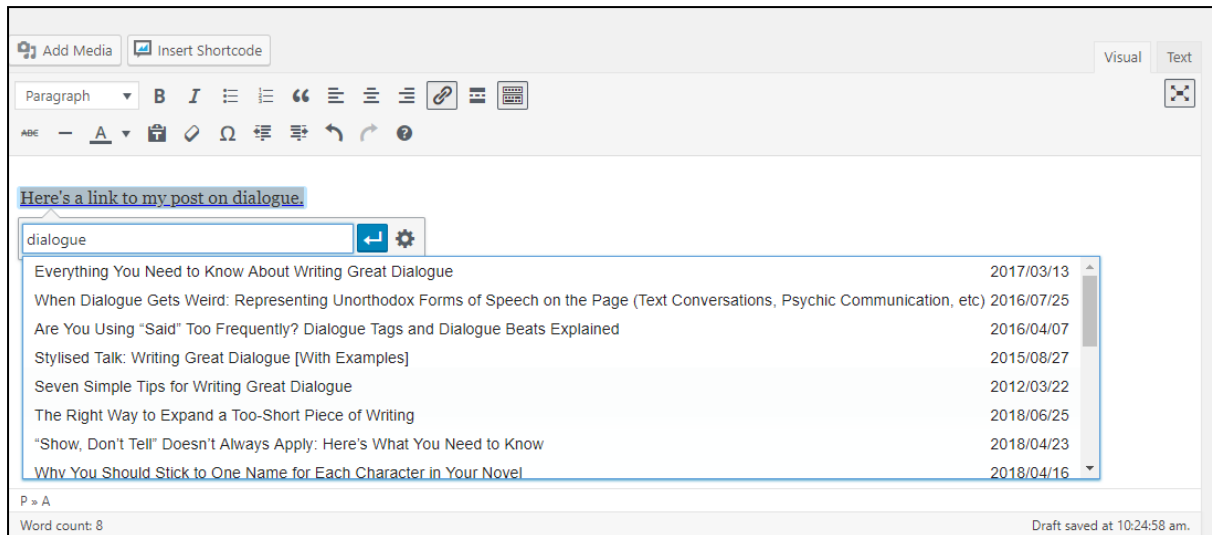
Where to Use Links Within Your Posts

As with quotes, you can use links at almost any point within your post (except for within your title, which is itself a link to the post!)

Using a Link in Your Introduction

If your post is part of a series, you'll want to link to the previous part (or to an index) in your introduction, so new readers can catch up. Here's an example from a short series on guest posting, on ProBlogger – the first sentence of the post includes a link to the previous post in the series:

The introduction can also be a good place to use links to set the scene for the post to come: if you're responding to a news story, for instance, you'll want to link to it early on.

Using a Link in Your Main Body

You can use links within the main body to give extra information – which might mean linking to basic help to get beginners up to speed, linking to something that's only tangentially related but that might be of use, or linking to more

advanced materials for readers who want to go further with your particular topic.

Some types of list post are essentially a collection of links: for instance, if you've written a post titled "My Top Ten Business Books of 2018" then it makes sense to link to each of those. You'll probably also use links in this way on a "recommended resources" page or similar. Here's an example from Jane Friedman's blog:

Recommended Resources

Updated April 2018

I've probably read, reviewed, or at least seen every single advice book, website, and service for writers. I could recommend dozens of resources, but I'll focus on the most helpful for early-career writers.

The Best of My Advice

- For free: Jane's Writing Advice Archive
- In book form: *The Business of Being a Writer*
- Learn about my paid services.

Also, I've created a list of my favorite books on writing and publishing.

High-Level Editing and Coaching

- Writer and editor Andi Cumbo offers a wide range of budget-friendly services for all types of writers. I recommend her manuscript review, where you can get big-picture feedback before investing in a comprehensive editing job.
- Nell Boeschenstein is a creative writing professor and extensively published freelancer who offers editing and coaching services for nonfiction writers—including memoir, family history, and narrative nonfiction.

Using a Link in Your Conclusion

This is a great place to encourage readers to check out more posts on your blog. Some bloggers use plugins to show "related posts" immediately after the post itself, but you can also include a link or two in your text.

For instance, you might write, "If you found this post useful, do check out …"

You might also want to link to a book you've written, your services page, your email newsletter, or something else that you sell – especially if it's closely related to the post the reader's just read.

Here's an example from this post on The Book Designer's blog: the words "independent publishers" at the end of the post link to IBPA (the Independent Book Publishers Association).

Click on the button reading **Publish Your eBook**. Congratulations! Your book should be available soon — most likely in a half a day or less. [ix]

You will be returned to your **Bookshelf** page. Your title will be greyed out; you won't be able to edit any of the settings until it has been published. From that point on, however, you can change any of those settings — subtitle, keywords, categories, cover art, prices, even the book file — as often as you wish. Experiment! See what works!

And welcome to the ranks of independent publishers.

Most bloggers don't include links within their posts as frequently as they should. Before publishing any post, it's worth having a quick look on your blog to see whether there's something else you've written that you can link a reader to. The more posts they read, the more likely they are to stick around long-term!

Using Nested Subheadings

We talked briefly about subheadings in Module #4, when we looked at list posts – but I wanted to take a look at them in more detail here.

Subheadings are invariably in a larger font than the rest of the post, and might be in a different colour. Here's how they look on my blog (from this post):

Non-Physical Suffering — Subheading (Heading 2)

You can put characters through hell without a single cut or bruise. Here are a few ideas:

#9: Financial Problems — Sub-subheading (Heading 3)

Money (as most writers notice at some point!) can be a massive source of stress. This can work for almost any character, however well-off – e.g. they lose all their money, or they go through an acrimonious divorce, or money is a serious source of relationship stress.

Handy for: putting pressure on a relationship; forcing difficult decisions (especially if physical suffering – e.g. hunger – is on the horizon); conflict between characters.

Example: The gulf between rich men and their (usually female) assistants, who are paying off student loan debt, kicks off drives the plot in *The Assistants* by Camille Perri.

#10: Losing a Job — Sub-subheading (Heading 3)

On its own, this isn't necessarily a form of suffering – but assuming the character wanted or needed the job, then it's likely to lead to financial or social difficulties. They may face a crisis of self-identity.

If losing a job is a bit drastic, an explicit or implied threat to a character's job can be a milder way of achieving some of the same effects. In children's or YA fiction, expulsion from school, or the threat of it, can work in a similar way to an adult losing a job.

Handy for: relationship problems (with spouse, former co-workers, etc); character blaming

As you can see, I'm using nested subheadings, or "sub-subheadings" in this post, to split high-level sections into smaller parts.

In HTML, there are seven levels of subheadings, but for practical purposes, the ones you'll be using are:

Heading 1 – the title of your post. Avoid using this within your post as it can confuse search engines if you have more than one Heading 1 on a page.

Heading 2 – the subheadings within your post. In many posts, this will be the only level of subheading you use.

Heading 3 – sub-subheadings. You might have two sections in your post with a Heading 2 subheading, and each of those sections might be divided into several short parts, with a Heading 3 subheading for each of those parts.

You *might* possibly use Heading 4, if you're writing a very long post with a lot of nested subheadings. I think it's fine to simply use bold text at this level, though (like I do with "Handy for" and "Example" in my post).

When you're writing subheadings, it's good practice to:

- **Make your subheadings match one another, within one level.** If your post is split into three sections, each with a Heading 2 subheading, try to make all those subheadings roughly the same length. You might want to use a question for each of them, or start each one with a verb. Think of them a little like bullet-points: you want them to read consistently.
- **Check that you're being consistent with the Heading number.** For instance, if your post is a list of five items, don't have some of those items in Heading 2 and others in Heading 3. (It's very easy to accidentally get the wrong one when drafting, so this is always a good thing to double-check when you proofread.)
- **Ideally, don't *immediately* follow a subheading with a sub-subheading.** Most bloggers think it looks better to have at least a line or two of text first. This is a very small thing, though, so don't worry if it makes more sense in your post to have a Heading 2 subheading immediately followed by a Heading 3 subheading.
- **Capitalise your subheadings consistently.** I like to use Title Case for all my subheadings, just like I do for my blog post titles, but some of the blogs I've freelanced for prefer to use an initial capital only. There's no "right" or "wrong" here – but it is important to be consistent, certainly within an individual post, but if possible also on your blog as a whole.

Where to Use Subheadings

Subheadings normally belong in the main body of your post. You *might* have a subheading at the start of your conclusion, but this isn't mandatory.

I'd avoid using subheadings at all in the introduction to your post, unless you're writing a very long piece. Your first subheading will normally mark the start of the post itself.

In any post that has a layered structure, with sections split further into different parts, you'll want to consider using sub-subheadings. If you're writing

a very long post (say, 2,000 words or more), nested subheadings can help to break it up visually and orient the reader.

How to Create Your Subheadings

It's simple to create a subheading in WordPress:

Copying from Word

I like to draft my blog posts in Word. WordPress will keep the subheadings at the correct level if you use Word's "Heading" styles then copy-and-paste your post into the Visual editor.

1. Type your subheading into your Word document, on its own line. Highlight it or click on it.

2. In the "Styles" pane on the Word ribbon, click "Heading 2" (or "Heading 3" for a sub-subheading).

3. Do this for all your subheadings, then copy-and-paste your post into the WordPress visual editor.

4. You should find that the formatting is preserved.

Adding Subheadings in the WordPress Visual Editor

1. Type your subheading into your blog post, on its own line. Highlight it or click on it.

2. In the "Paragraph" drop down, select "Header 2" (or "Header 3" for a sub-subheading). *If you can't see the Paragraph drop down, click the [[TOGGLE]] button to open up the second row of buttons:*

[screenshot showing Paragraph drop down and the Toggle button highlighted]

Adding Subheadings in the WordPress Text Editor

1. Type your subheading into your blog post, on its own line.

2. Immediately before the subheading, type <h2> (or <h3> for a sub-subheading)

3. Immediately after the subheading, type </h2> (or </h3> for a sub-subheading).

All three methods will produce exactly the same result, so use whichever works best within your own workflow.

Subheadings take only moments to add to your post, and they're very simple to format – but they can make a huge difference to the reading experience.

Other Elements to Use Within Your Posts

In the final section of this module, I want to quickly take you through some other formatting elements you may want to try out.

All of these different elements are fairly simple ones, but they can be very handy. I'll introduce them briefly, then go through each in turn:

Bold text – used for emphasis

Italic text – for emphasis or for an aside

Horizontal line – for dividing one part of your post from another

"Read More" link – for splitting your post part-way so that only the first part appears on your home page / in your list of blog posts.

Bullet-pointed lists – for giving information in an easy-to-take-in format

Images – can be used at the start of your post, but also throughout it

Bold and Italic Text

Bold text is great for emphasising a key sentence or point. It's best used fairly sparingly: too much bold text (especially if you tend to use it on individual words or short phrases) can make your post look rather choppy.

Italic text is great for putting stress on an individual word (e.g. to distinguish between "what *was* Sam thinking?" and "what was *Sam* thinking?") You can also use italic text on a whole sentence or paragraph to set it aside a little from the rest of your text, as with the first line of this post (which I also put into a lighter font colour):

Note: This post was originally published in 2016, and was updated in June 2018.

Do your characters suffer enough?

Even if you're writing a light and fluffy romance, at some point, someone in your novel is going to need to get hurt.

I'm not suggesting all-out graphic torture here, obviously – unless that suits your genre. Suffering comes in a lot of different forms – and I'm going to go through a bunch of those in a moment.

Horizontal Line

Many bloggers don't know that this even exists, but it's a handy feature!

A horizontal line is a simple dividing line across your post. It can be really useful if you want to have a short section of text before the post itself, or after the post itself.

You might use this, for instance, if you want to begin your post with an announcement that isn't particularly related to it, or if you want to end it with a longer call to action (e.g. inviting people to join your newsletter) that's set off from the post.

[ADD EXAMPLE]

To create the line, simply click the Horizontal Line button on the WordPress toolbar, shown in the red box below:
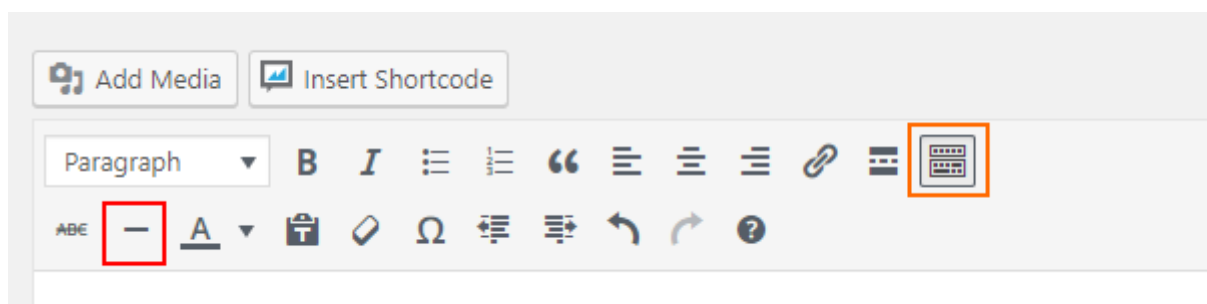
If you can't see that second row of buttons, click the "Toolbar Toggle" at the end of the top line (in the orange box above).

Alternatively, you can use the Text view to insert the HTML tag for a horizontal line, which is **<hr/>** (standing for "horizontal rule").

"Read More" Link

The "read more" link sometimes gets confused with the horizontal line – but they're two very different things.

The horizontal line is a visual marker but doesn't have any functional effect.

The read more line *doesn't* appear visually in your post itself, but it *does* have an important function. It splits your post into two parts. Only the first part, before the "read more" will appear on the homepage of your blog:

 On that home page, you'll see the "Continue reading", "Read more", or similar link that's created, but it won't be in your post itself when you open it up, as you can see:

> Over the last eight years, I've written hundreds (probably thousands!) of blog posts for dozens of different blogs.
>
> I've also written quite a bit about blogging. Today, I wanted to share five of my favourite pieces about blogging, all published here on Aliventures over the past couple of years:
>
> **Should Your Blog Have a Narrow or Broad Topic?**
>
> When I got into blogging ten years ago (yikes), the prevailing advice was to "choose a niche". Since then, many bloggers have realised that picking a *very* narrow
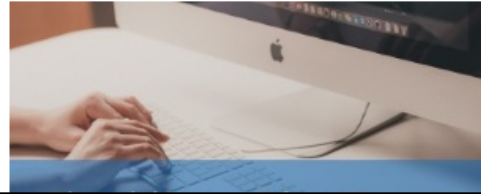
Bullet-Pointed Lists

In WordPress (and in almost any word processing program or blogging platform), you can create two types of lists:

- Unordered lists, normally using a little black dot as the bullet point (though you can change it to a different symbol if you prefer).
- Ordered lists, where each item on the list is numbered sequentially. WordPress (or Word, etc) automatically puts in the numbers … and renumbers everything if you insert an item mid-way.

Like bold text, lists *can* make your post look a bit choppy if you overuse them. I'd also avoid having really long lists, as they can be a bit much to take in: split your list into multiple categories if you need to.

It's fiddly to do lists with more than one paragraph per bullet point … but to be honest, I don't think it's very helpful to use bullet points if you're putting loads of information into each. Just use subheadings instead.

Within your list, all items should match. Here's a quick example to show what I mean:

In today's blog post, I'm going to teach you how to:

- *Buy your own domain name*
- *Buy hosting*
- *Setting up a WordPress blog*

That third bullet point should be "set up a WordPress blog", so that it matches other items on the list and (crucially) it works with the phrase that introduces the list – "teach you how to…"

Images

Back in Module #2, we very briefly mentioned that you might use an image as part of the introduction to your post. Many bloggers use images *only* in their introductions (or don't even use them at all) … but it can often be useful to include images within the main body of your post.

You can insert an image in WordPress using the "Media" uploader:

1. Click the "Add Media" button (just above the box where you write your post).
2. Click "Upload Files", and upload your image, or…
3. … use the "Media Library" to choose an image that you've already uploaded.
4. Click on the image and then click the blue "Insert into post" button (bottom right).

Images are particularly important if you're writing a "how to" style post, or something like a recipe where readers will want to *see* what they're aiming for.

They can also be very handy if you're linking to several different resources (like books or even blog posts or websites) – they add more visual interest to your post, and as we mentioned earlier in this module, you can use the images themselves as links. (To turn an image into a link, edit it and set a "custom URL" under "Link To".)

When you're choosing images for your blog, it's crucial that you *do not* simply search on Google Images for your topic.

That's so important I'll say it again: **do not search on Google (or any other search engine) for images.**

Many images online are copyrighted, and you don't have the right to republish them. You could face a hefty fine if you inadvertently use someone else's image without permission.

To be safe, you need to source images from a site that offers "creative commons" licensed work that you can use *commercially* (if your blog makes any money at all, or might make money in the future).

I use Pixabay for most of the images I use in my Aliventures blog post; Pexels is another good source.

As with other design elements, do try to use images consistently. For instance, if you have a long post with five subsections, you might use an image at the start of each subsection, and you might try to pick images that are reasonably similar (e.g. using photos each time, not a mix of photos and cartoons and screenshots).

Module #6: Recap

I know there's been a lot to take in here, so congratulations on making it through! You definitely don't need to master all these techniques at once, and you might only use one or two of them in any given post.

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

- **Quotes allow you to bring in other people's opinions and expertise.** They add greater depth to your posts, and can be used at any point (even in the title).
- **Links let you guide your readers to extra help and further resources.** You might link to your own posts, books, etc … or to someone else's. Linking to another blogger is a great way to do something nice!
- **Subheadings break up blog posts and offer "signposts" for your reader** – as well as making your post look more attractive to read. They're easy to create, but make sure you're using the correct level of subheading.
- **You can also use other features like bold and italic text, horizontal lines, "read more" links, and images** to make your posts easy for readers to engage with.

It can be tricky to get to grips with new formatting features, especially if you've not been blogging for very long. If you get stuck at any point, do come and ask for help in our Facebook group: **facebook.com/groups/blogonspring2018**

Module #6 Assignment and Check In

This week, your assignment is to write a blog post on any topic you like. It can be a classic post (Module #2) or a list post (Module #4).

Within your post, use *at least* one of the formatting options we covered in this module. Ideally, use more than one!

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

facebook.com/groups/blogon.spring2018/permalink/244108566367996

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 a draft 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 8th July**. (It's fine to check in even if you haven't quite finished your post.)

Module #6: 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.

The Why, How and When of Using Quotations on Your Blog, Ali Luke, ProBlogger

This post (by yours truly) goes into a fair bit of detail about *why* you'll want to use quotes and offers suggestions for how best to use them. I also give some ideas for types of posts you could create using lots of quotes.

How to Use Subheadings to Add Structure to Your Blog Posts [podcast], Ali Luke, ProBlogger

This podcast episode on ProBlogger features me, talking about subheadings. I explain why you should use them, how to use them well, and offer a couple of examples and some technical tips as well.

A Guide on Where to Find Photos and Images for Your Blog, Ramsay Taplin, Blog Tyrant

This is a huge and comprehensive post all about sourcing and using images on your blog. It goes into a bit more detail than most bloggers need, so feel free to skim-read it and focus on the parts that are most helpful to you.

What's Coming Up Next Week:
Module #7: Blog Pages: Services, Products, and Recommendations

Next week, from Monday 9th July, we'll be looking at key pages on your blog. We'll go through the crucial differences between posts and pages, and how to know which you should use when.

We'll take a look at three different types of page you might create: a "services" page (where you offer, for example, freelancing services); a "products" page (where you might promote your books); and a "recommended resources" page (which is a really useful page for *any* blog to have).

Module #7: Blog Pages: Services, Products, and Recommendations

In this week's module, we're taking a look at some important pages you might create for your blog. We'll start off by discussing the difference between *posts* and *pages*, then we'll take a look at three types of pages you might create.

If you're selling something to your readers, a Services or Products page makes sense – and even if you're not yet selling something, you might want to consider this for the future. If you're running a hobbyist blog where you don't intend to make money, a Recommended Resources page is a great option.

We're covering a lot of ground in this module, and I'm going to run through things fairly quickly. If there's anything you're unsure about, or if you want more advice on a particular area, just ask in our Facebook group:

www.facebook.com/groups/blogonspring2018

(Or feel free to email me – ali@aliventures.com.)

What's the Difference Between a Post and a Page?

WordPress, and other blogging platforms, allow you to create both "posts" and "pages".

If you're new to blogging, it might not be clear why "pages" exist at all, or you might think it doesn't matter whether you publish content as a post or a page.

There are some important differences, though, and I wanted to cover those before we get further into the module. (If you're already confident about the difference between posts and pages, feel free to skip this section!)

A post is a piece of dated content that appears in your list of blog posts. Normally, posts show up in reverse chronological order (most recent first) on your homepage, or on a dedicated "blog" page.

Your posts will also appear in your blog's archives, if you have an archive list, and in your category lists (if you click on a category's name on your blog, you should see all the posts in that category).

A page is undated content that does *not* appear in your list of blog posts. You won't see it on your homepage, in your archive, or in your categories list. (Pages don't have a category.)

Depending on your blog's setup, the title of your page might automatically appear in your navigation menu, or you might have to add it yourself.

So why do these two different types of content exist?

Most of what you publish on your blog will be regular content: posts that you put out there every week or month.

Sometimes, though, you'll want to publish more "static" content – something that it doesn't really make sense to fix to a particular date. We've already covered Contact pages (Module 3) and About pages (Module 5), which are great examples.

If you're feeling puzzled about anything here, or if you're unsure whether to publish a particular piece of content as a post or a page, just ask in the Facebook group:

www.facebook.com/groups/blogonspring2018

Now that you're (hopefully!) clear about posts and pages, here's a big question to ask yourself:

Should You Sell a Service or a Product to Your Readers?

Back in Module 1, we looked at your reasons for blogging. If an important reason for you is to make money, then you'll almost certainly need a services or products page in order to do that.

Even if making money isn't your main motivator, having a services or products page still might make sense. For instance, if you blog in order to raise your profile in your niche, writing a book to sell could help you look more credible.

You might have been thinking about making money through affiliate links (promoting other people's products) or through running ads on your blog. While those are both possible options, for most bloggers, selling products and/or services directly is a much faster way to make a steady income.

Selling your own product or service means that:

- You'll be getting 100% of the profit.
- Readers will be more engaged with your blog – rather than leaving your site (after clicking an advert or an affiliate link).
- Readers will be more likely to buy (whereas they might not be interested in affiliate promotions). They trust you and like your blog already.

"Services" and "products" can cover a huge range of different things, and we'll be going through some examples as we work through this module. We're going to tackle services pages first, then products pages, so I thought it'd be helpful to take a look at how they differ.

Services involve your direct input. For instance, if you're a photographer, you might offer photo shoots: you need to be physically present! If you're a writer, you might offer freelance copywriting.

Products take time to create, but then can be purchased with little or no input from you. For instance, if you're an author, you might spend a year writing a novel – but then hundreds of people can buy it at any time of the day or night. You don't need to get involved in the sales process.

Neither is "better" or "worse": services allow you to start making money straight away (rather than spending hours creating something up-front) – but products are more scalable (you could sell 100 books in a day).

We're going to look at services first, going through some examples of services pages and how to write yours, then we're going to dig into products.

> **Note:** If you have no interest at all in offering a service or selling a product at this point in time, that's fine! Skip to the section on "Recommended Resources pages", which begins on page 22 of this module.

Choosing a Service to Offer

What sort of service could you provide?

You might already have something in mind – or you might well already be underway with coaching, freelancing, or some other type of service.

If not, though, there are plenty of possibilities. If you're a writer, for instance, you might consider:

- **Copywriting:** producing advertising copy for businesses – these could be tiny or huge
- **Article writing:** writing for magazines or blogs
- **Editing or proofreading:** taking someone else's writing and helping to shape and polish it – this could be anything from a blog post to a novel
- **Coaching:** if you're already an established writer, or have a particular area of writing expertise

Coaching and consulting can work in many different areas: the bloggers I know include a life coach (Tim Brownson), a business / executive coach (Barry Demp), a coach for tiny businesses (Naomi Dunford), a coach for academics (Jo VanEvery) and many more!

You might want to spend a bit of time brainstorming some ideas. Ask yourself:

- What services could I offer?
- Which of these would I enjoy doing?

If you're already promoting a service, you might think about:

- Is there a way I could change this to make it an even better fit for me / my readers?
- Is there something else I'd like to offer as well as (or instead of) this service?

Creating a Services Page

Once you've decided what you're going to offer to your audience, you need to tell them about it! That's where your Services page comes in.

Your Services page might be called "Services", but it could be called something quite different – e.g. "Freelance Writing" or "Coaching" or "What I Do" or "How Can I Help You?"

The title on the page itself doesn't necessarily have to match what you have in your navigation menu.

Whatever you call it, there are a few key elements you'll want to include … and you might find it helpful to draft or outline these bit by bit before you create the page itself:

- A clear, high-level statement of what you do
- Your (relevant) qualifications or experience
- An explanation of who you work with
- Clear descriptions of each service you offer
- What your services cost

I know all of that might look a bit daunting (worse than writing an About page, even!) Don't worry – we're going to run through each of these and take a look at some examples of what other bloggers are doing.

The examples we'll be using are:

Jane Friedman's "Publishing Consultant" page
(labelled as "Work with Jane" in the navigation)

Charlie Gilkey's "Services" page

Joel Friedlander's "Consulting" page

Jo Van Every's "Services" page

We'll only be looking at small parts of each of these pages, but if you have time, do read them in full. Each one works a bit differently, and all are good examples of ways in which you might set up a Services page.

Element #1: A Clear, High-Level Statement of What You Do

It can be helpful to have a short, clear statement about what you do near the start of your Services page. Imagine someone has clicked on your Services page with only a very hazy idea of who you are (perhaps a friend sent them there).

Jane Friedman's "Publishing Consultant" page, for instance, starts like this:

> **Publishing Consultant**
>
> With more than 20 years of experience in the business of publishing and media, I can help you make smart decisions about your publishing and digital media strategy, and position you for long-term growth.

This is a clear, direct statement about what Jane offers (neatly incorporating her key credentials). It's also obvious from this – and from the list of services she offers, which appears beneath it – that she works with self-publishing authors.

Element #2: Your Relevant Qualifications or Experience

Hopefully, you've got some qualifications or experience that relate to the service you offer. (If not, you might want to have a rethink about what you're providing…)

You don't need to give a long list of qualifications here, or exhaustively detail every single project you've worked on in the past … but you do need to make it clear to your potential clients that you know what you're talking about. Here's a good example from Charlie Gilkey's "Services" page:

> I've worked with hundreds of business owners, leaders, and entrepreneurs on exactly those areas of focus. I help people build businesses that work better – for them, their teammates, their customers, and their ecosystems.
>
> Along the way, I've written a best-selling book that shows how to navigate the different life cycles of business growth, given scores of presentations to business owners in a variety of settings, and shared strategies, methods, and techniques for making better businesses.

Charlie explains what he does, and how much experience he has doing it (he's worked with "hundreds" of people and given "scores" of presentations).

You might not have Charlie's years of experience yet … but you could still talk about things like:

- Any relevant qualifications (e.g. your degree)
- Work you've done in the past (many freelancers will link to pieces as part of a portfolio)
- Your hands-on experience (for instance, if you coach parents and you have five kids, that's definitely worth mentioning!)

Remember that something that might seem fairly ordinary or mundane to you could be quite impressive to someone else.

Element #3: An Explanation of Who You Work With

Your Services page should make it clear who you work with. You might do this explicitly ("I help small business owners create great content for their blogs") or you might do it by writing to the potential client as "you".

Here's what Joel Friedlander does on his Consulting page:

- Are you thinking about publishing your own book?

- Do you want to get in on this work-at-home business but don't know how?

- Do you have a book you think will sell but don't know what to do with it?

- Do you want to become a print on demand publisher but you're holding back because the way it works is very confusing?

Bullet points can be very effective on Services pages (and any type of page where you're selling something) as they let people skim and instantly pick out the parts that are relevant to them.

Using bullet points doesn't mean dumbing down, either. Jo Van Every uses them on her Services page to take a look at some quite complex struggles that her potential clients might be facing:

- You want to be writing more and aren't sure how you find the time to do that given all the other demands.

- You are approaching burnout and realize there must be a more sustainable way to walk this path.

- You are under pressure to increase your research activity in some specific way and you struggle to see how to meet those demands.

- You feel uncomfortable with the things you "should" be doing but aren't quite sure what that means or how to articulate the discomfort, much less an alternative.

- You are wondering if this is all there is. The vision you had isn't serving you any more and you're not sure where to go next.

Element #4: A Clear Description of Each Service

You might only offer one service, in which case this is fairly straightforward: tell readers what you do!

Joel Friedlander does this in his typically straightforward fashion on his Consulting page, where he sells a single service (with a 30 / 60 minute option).

Here's what you'll get:

- Analysis of your book or your concept, if you don't have a manuscript yet
- Recommendations of how to produce your book, including specific vendor referrals
- Cost estimate of your book production
- Either a 30- or a 60-minute phone consultation in which we'll address all your questions. Afterward, I'll send you an MP3 recording of our conversation so you can review it any time you want. That way you don't have to get distracted by taking notes while we're talking.
- You'll also get a "plain talk" evaluation of your book or concept. No fluff and no flattery, just an informed opinion that gives you specific things you can do to move to the next step in your publishing journey.

Of course, many bloggers end up offering several different services, or different packages: if that's you, you'll need to give at least brief details of what each of these involves.

It'll often make sense to create a separate page for each service – so your main "Services" page acts a bit like an introduction or an index. This is very much the case with Jane Friedman's "Publishing Consultant" page:

Element #5: What Your Services Cost

You don't *have* to include your pricing on your Services page. Many people don't, particularly if they have a complicated scale of fees or if they'll need to customize their quote to each specific project.

If you have a standard service, though (like an hour-long coaching call on Skype), it makes sense to give the price up-front. If you don't, people may assume it's going to be too expensive … or they may contact you expecting it to be cheap, and waste your time trying to bargain you down.

Here's how Joel Friedlander explains his pricing:

> The cost is $350 for a 60-minute consultation, or $175 for a 30-minute consultation. Compare that to the $2,000 – $50,000 paid by competitive self-publishing authors to get their books into print. Having the right plan in place can make a huge difference.

If you can't give an exact price, it might make sense to give a range. E.g. "I normally charge $60 - $90 for a 1,000 word blog post, depending on how much research is required."

When it comes to taking payment, the easiest way is to set up a PayPal account. You can either create a button on your page that people can click to pay or you can let them get in touch with you first, then send them a "money request" or a more formal invoice.

Your customers can pay with a credit card through PayPal, without needing a PayPal account, in most cases.

What Tone Should You Use for Your Services Page?

You'll want your services page to be in keeping with the rest of your blog (so don't make it very stuffy and formal if you're normally incredibly laid back in your writing style). It's important, though, that you're as clear as possible, and that you sound confident!

If you get stuck, here are a few phrases and sentences you might like to try:

> *I'm an experienced …*
>
> *I can help you to …*
>
> *When you hire me, you don't just get [basic description of your service]. You also get someone who'll [explain how you can go further].*
>
> *Most of my clients are …*
>
> *If you are …*
>
> *I work with …*

> *My services include …*
>
> *As well as the above services, I'm happy to put together a custom package to suit your needs. Just drop me an email and let me know what you're thinking of.*

Obviously, it's important to proofread and watch out for typos – especially if you're offering any kind of writing-related service.

I highly recommend asking someone to read through the page, so that they can point out any areas which weren't clear. Something that seems obvious to you might not be at all obvious to a potential client.

Feel free to share your draft Services page in the Facebook group, so we can give you some feedback.

Creating a Products Page

Note: you might hear this type of page called a "landing page" or "sales page".

If you're selling a product, rather than a service, there are a few things you'll be doing differently.

Your focus will be on what the customer will get rather than on what you can offer. Your qualifications and experience still matter – but you might not need to mention them particularly prominently, depending on what type of product you've created.

Another key difference is that, with services, you'll normally be handling payments yourself. When you're selling a product, there'll almost always be a third party involved.

For instance, if you're an author, your Products page might link to your books on Amazon – where your customers can buy them. Even if you sell ebooks through your own site (like I do with my Blogger's Guides), you'll need a way for customers to get the file even if they buy in the middle of the night. I use Payhip to handle payments and deliver the Blogger's Guide files.

Products pages vary a lot, depending on what you're selling. A novelist with a dozen books out there will have a very different products page from someone selling a self-study ecourse about blogging.

I'm sure it goes without saying, but actually calling your page "Products" will probably look a bit weird! If you have several products, something like "Shop", "Store", or "Books" should work. For individual products, you can just title their pages with the title of the product itself.

Generally, you'll need a separate page for each product, giving full details, plus (if you have more than two products) your main "Products" page that links to them all.

What Product Might You Sell?

At this point, you might already have a particular product – or even several products – lined up to sell. (Or you might be actively working on them.) Maybe you're an author, and you're blogging to promote your books, for instance.

"Products" can be either digital or physical.

Digital products can be supplied electronically, as a download. They might be ebooks, worksheets, audio files, videos … anything that can be sent over the internet.

Physical products are ones that have to be sent to a customer's mailing address. They could be almost anything, from paperback books to individually hand-crafted items. (Physical products might also contain the same content as digital ones: think ebooks vs paperback books, or MP3 downloads vs CDs.)

Digital products are easiest to get started with, because you don't have to keep inventory (or pay someone else to) and you don't have the same overheads as with physical products.

However, it could make sense to begin with a physical product if you want to sell something like handcrafted goods (probably via Etsy).

You might want to start brainstorming some product ideas before we move on. **What could you sell from *your* blog? What would your audience find useful?**

We're going to look at a couple of different products pages in this part of the module:

The "Creating Character Arcs" page on Helping Writers Become Authors

The "How to Market a Book" page on The Creative Penn (and the **"Books" page**)

I'm going to pull out specific examples from these pages, but if you've got time, I recommend reading through both of them to see how they're put together.

Creating a Product Page for a Single Product

Each of your products should normally have its own separate page, so customers can get details about that specific product – rather than having to scroll down a long page that lists all your products.

(When you're starting out, you probably only have one product anyway!)

There's no one "right" way to structure your page, but normally, you'll want the following elements at some point:

- An explanation of what your product is
- A brief summary of your credentials
- Bullet points explaining the key benefits of your product
- The price of your product, plus a "buy" button

Element #1: An Explanation of What Your Product Is

Unless it's super-obvious, make sure you explain what your product actually *is* at some point on your page. If there are multiple options for buying it (e.g. book vs ebook; one-off vs monthly subscription), make that clear too.

You can potentially do this with a single sentence or even just a few words. For instance, on Joanna Penn's page for her book How to Market a Book, she has:

> Buy now in ebook, print or audiobook format!

Element #2: A Brief Summary of Your Credentials

On a page about your services, your qualifications and experience matter quite a lot because that's essentially what someone's buying from you!

With products, the product itself is what they're interested in – but your credentials for creating or writing it do still matter.

You don't have to go into a lot of detail (assuming that you have more information about who you are elsewhere on your site, like on your About page). For instance, K.M. Weiland has this on her <u>Creating Character Arcs page</u>:

> Internationally published, award-winning novelist K.M. Weiland shares her acclaimed method for achieving memorable and moving character arcs in every book you write.

Element #3: Bullet Points Explaining the Key Benefits of Your Product

Bullet points are easy for readers to skim and they can be a great way to give an overview of what your book includes, or what your product involves.

Here's how Joanna Penn does it:

In this completely updated Third Edition, you'll discover:

- **Part 1: Marketing Principles**
  Book marketing myths, how discoverability works, and the polarities of marketing that will determine what you choose to implement
- **Part 2: Your Book Fundamentals**
  Prerequisites for success, how to optimise your book for online sales, categories and keywords, exclusivity, pricing and use of free, box-sets and bundling, and writing series
- **Part 3: No Platform Needed. Short-term Marketing**
  How to get customer reviews and find book bloggers, paid advertising with email blasts, paid advertising with Facebook, Amazon Ads and ad stacking, algorithm hacking, big data, and production speed
- **Part 4: Your Author Platform. Long-term Marketing**
  Building an author brand, author website, list-building and email marketing, content marketing, blogging, audio and podcasting, video and book trailers, social networking, professional speaking, marketing audiobooks, PR and publicity, TV, radio and traditional media
- **Part 5: Launching Your Book**
  Why launching is different for indie authors, soft launch, launch spikes, post launch, how to relaunch backlist books. Includes an example book marketing strategy and launch plan checklist.

You don't necessarily need to give a full list of everything that's included: depending on your product, a list of the key highlights might be fine.

K.M. Weiland has this:

> This comprehensive book will teach you:
>
> - How to determine which arc—positive, negative, or flat—is right for your character.
> - Why you should NEVER pit plot against character. Instead, learn how to blend story structure and character development.
> - How to recognize and avoid the worst pitfalls of writing novels without character arcs.
> - How to hack the secret to using overarching character arcs to create amazing trilogies and series.
> - And much more!

Element #4: The Price of Your Product, Plus a "Buy" Button

When you're offering services, you don't *have* to give the price, though I'd recommend it. With a product, though, you definitely need to tell people how much it costs.

Sometimes, it makes sense to include the price next to a "buy" button: this is what Joanna Penn and K.M. Weiland do. This works for something that's a low, fairly standard price, like a book – readers aren't going to get to this point and suddenly be shocked at how much it costs.

(from Joanna Penn's How to Market a Book page)

(from K.M. Weiland's Creating Character Arcs page)

If you have a product that's something a bit more unusual, like a downloadable premium ebook with worksheets and printables, you'll probably want to mention the price a bit earlier on the page to help put it into context.

Creating a "Shop" or "Store" Page for Multiple Products
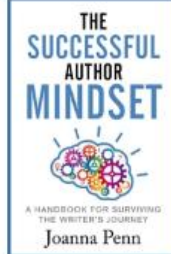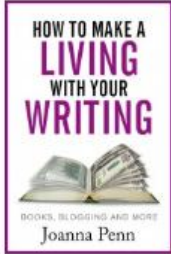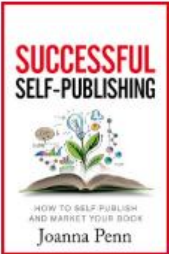
If you have several different products to sell, it makes sense to create a "Shop" or "Store" page where you can list them all. You don't need to go into much detail about your products on this page – some authors with lots of books, for instance, just give the covers. Each product in the Shop / Store should be linked to a more detailed page, though.
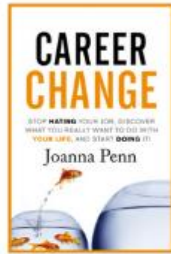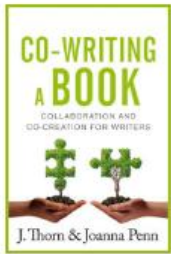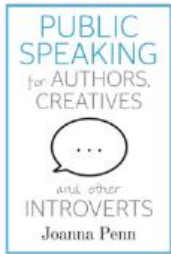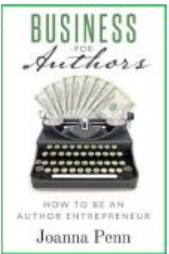
(from Joanna Penn's Books page)

Once you have more than a couple of products, I think it makes sense to list them together on one page and have one link in the navigation menu.

If you just have one or two products, you can simply give them a page each, and link to those pages in your navigation.

Testimonials and Reviews

One huge area that we haven't covered yet is that of testimonials and reviews – other people's words about your services or products.

When you're just starting out with a particular product or service, you probably won't have any testimonials or reviews yet! That's fine, but it's a good idea to encourage some as soon as possible – they'll really make a difference to your sales.

Testimonials vs Reviews: What's the Difference?

A testimonial is something nice someone says about you, your service or your product. You probably emailed them asking them if they'd write one, and they obliged! You then published their words on your website or Amazon page.

A review might also be something nice, but it could potentially be critical. You may or may not have solicited it. On sites like Amazon, customers can publish reviews without your consent or involvement.

Getting Testimonials

The best way to get a testimonial is to ... ask. Let's say you write blog posts for clients. If you've already done this work for someone (even for free), ask them to write you a testimonial.

Whenever I've asked for testimonials, people have been overwhelmingly happy to oblige. But in ten years of working for myself, I don't think anyone's ever emailed with a testimonial out of the blue! It's just not something that people tend to think of doing, unless you ask.

If someone's already written something that might work as a testimonial (like a "thank you!" email to you), you can ask their permission to quote from it on your site.

Getting Reviews

If you've written a book, particularly if it's a novel, short story collection or book of poetry, then it'd be a bit weird to ask for a testimonial. You can ask for an honest review, though; most authors will offer a free copy in exchange for this.

Once you have reviews on Amazon or Goodreads (or wherever your books are listed / sold), you can quote from them on your website and in your marketing materials.

Using Testimonials and Reviews on Your Site

Different bloggers display testimonials and reviews in a wide variety of ways … and it's up to you exactly how you use yours.
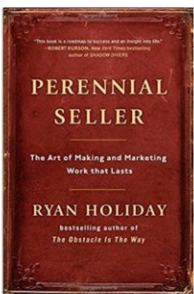
These are just a few things you might want to keep in mind:

- With testimonials (that typically aren't published elsewhere), it's a great idea to link to the person's Twitter profile or website, to help prove they exist! If the person gives permission, you could also use their photograph.
- With Amazon reviews or Goodreads reviews that you're quoting on your website, you might want to link to the original.
- If you have a *lot* of testimonials, you might want to have a specific page on your site for them, or you might want to select different ones for different pages (e.g. you could include a testimonial on your About page, if your main aim is to encourage potential clients to hire you).

Here are a few examples of testimonials and reviews in action, from some of the sites we've looked at in this module:

Example #1: From **How to Market a Book**, Joanna Penn, The Creative Penn

Joanna includes lots of reviews on her page (which are more like testimonials, really, because many of them focus on Joanna herself rather than the book). She's included images of the reviewers' books, or photos of them, to help add visual interest and to prove that these people exist!

She's also put key sentences in bold – which is a good move when you have a lot of reviews or testimonials.

Example #2: From Query Letter and Synopsis Critiques, Jane Friedman, JaneFriedman.com

On Jane's pages about her individual services, she includes testimonials down the right-hand side:

This helps the testimonials to stand out – without having them interrupt the text of the page itself. Linking to people's websites and books (where available) helps to show that the testimonials are authentic, too.

Example #3: From **3x Your Business without 10x'ing Your Headaches**, Charlie Gilkey, Productive Flourishing

Like Joanna, Charlie includes images of the various people giving the testimonials, and puts key points in bold. He includes the URLs of websites as text (not as links): I suspect this is a deliberate choice to show that these people exist, without distracting readers who might click on the links!

The images are all the same width and all on the left-hand side of the testimonials, which I think makes this section look quite neat (I'd personally like a bit more whitespace in between the testimonials, though).

Creating a Recommended Resources Page

Finally – I know this has been a long module! – we come to the Recommended Resources page.

This is a great page for almost any type of blog, whether you're aiming to make money, build a reputation, or simply enjoy blogging as a hobby. It will be:

- Useful for your readers – helping them find resources that they'd enjoy.
- A good way to showcase your knowledge of your topic area.
- Potentially a way to bring in money (if you're using affiliate links).

The one drawback to a Recommended Resources page is that it points people away from your site.

Once your blog gets quite large, with a number of services / products of your own, you might prefer to remove the link to your Recommended Resources page from your menu or sidebar to keep the focus on your own products.

What Does a "Recommended Resources" Page Look Like?

Your Recommended Resources page is essentially a list of books / blogs / software / etc (whatever's appropriate for your topic area) that you recommend.

Depending on the length of your list and how you want to arrange your page, you might:

- Divide your list into different sections (e.g. blogs separately from books).
- Use images – e.g. book covers – in addition to, or instead of, text.
- Give a brief review or summary of the different resources.

Here's a straightforward example, from Jane Friedman's Recommended Resources page:

Recommended Resources

Updated April 2018

I've probably read, reviewed, or at least seen every single advice book, website, and service for writers. I could recommend dozens of resources, but I'll focus on the most helpful for early-career writers.

The Best of My Advice

- For free: Jane's Writing Advice Archive
- In book form: *The Business of Being a Writer*
- Learn about my paid services.

Also, I've created a list of my favorite books on writing and publishing.

High-Level Editing and Coaching

- Writer and editor Andi Cumbo offers a wide range of budget-friendly services for all types of writers. I recommend her manuscript review, where you can get big-picture feedback before investing in a comprehensive editing job.
- Nell Boeschenstein is a creative writing professor and extensively published freelancer who offers editing and coaching services for nonfiction writers—including memoir, family history, and narrative nonfiction.
- Whether you're writing a novel, seeking a ghostwriter, or looking to publish a book from your nonfiction expertise, Stuart Horwitz of Book Architecture can help.

(Note that you don't need to call your page "Recommended Resources" – it could be something like "My Favourite Books" or "Reviews".)

Using Affiliate Links

If your main reason for blogging is to make money, I don't recommend using affiliate links as your main focus – you'll need a lot of readers to bring in money that way. But there's no reason not to use them at all!

Even if you're not particularly interested in making money blogging, you might find it's useful to include affiliate links to make a little bit of money – it can offset your hosting costs, or allow you to justify buying a premium theme for your blog.

What is an Affiliate Link?

An affiliate link is a special link (URL) to a product or service page, e.g. a book's sales page on Amazon.

When someone follows that link, they're "tagged" with your affiliate ID. This means that any purchases they make are credited to you. You'll receive a percentage of what they spend – this could be 5% or less on Amazon, or 50% or more on some bloggers' digital products or online courses. For instance, I offer 50% commission on my Blogger's Guides.

To get the special affiliate link, you'll need to sign up for an affiliate program. This might be through a big site like Amazon, or through a third-party retailer like Payhip or E-junkie – these allow bloggers to sell products.

What Should You Include on Your Recommended Resources List?

Unless you're framing your list as reviews – in which case it might be appropriate to review things you *didn't* like as well as ones you did! – you should only recommend resources that you've (a) used yourself and (b) liked.

Most affiliate programmes allow you to sign up without having bought the product or service in question – but I'd caution against recommending things that you haven't tried out first-hand.

To start creating a Recommended Resources list, I'd suggest thinking about these questions. Keep in mind that your resources should be on-topic for your blog, so if you write a blog about parenting, it's unlikely to make sense to recommend a web hosting company!

- What books have you read and enjoyed? You could list those and link to them on Amazon. (You might want to write a short review or summary, too, but you don't have to.)
- What online tools have you used – like apps or websites?
- Is there any equipment that you'd recommend? (E.g. if I blogged about parenting, there are lots of things I could recommend – from bottles and weaning spoons to our kids' favourite toys!)
- What blogs do you regularly read?

Your list doesn't need to be long. You can easily add to and update it over time – and a very long list will probably be overwhelming for readers, anyway.

Module #7: Recap

I know this module has covered a lot of ground! Please don't feel that you need to rush to create the perfect Services / Product / Recommended page straight away – you can always make some notes at this stage and return to the module when you're ready.

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

- **Selling your own services and/or products is the fastest way to make money from your blog.** Services will bring in money more quickly, with less upfront work – but products are more scalable.
- **Service pages can look very different from one another**. What matters is that they clearly explain what you offer, who you work with, and what people will get.
- **Individual product pages should explain what your product is and how much it costs**. You'll need to give readers a link to buy the product, too (whether that's directly from you or from a site like Amazon or Etsy).
- **If you have three or more products, it makes sense to bring them together on a "Shop" page** (or "Store", "Books", etc). You can list your products, potentially give brief details about each, and link to their more detailed page.
- **Recommended Resources pages** can be a great fit for almost any type of blog. They're simple to put together, you can add to them over time, and you can use them as a source of income (through affiliate links).

There's been a lot to take in here, particularly if you're looking at creating your first Services or Products page. If you're stuck at any point, do come and ask for help in our Facebook group:

facebook.com/groups/blogonspring2018

Module #7 Assignment and Check In

This week, your assignment is to draft a Services, Product, or Recommended Resources page.

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

facebook.com/groups/blogon.spring2018/permalink/250922302353289

If you're publishing your page, do share the link to your page with us, so we can check it out. If it's just a draft for now, feel free to upload it to the Facebook group as a Word document, .pdf or whatever suits you.

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 15th July**. (It's fine to check in even if you haven't finished drafting your page.)

Module #7: 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.

The Differences Between Posts and Pages in WordPress, Bon Dunn, BobWP

This post gives a great summary of the difference between pages and posts, with screenshots highlighting the key technical differences. If you're still feeling a bit unsure how posts and pages work, give it a read.

How to Write a Sales Page that Converts Like Crazy, Sharon Hurley Hall, OptinMonster

This is a long, in-depth post about sales pages (geared towards products, but a lot of this would also apply to selling a service) – you might want to skim read it at this point, but it's a good one to bookmark to come back to as you add more products or services to your website.

How to Create a Killer Resource Page (That's Crazy Profitable), Matt McWilliams, MattMcWilliams.com

While this is very much geared towards bloggers using their Resources page to generate affiliate income, there are useful tips here whatever type of blogging you do – and examples of resources pages that Matt thinks are working well.

What's Coming Up Next Week:

Module #8: Creating a Content Calendar Packed with Great Ideas

Our final week, from Monday 16th July, is all about setting you up for a great few weeks of blogging *after* Blog On! You'll learn about content calendars and how to create yours.

Along the way, you'll be coming up with ideas, figuring out which ones will work best, and writing brief plans so you can test out your idea before committing to writing about it.

Module #8: Creating a Content Calendar Packed with Great Ideas

In this week's module, we're looking at content calendars, ideas and planning: by the time you've finished the module and completed the assignment, you'll be in a great position to move forward with your blog over the next few weeks and months.

We'll also cover a specific framework for producing blog posts, using "batch production" – this can make the whole writing process much easier, and I hope you'll find it as useful a technique as I do!

This is our final module, and it's designed to give you the tools and techniques you need to keep blogging after Blog On. If you're stuck at any point, or if you have *any* blogging questions (they don't need to relate to this module), just ask in our Facebook group:

www.facebook.com/groups/blogonspring2018

(Or feel free to email me – ali@aliventures.com.)

What's a Content Calendar … and Why Might You Want One?

A content calendar is simply a list of upcoming dates, and posts that you plan to publish on those dates.

Here's how mine looked for June:

June

Week commencing	Blog post (Monday)	Newsletter main article (Thursday)	Notes/other
4th June	Choosing the Right Viewpoint and Tense for Your Fiction (repost) http://www.aliventures.com/choosing-viewpoint-fiction/	(7th) X ways to find support with your writing (online groups, including the Parent Writer group, local groups, classes/courses, local library, existing network/friends).	
11th June	X things to do before you start freelancing (e.g. get a professional email address, set up PayPal)	(14th) X techniques for quickly planning the novel scene you're about to write	
18th June	How to Make Your Characters Suffer (repost) http://www.aliventures.com/make-characters-suffer	(21st) Why is fiction so hard to write well?	Launch of advanced fiction & editing packs -- $9.99 for two weeks
25th June	The Right Way to Expand a Too-Short Piece of Writing (repost) http://www.aliventures.com/too-short-writing	(28th) X five-minute jobs to spruce up your blog or website	

Whatever type of blog you have, a content calendar (sometimes called an editorial calendar) can be useful. Even if your blog is very much a personal journal where you write about whatever's on your mind, you can still use a content calendar to help you stay on track.

Your content calendar could be as simple as a few prompts of what you want to write about:

4th June – Viewpoint & tense

11th June – Beginner freelancing tips

At the other end of the scale, you could create a content calendar that goes far beyond just listing dates and post titles, by including the category for the post, potential tags, notes for what you want to write in the post itself, and more.

Great Reasons to Use a Content Calendar

A content calendar:

- Helps you plan ahead with your blogging – making it much easier to post consistently, without having to scrabble around for ideas.
- Lets you see a whole month's worth of posts at once (perhaps more!) – which means you can think about the bigger picture of your blog, rather than just thinking about individual posts.
- Highlights potential problems (like having several posts on one narrow topic in a row) and opportunities (like a natural chance to promote one of your products).
- Means you can let readers know what's coming up, if you want to. This can be particularly helpful if you're running a series of linked posts.
- Makes it easier to work with guest posters: you can set aside specific slots for guests posts in your content calendar, and you'll be able to let them know when their post will run.
- Lets you outsource work more easily to an assistant. For instance, you might plan several posts ahead, then you can give the titles / topics to your assistant and ask them to source suitable images for your posts.

All of this sounds great … but the reality is that lots of bloggers *don't* use content calendars! If you're not sure it's worth it for you, perhaps you're thinking:

"Creating a content calendar will take too long." Obviously, sitting down and putting together a content calendar takes a bit of time (especially if you're coming up with post ideas as part of the process). But I find that spending 20 minutes once a month on my content calendar makes it so much easier to write blog posts and newsletter articles for the rest of the month!

"A content calendar means I can't be spontaneous with my blog posts." Your content calendar isn't set in stone! I often move a post or two around during the month, or change a topic for something else entirely. It's fine to adjust your plan as you're going along.

Four Options for Creating Your Content Calendar

There are lots of ways in which you might create a content calendar. What's important is that you pick something that feels easy and natural for you: something you'll actually use. For many bloggers, that means keeping it simple, using a spreadsheet or document – or even a sheet of paper!

If you already enjoy working with a software tool like Trello, for instance, then you might want to use that for your content calendar. Don't sign up for a new app or tool just to create a content calendar, though: you'll spend a lot of time learning how to use it and not so much time actually planning your blog posts!

Good options are:

#1: A document or similar – you could use a Word document, Google docs, or Evernote (which is what I use for my content calendar). I like to create a table for my content calendar so that it's easy to leave blanks and to juggle things around.

#2: A spreadsheet – this is useful if you want to keep track of several pieces of information for each post (e.g. if you want to include your intended category, other blog posts to link to, and so on).

#3: A physical notebook – if your notebook is big enough to fit a month's worth of blog posts onto one page or view, this could work well. You might find that it's easier to think about your blog posts without distractions when you're not at the computer, too.

#4: A WordPress plugin – the "Editorial Calendar" plugin for WordPress allows you to create a content calendar. These have never been a good fit for me because I like to draft in Word rather than directly into WordPress, so I only login to my blog when it's time to actually upload a post! But if you write your posts in WordPress, you might find a plugin suits you.

Of course, you don't have to stick to one of these options forever! If you're short on time right now, you might want to start out with something very simple and straightforward, like a sheet of paper where you list your posts for the month, then move on to a different method once you've tried that for a month or two.

Filling Your Content Calendar With Ideas

I tend to come up with ideas separately from putting them into my content calendar: I like to generate ideas without thinking about where exactly they're going to fit, what other posts they might link to, or even whether they're workable at all!

While you could come up with all your ideas while staring at your blank content calendar, you'll probably find it easier to brainstorm them before you begin to figure out which idea goes where. Which leads me on to …

Coming Up With Great Ideas

There's no magic way to come up with ideas for your blog … but I find all of these help me to get my brain in gear!

Note: each idea could be a fairly general topic ("writing a short story") or it could be a working title ("Ten Tips for Writing a Great Short Story"). Either is fine: I tend to think in titles these days, after ten years of blogging (!) but if you'd rather come up with ideas and fix a title at a later stage, there's nothing wrong with that.

#1: Write a List
Sit down with a notebook / blank document and start listing ideas. Don't worry if your first few feel forced or a bit silly … just keep going and you'll soon hit on some good ideas. I find it helps to think of this as a process: I'm not aiming for a specific outcome straight away (like "ten perfect ideas"), instead, the act of listing ideas means I'll eventually hit on some good ones!

#2: Think Like a Beginner
This isn't appropriate for every blog, but if you're writing about a particular topic (like gardening, parenting, photography, etc), it can help to think like a beginner. What questions did you have when you were new to this? What was worrying you or confusing you? Could you write a post that would help someone else who's in the same position?

#3: Use Some "Fill in the Blanks" Titles

Another way to come up with ideas is to take some ready-written titles and fill them in to suit your blog. Here's a list you could start off with:

- Ten … Ways to … (e.g. "Ten Powerful Ways to Start Your Next Blog Post")
- How to … (and Why You'll Want To) (e.g. "How to Start a Blog (and Why You'll Want To)")
- How I … and How You Could Too (e.g. "How I Retired at 40 … and How You Could Too")
- Five Lessons Learned from Five Years of … (e.g. "Five Lessons Learned from Five Years of Freelancing")
- The Biggest Mistake … Make with …. (e.g. "The Biggest Mistake Writers Make With Marketing")

There's no copyright on titles, and most title patterns get endlessly repeated across different blogs – so it's fine to take someone else's title and swap a few words around.

#4: Think About What Other Bloggers *Aren't* Covering

Are there any topics that you never seem to read about on other blogs in your field? Maybe you've been trying to find information on something and no-one covers it: this could make a great topic for *your* blog.

Sometimes, the things that aren't covered are simple and straightforward (perhaps so much so, that no-one even thinks to write about them)! These can make for great topics for your posts. For instance, Digital Photography School (one of Darren "ProBlogger" Rowse's blogs) has a post on How to Hold Your Digital Camera. It's a very beginner friendly topic … and a very popular post.

#5: Use a Blogging (or Writing) Prompt

If you're blogging as an outlet for your writing, or as a way to get into a regular writing habit, then there are lots of blogging and writing prompts out there that you could use as starting points.

Here are a couple of lists to try:

52 Writing Prompts to Inspire Your Next Blog Post – a collection of different prompts, mostly focused towards personal, journal-style blogging.

365 Blog Post Ideas and Writing Prompts – some of these are a bit repetitive or a bit too wacky (e.g. "what is the opposite of cake?"), but there are lots that could get you thinking.

Selecting Ideas to Put Into Your Content Calendar

Once you've got a list of ideas – I'd suggest aiming for at least ten – then you can start filling in your content calendar.

I always create my blank content calendar first (by copying the previous month's!) so that I can slot things in piecemeal. If you'd like a blank template to use, you can download either of these:

- **Word document content calendar template**
- **Excel spreadsheet content calendar template**

As you decide which ideas to include, you might want to think about:

- **Rotating between different topic areas.** On Aliventures, I try not to have too many posts in a row on a particular area of writing – instead, I have a mix of content on fiction-writing, self-publishing, blogging and freelancing. If I cover any one topic too frequently, that (understandably) puts off people who aren't interested in it!
- **Rotating between different types of post.** For instance, you might have a "how to" post then a "ten ways to" post, then an essay-style post. It's easy to get into a bit of a rut with blogging, especially if you have a favourite type of post – and planning things out on your calendar means you can make sure you're offering readers a variety of types of content.
- **Allowing for weeks when you're going to be unusually busy, or away on holiday.** If you know you're not going to have much time to write in a particular week, you could plan for a short, straightforward post that week … or you can make sure that you schedule in some writing ahead of time.
- **Running a series of posts.** Sometimes it makes sense to run a short (or long!) series of posts that are all linked together. You might plan this so you have several posts in a row leading up to a launch, for instance (Michael Hyatt does this a lot) – or you could have an ongoing series

once per month, like the [e-Cover Design Awards on The Book Designer](#), or [K.M. Weiland's Writing Mistakes series](#).

- **Considering what each post will do for *you* as the blogger.** For instance, is it a chance to draw readers further into your blog by linking to lots of your past posts? Is it an opportunity to encourage people to sign up for your newsletter? Is it a good post for encouraging comments or feedback? Will it give you a chance to promote your products? Or is it simply a topic you'd enjoy writing about? (That's perfectly valid, too!) You might want to look at having different underlying purposes for each post so that you can vary your calls to action, rather than always asking readers to comment (or similar).

- **Including old posts that you can update and republish.** This is something I've started doing recently: some of the posts that get the most readers are older ones (people find them through search engines or, less often, social media). I've been picking a couple of these each month to slot into my content calendar – it's easy for me (!) and it means I can update those posts that lots of new visitors are coming to. Often, for instance, I've added a call to action to sign up for my newsletter.

How to Batch Produce Your Blog Posts

When I was at university, a decade and a half ago, I had to write at least one short essay – often two – each week. (On the plus side, I had extremely long vacations! Instead of sitting down with a blank screen and researching as I went along, I wrote essays step-by-step, like this:

Step #1: Choose an essay question. We normally had several to pick from. This was a quick step as all I had to do was to choose whichever sounded most interesting!

Step #2: Write a plan. I'd had lectures about whatever the essay topic was, so I knew enough to at least put together a rough plan. This would include several key points in my argument.

Step #3: Choose quotes. I studied English, so at the heart of every essay were quotes from whatever text I was writing about. Once I had a plan, I knew what type of quotes to look for to support my argument.

Step #4: Draft the essay. With a plan and the quotes in hand, the drafting process was fairly quick. It normally took me two hours or less to draft a 1,500 – 2,000 word essay.

Step #5: Edit the essay. I'd quite often print out my draft and start over from scratch at this stage: the structure and argument of the essay wouldn't normally change much, but this way, I could make my points more eloquently!

I always met deadlines for essays, and for the most part, I enjoyed the process of writing them. (Unlike some fellow students, who'd end up pulling "all nighters" to finish their essays.)

The process I used then is not so very different from the process I use to create blog posts – and it's served me well for ten years of blogging!

Here's how it looks:

Step #1: Come up with lots of ideas. I do this separately from planning, drafting and writing, because I've found that it's easiest to come up with a bunch of ideas all at once. (We covered a bunch of ways to generate ideas earlier in this module, if you want to skip back to page 9 for help with that.)

Step #2: Plan several posts or newsletters at once. Occasionally, I plan a single post at a time, but I normally find it's most effective to plan three or four in one go. I can get into a "planning" frame of mind, and I can also more easily spot potential links between the posts.

Step #3: Figure out what links I'm going to use in the posts. If I'm honest, I normally do this at the drafting or editing stage – but if I know I'm going to be linking a lot, or bringing in quotes from other bloggers, I find it helpful to start gathering links before I start writing.

Step #4: Draft the post. Having a plan makes it relatively easy – it's just a case of filling in all the blanks! There are some bits of my draft that I always know will need extra attention – particularly the introduction and conclusion – and I

resist the urge to try to perfect those at this stage. If I'm writing short pieces for my newsletter, I like to draft three or four at once.

Step #5: Edit the post. Unlike with my university essays, I don't start over from scratch! My writing style for my posts is informal and conversational, and the draft is usually in reasonable shape. The introduction and conclusion normally get the most attention, and I'll read the post through carefully and tweak anything that doesn't quite work (e.g. clunky-sounding sentences).

Step #6: Upload the post to my blog. At this stage, the text itself is complete – though I'll usually do a final proofread. This is when I add an image, set the category, put in the "read more" link and so on. (Actually, my assistant does this step for most of my posts these days ... which is another great reason to batch produce posts, because it makes it easier to hand tasks over.)

You don't have to follow the exact same process as me. You might find that you want to break some of these steps down even further, or you might want to tackle things in a different order – perhaps you like to find an image for your post when you're planning, for instance, instead of after you've edited.

But by creating posts as a batch, you'll find that it's much easier to keep up your blogging momentum. I know that I have plenty of days when I don't have time to write, but I do have the time to spend 20 minutes coming up with some ideas, or fleshing out some ideas into simple blog post plans. Then when I do have writing time, I've got a plan all ready to go – I don't waste any time staring at a blank screen.

Why Planning Your Blog Posts Ahead of Time Helps So Much

One of the most important stages of the batch production process is planning – and even if you decide to only plan one post at a time, you'll hopefully find that alone is helpful.

Having a plan makes it easier to:

- **Break through the initial resistance to writing.** Sitting down to write a blog post can feel hard. If you've already got a clear idea and a plan, a big chunk of the work is already out the way – which makes it easier to push past that resistance.
- **Draft your post across several writing sessions.** While I think it's usually helpful to draft a whole post in one go, I know that's not always practical – if you're writing something particularly long, for instance, or if your writing time is limited to 10 minutes here and there. A plan helps you do a little bit at a time without losing your thread.
- **Make the most of your writing time.** If you don't have a plan, it's easy to end up wandering off on a tangent that you later have to cut out – or otherwise, you might have to keep stopping and starting as you try to figure out what needs to come next. A plan keeps you moving efficiently in the right direction.

We took a look at planning back in Module 2 (for classic/essay-style posts) and Module 4 (for list posts), but here's a quick recap on what a plan might look like:

Post Title

Introduction

Key point 1

Key point 2

Key point 3

Conclusion

Call to Action

(you might have more, or fewer, than 3 key points)

Here are a couple of worked examples:

> **Initial idea:** Parts of your novel that need a lot of rewriting (beginning & end)
>
> **Title:** The Two Scenes in Your Novel That Will Need the Most Rewriting
>
> **Introduction** – novels are complex and need a lot of rewriting ... but some areas will likely need more attention than others
>
> [Key point 1] **Your Opening Scene** (the first chapter of Lycopolis went through about a dozen different versions)
>
> [Key point 2] **The Climax of Your Novel** (not necessarily the final scene)
>
> **Conclusion** – don't be surprised or dismayed if you find yourself rewriting the beginning and end of your novel again and again – it can be really tough to get these right.
>
> **Call to action** – link to http://www.aliventures.com/novel-in-two-years/

> **Initial idea:** Being "too busy to write" is a problem with your life in general, not just your writing
>
> **Title:** Are You Too Busy to Write? Then That's What You Need to Fix
>
> **Introduction** – one of the most common problems I hear about from writers is that they can't find the time to write, or that they're too busy to write
>
> [Key Point 1] **The Problem (Probably) Isn't Your Writing** ("finding time" is hard if your writing doesn't engage you, yes ... but you can have a great project to work on and still struggle to find time)

[Key Point 2] **The Problem (Probably) Isn't Your Work Ethic** *(if you procrastinate terribly, then yes, fix that – but being busy or overwhelmed doesn't mean you're procrastinating)*

[Key Point 3] **The Problem is … Everything Else** *(day job, family commitments, volunteering, housework, etc)*

[Key Point 4] **And the Solution is to Do Less, Not More** *(it's not about cramming in more writing – it's about making space for your writing by looking at everything else that's taking up your time)*

Conclusion – I can't tell you what to do less of, because I don't know what commitments you have. But you can ditch, delegate or at least delay some of them. (Give examples.)

Call to action – join the newsletter to get my free mini-ebook "Time to Write"

Your plans might be more or less detailed than mine. You might just want to write down a few words to jog your memory. What matters is that you have a plan – a shape for your post, so that when you sit down to write, you know exactly where you're going.

Module #8: Recap

This module has, I hope, given you a good basis for building on as you go forward for your blogging. We've taken an in-depth look at content calendars, and we've covered:

- **What a content calendar is**, and why they're so useful for almost any type of blog, whether you're blogging to make money or simply as a hobby.
- **Different ways in which you could create a content calendar** – using a document, a spreadsheet, an app, or simply a notebook.
- **How to come up with plenty of ideas** that you can then choose from for your content calendar, through brainstorming or simply writing a list.
- **Some key considerations to keep in mind when you're slotting different ideas into your calendar**: varying the types of post and the subjects you cover, and thinking about whether you want to link posts together in a series.
- **Why "batch producing" your posts can make the writing process easier** (and a lot more efficient): you can come up with lots of ideas at once, write several short plans, draft your content, and then edit.
- **Why planning is particularly important**, especially if you're short on writing time, as it allows you to work on posts bit by bit.

As always, if you're stuck at any point, do come and ask for help in our Facebook group:

facebook.com/groups/blogonspring2018

(The group will still be available after the end of the course, and I'll keep popping in from time to time to answer questions and to celebrate your successes with you ... so please do keep us posted on how your blogging goes!)

Module #8 Assignment and Check In

This week, your assignment is in three parts:

#1: Come up with a list of 10 post ideas

#2: Choose four of these and put them into your content calendar

 #3: Spend 5 – 10 minutes planning each of those four

It's fine if your content calendar is just a list in a document or on a bit of paper for now, and it's fine if your plans are very brief. The idea is to get *something* down for your next four posts so you've got somewhere to go after Blog On!

Once you've come up with some ideas and plans, or got as far as you're going to get, check in here to get your reward card stamped:

facebook.com/groups/blogon.spring2018/permalink/257597685019084

Please feel free to share your four best ideas (and your plans, if you like) in the Facebook group. If you've got quite a bit to share, it might be easiest to upload a document rather than paste it all into a comment.

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 22nd July**. (It's fine to check in even if you haven't finished the assignment.)

Module #8: Recommended Further Reading

Why You Should Create Content in Batches (and How to Do It), Ali Luke, Craft Your Content

If you want to learn more about the idea of batch production, I've got a whole post on it here, with tips for each stage of the production process, and some thoughts on why it's such a useful way to approach writing for your blog (and/or newsletter).

How to Write a Series of Posts for Your Blog, Darren Rowse, ProBlogger

If you're thinking about incorporating a series of linked posts into your content calendar, there are lots of good tips and things to think about here.

The Surprisingly Simple Secret to Knowing What Your Readers Want, Linda Formichelli, Smart Blogger

This is an in-depth post about surveying your readers, with links to survey tools you can use plus suggested questions to ask (and why). It's geared for bloggers who are thinking about launching a product, not just looking for content ideas -- but there's a lot here that any blogger might find useful.

What's Coming Up Next

Well done on finishing the final module of Blog On! This isn't the end, though: our Facebook group (**facebook.com/groups/blogonspring2018**) will remain up and running, and I very much hope you'll keep us updated there on how your blogging goes over the next few weeks and months.

I'd love to hear how the course was for you, and I've started a Facebook topic here where you can leave feedback (good or bad!):

facebook.com/groups/blogon.spring2018/permalink/257599041685615

Also, I updated the materials a *lot* from the previous incarnation of Blog On … and while I hope everything came together well, I'm sure there are areas where you might have wanted more guidance or a different focus. I'd love your suggestions on what I could change to make Blog On even better for the next cohort:

facebook.com/groups/blogon.spring2018/permalink/257601358352050

In the autumn (probably starting late September), I'm going to be running a brand new course, **Successful Guest Posting [Blog On #2].**

Whatever your blogging goals, guest posting is a great way to get your name out there, to create pieces for your portfolio, and to reach lots of new readers. **I very much hope you'll come back and join us for that course … don't forget that your reward card gives you a hefty discount!**

I'll post details in the group nearer the time, and if you're on the Aliventures newsletter list, you'll receive an email about those too.

You're always very welcome to get in touch with me at ali@aliventures.com at any time.

Installing and Using Contact Form 7

In this document, I take you through the process of installing the "Contact Form 7" plugin on your (self-hosted) WordPress blog. Just follow the instructions step by step, and you'll have a working contact form up on your site at the end.

Part One: Installing Contact Form 7 on Your WordPress Website

Step #1: Login to Your WordPress Dashboard

The homepage of the Dashboard is your site name plus */wp-admin*, e.g. *www.aliluke.com/wp-admin*). The Dashboard will look something like this:
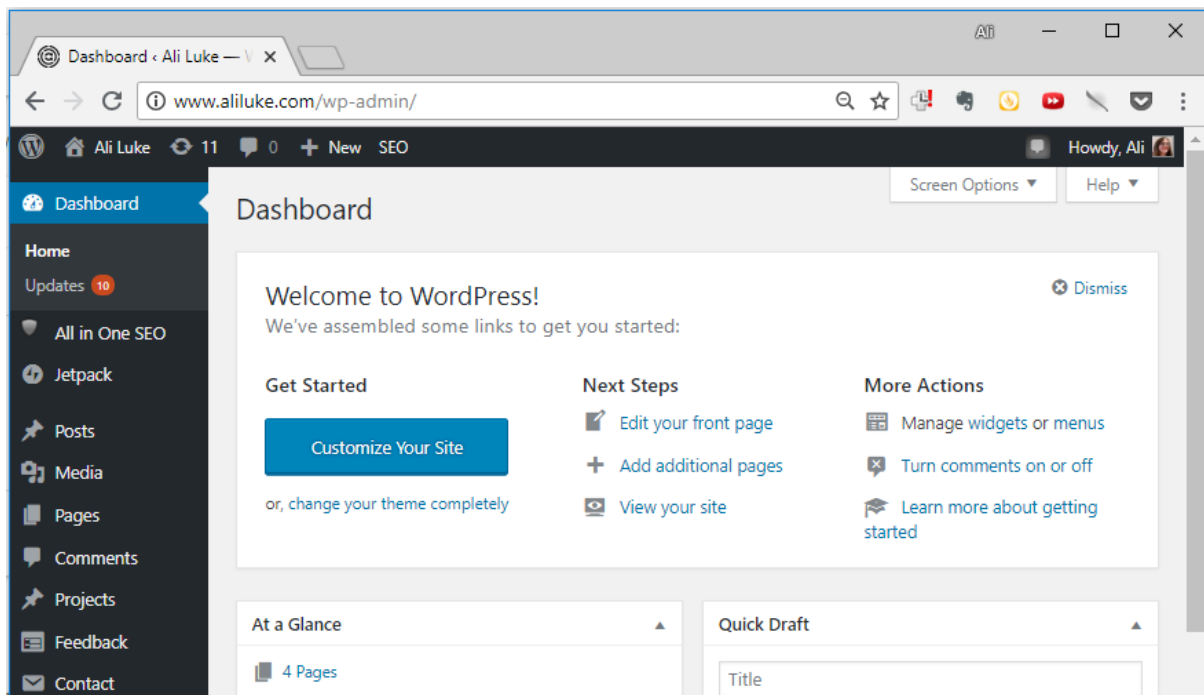
Step #2: Go to Plugins → Add New

In the black sidebar, look for "Plugins" . Hover your mouse cursor over it and you should see "Add New" (alternatively, click on "Plugins" and the menu will automatically expand, as shown below):
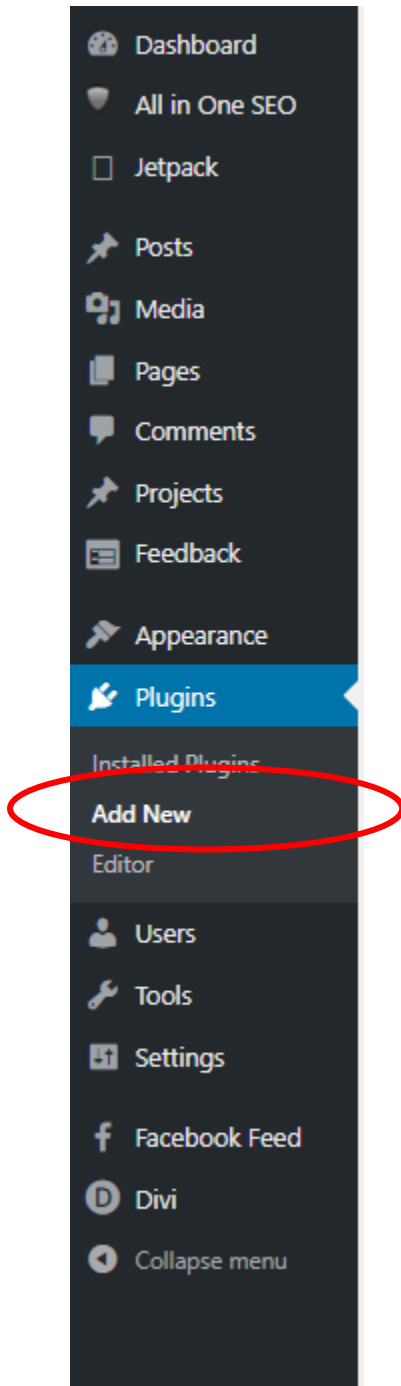
The Plugins page will default to a view of the "Featured" plugins:
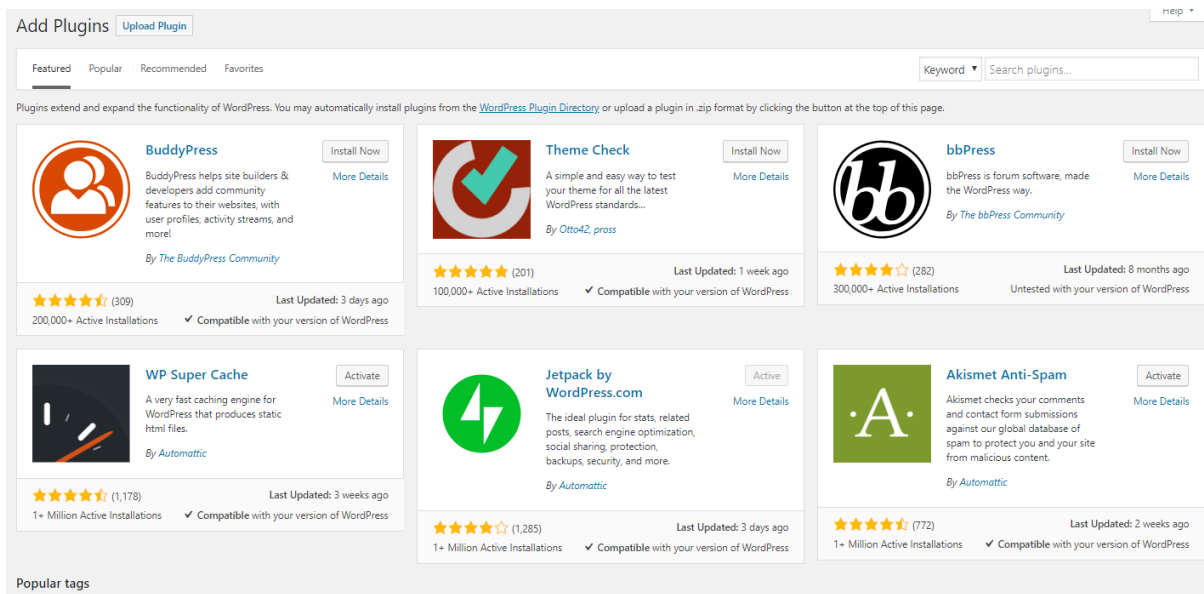
Step #3: Search for Contact Form 7

On the top right, in the search box next to the "Keyword" drop down, type "Contact Form 7" then press Enter (or on a Mac, Return).

You should now see a list something like this:
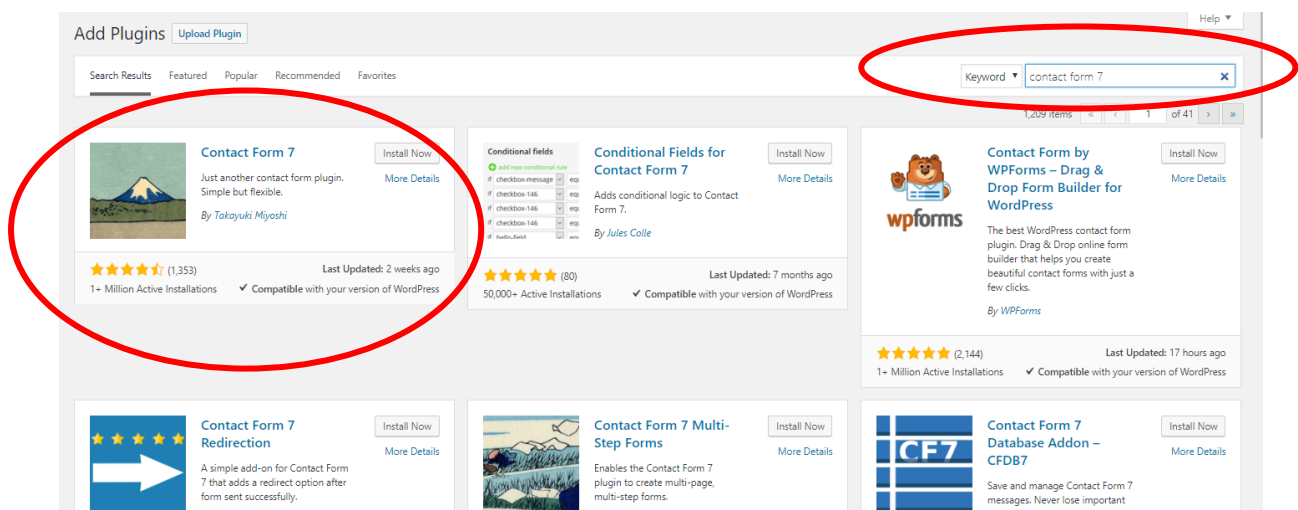
Step #4: Install Contact Form 7

Next to Contact Form 7, click the "Install Now" button.
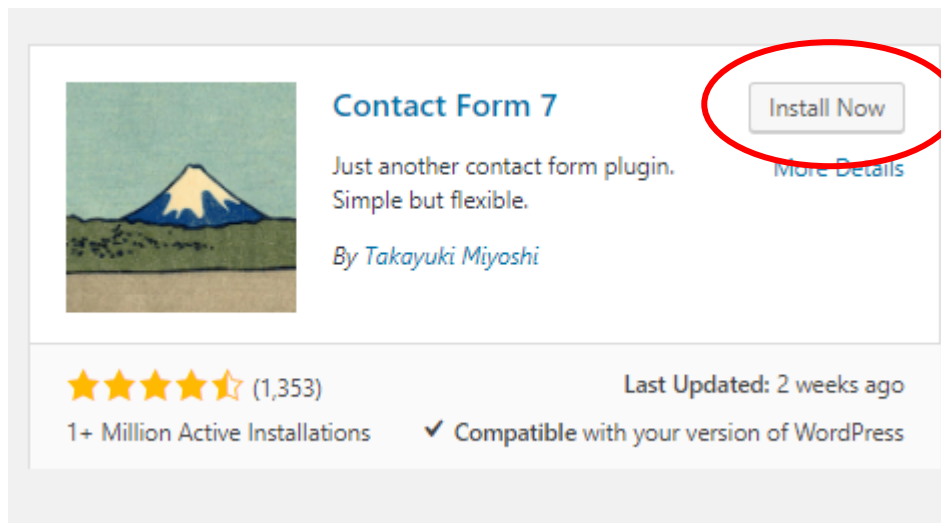
It will show "Installing..." in the button, then the button will turn to a blue "Activate" like this:
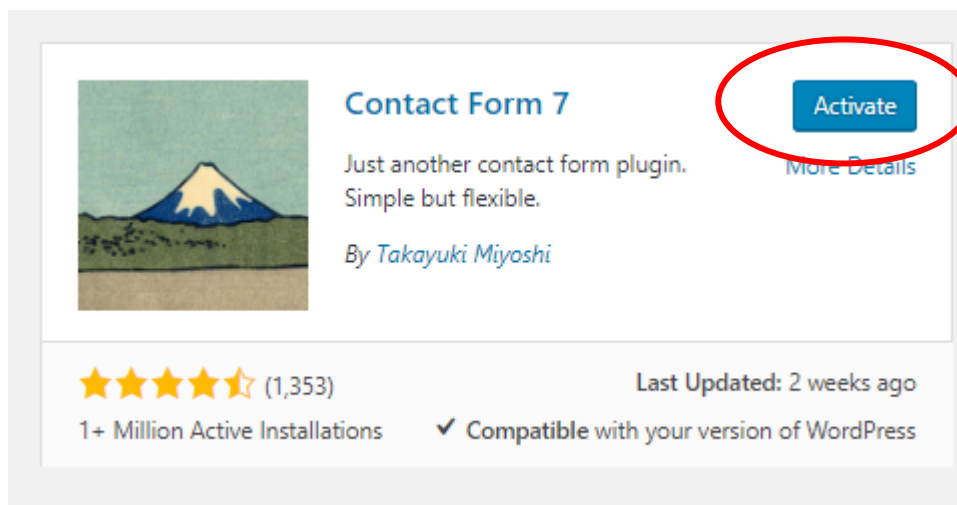
Step #5: Activate Contact Form 7

Click the Activate button.

You'll then see the words "Plugin **activated**" at the top of the screen, followed by a list of all your installed plugins.

Congratulations! You've successfully installed and activated the plugin. Now you just need to set up your contact form itself. (Don't worry, it's quite straightforward.)

Part Two: Getting Your Contact Form onto Your Contact Page

Step #1: Find Your New Contact Form

In the black sidebar, you should now see a new link that says "Contact" (just above Appearance). Click on it:
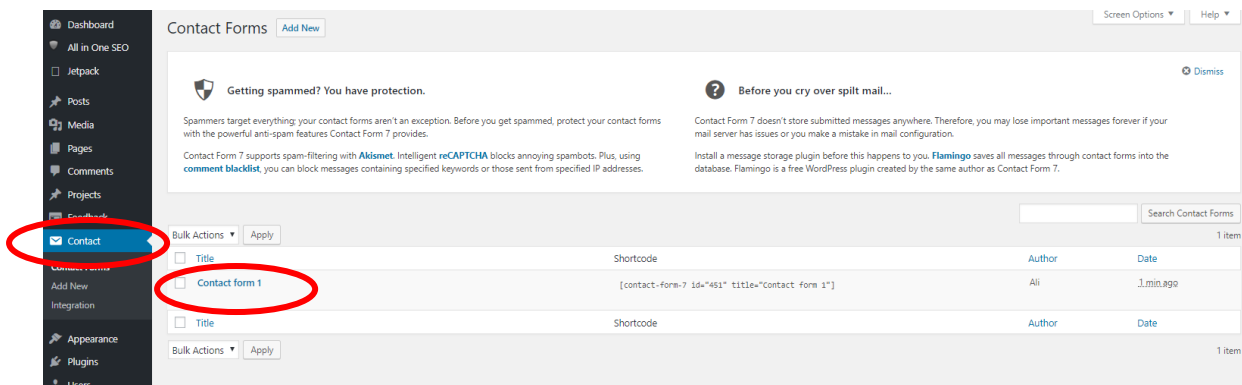
As you can see, "Contact form 1" has been created automatically for you.

You can edit "Contact form 1" by clicking on the title – this will allow you to change, remove or add different bits of the form. I suggest that you leave it alone for now, though, and focus on getting the form onto your Contact page.

Step #2: Copy the Shortcode for Your Form

Copy the code that you see under "Shortcode". For me it reads:
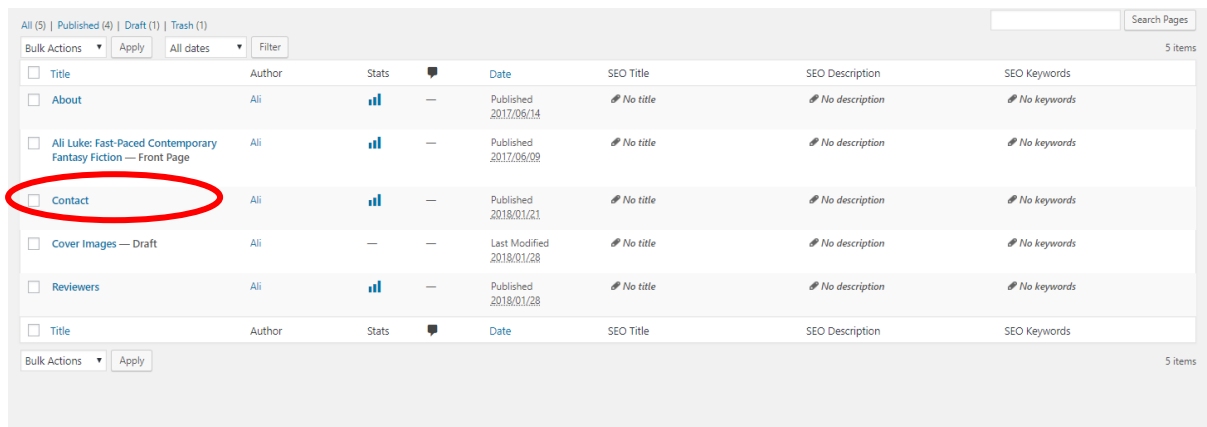
```
[contact-form-7 id="451" title="Contact form 1"]
```
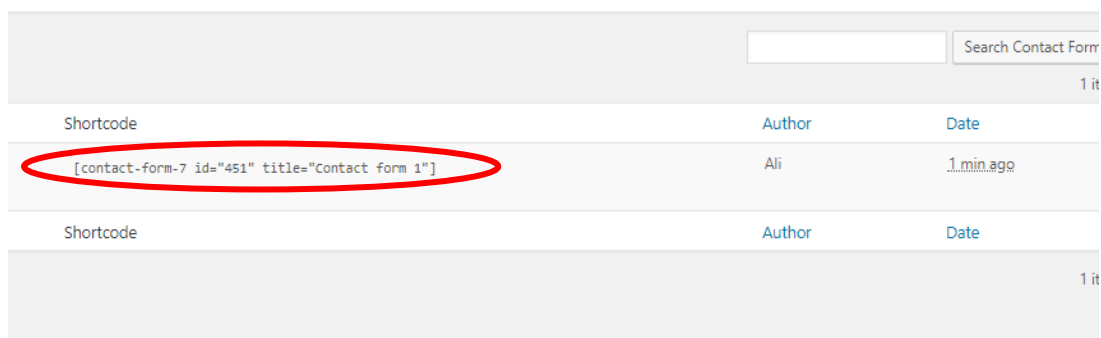

(To copy it, highlight it by clicking and dragging with your mouse cursor, then press Ctrl+C on your keyboard, or Command+C if you're using a Mac.)

Step #3: Open Your Contact Page for Editing

Click on Pages in the black sidebar, then look for your Contact page:

Click on the title "Contact", or whatever you're called the page, to open the editing view.
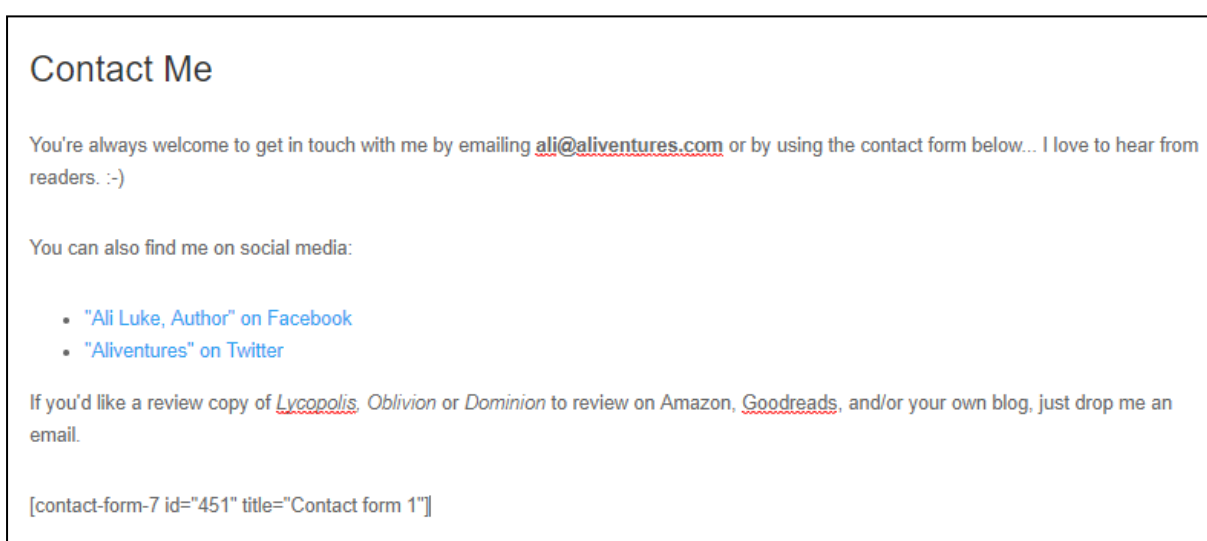
Step #4: Put the Contact Form Code into Your Contact Page

Click at the bottom of your contact form page's text and enter a new line.

Then paste in the contact form code that you copied in step 2.

To paste, press Ctrl+V (or Command+V) on your keyboard.

Here's how it looks in my Contact page in the editing view:

Step #5: Check Out the Form on Your Live Contact page

Open your site's Contact page. You can do this by clicking View Page or by clicking on the Permalink at the top of the editing view:
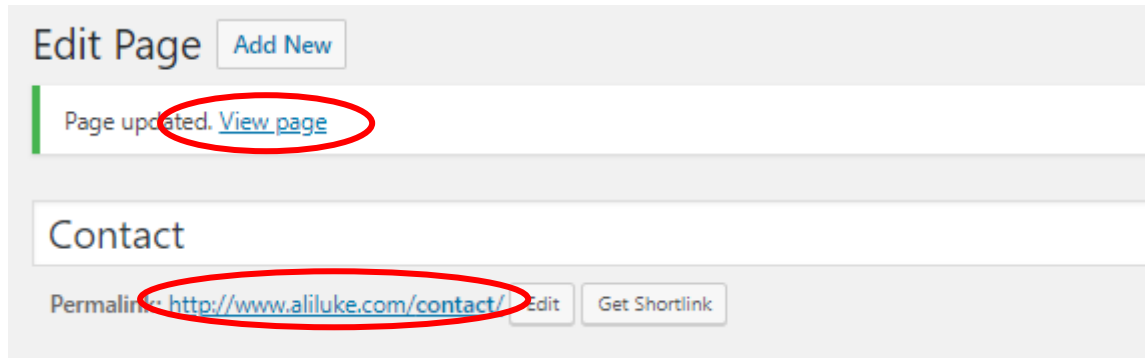
On the live page, the form should look something like this:
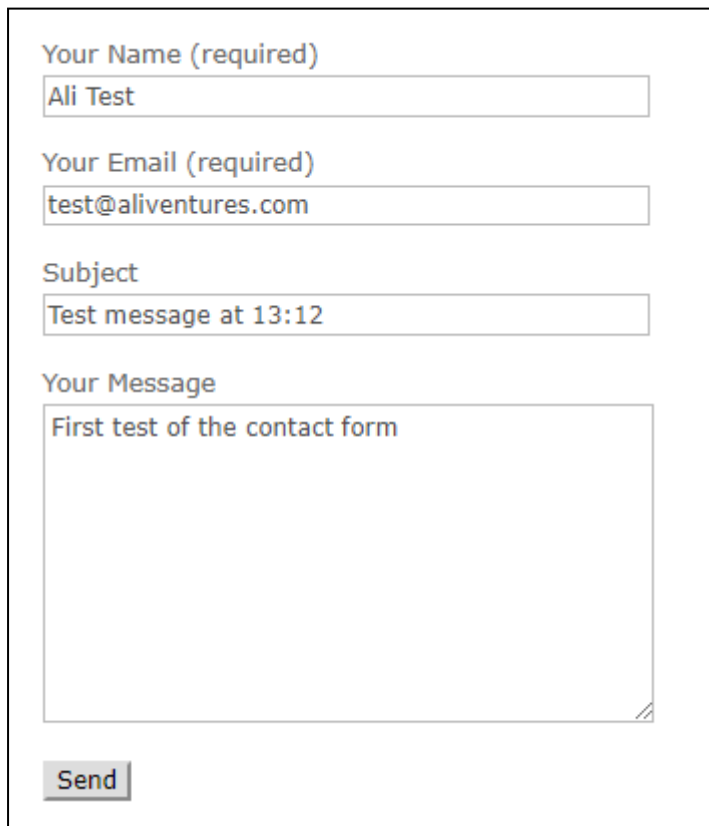
Step #6: Test the Contact Form

It's always worth testing contact forms whenever you install them or make any changes, to make sure that (a) they work at all (e.g. they actually send you an email!) and (b) the email you get looks how you'd expect it to look.

To test your form, type in some details – you can make up a name and email address if you want:
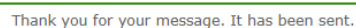
(Note: I always put the time into the subject line of test messages, just in case a message gets delayed or doesn't arrive – then it's easier to spot which test went wrong, if I'm tweaking things.)

Click the "Send" button.
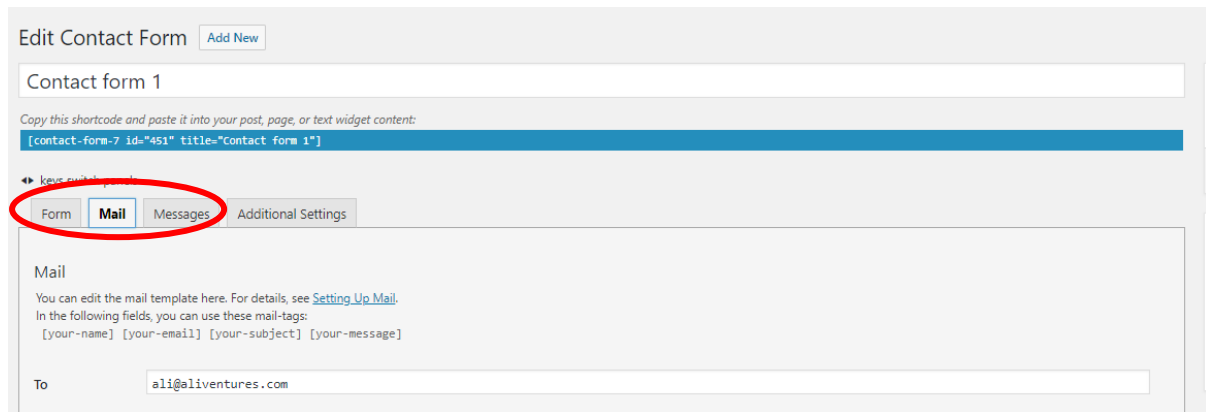
You should see this:

Step #7: Check your Email

The contact form will, by default, send emails to the email address you used to set up WordPress. If you're not sure what that email address was, you can open up the editing view of your Contact form (see Step 1) and look under the Mail tab. The "to" field shows you where the emails are going:

Open up your email inbox and check to see whether your contact form message has arrived. (In most cases, it'll be there straight away, but do wait a few minutes if you don't see it immediately.)

It should look something like this:
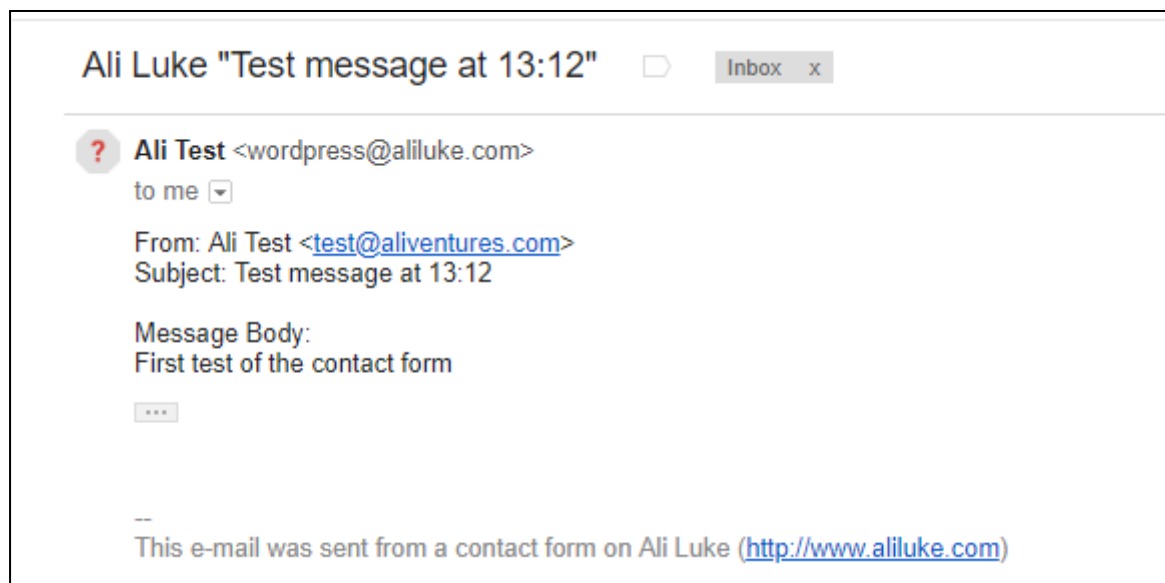
And you're done! Your contact form is now up and running. But – see over the page for a note about replying to messages that are sent in via your contact form.

A Few Extra Things to Note

Replying to Emails:

When you reply to a message via your contact form, you'll need to copy and paste the email address from within the message (e.g. test@aliventures.com in the example above) into the "to" field of your email.
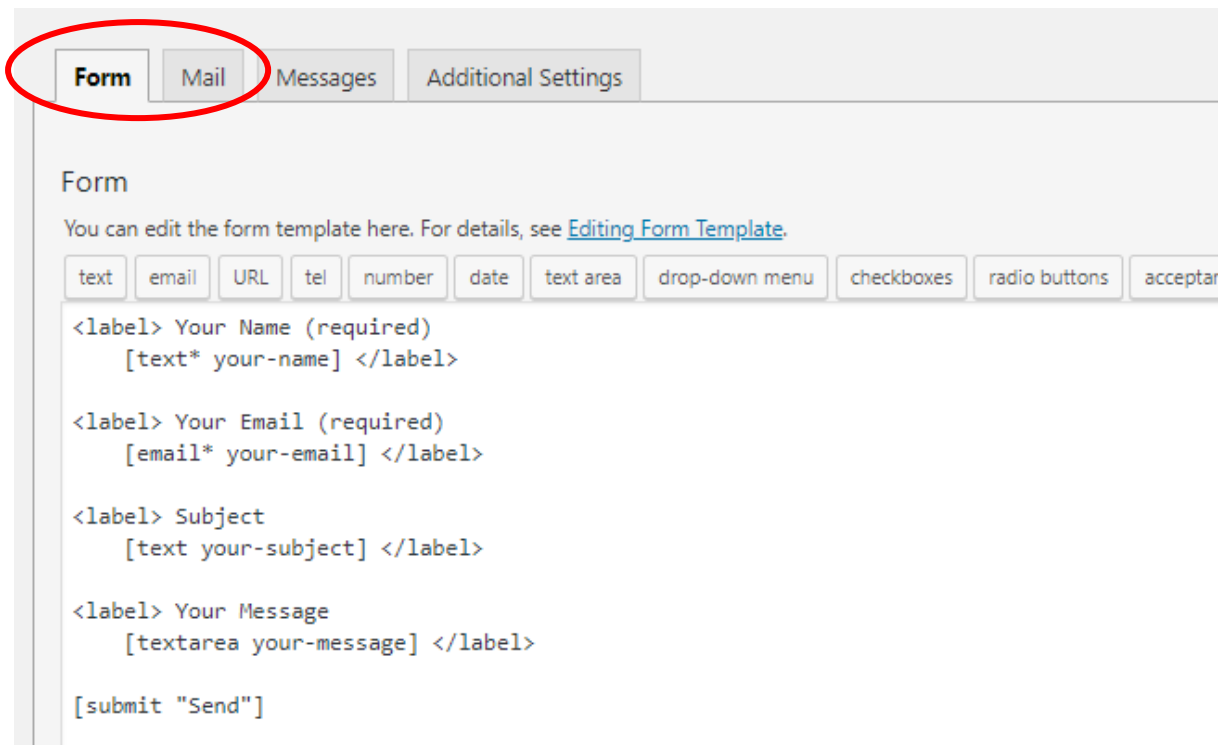
This is a bit of a pain, and I originally set up my own contact forms so that they'd appear to come from the address that the person contacting me entered – but I found this led to some messages going into the spam folder.

Don't worry if you forget and reply to wordpress@yourblogname.com instead: the email should bounce back to you, so you'll realize that you need to resend it to the actual person!

Changing the Contact Form:

You can edit the contact form, e.g. to remove the subject line if you aren't bothered about people entering a subject line.

For any change, addition or deleting, you'll need to make it in the form itself (the "Form" tab) and also in the email template ("Mail" tab):

Creating a Contact Form for Your WordPress.com Blog

In this document, I explain how to add a contact form to your WordPress.com blog (this is the type of WordPress that is hosted for you by the WordPress company).

Step #1: Login to Your WordPress Dashboard

Go to www.wordpress.com/log-in.

If you're already logged in, you'll see the "My Site" link on the top left. Click on it to go to your dashboard.

If you're not already logged in … enter your email address and then your password and you should see the "My Site" link:
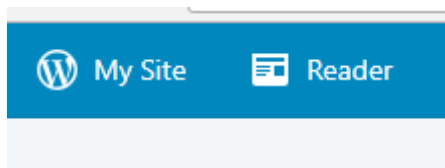
Once you're logged in, you should see a sidebar down the left:
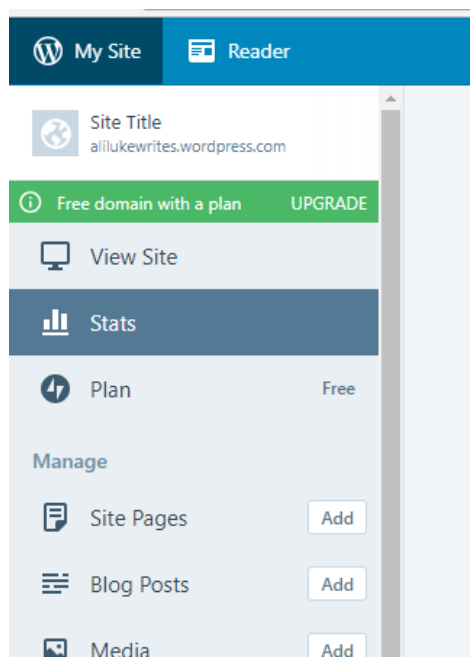
Step #2: Find Your Contact Page and Open it for Editing

In the sidebar, click on "Site Pages" and you'll see a list of your pages:
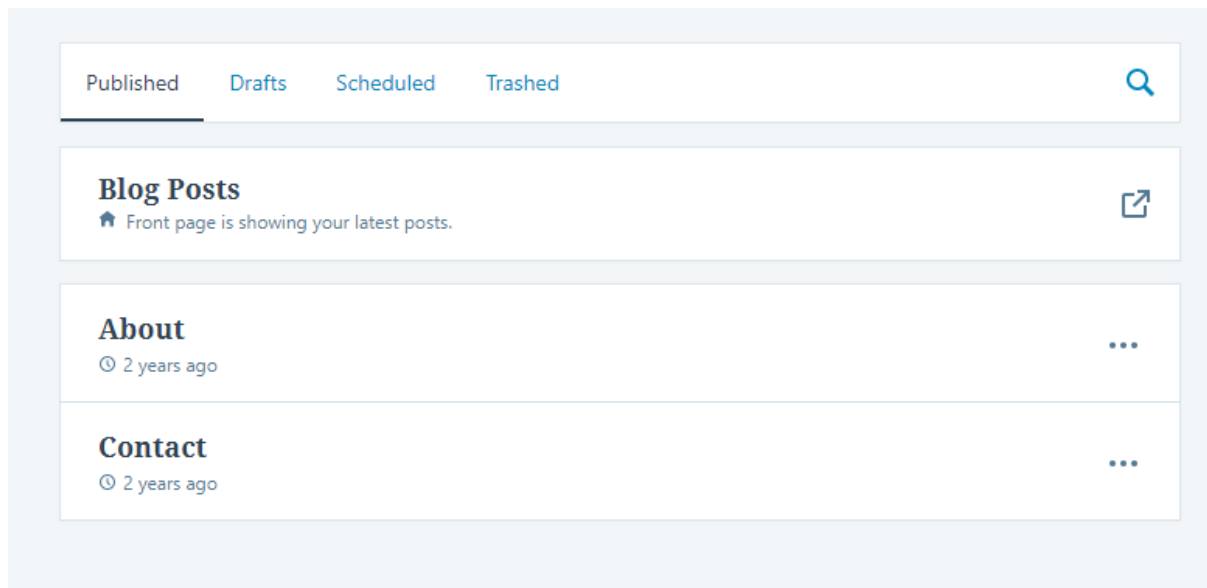
Click on the title of your Contact page to open the editing view.

Step #3: Create your Contact Form

Add a blank line at the end of your current Contact Page.
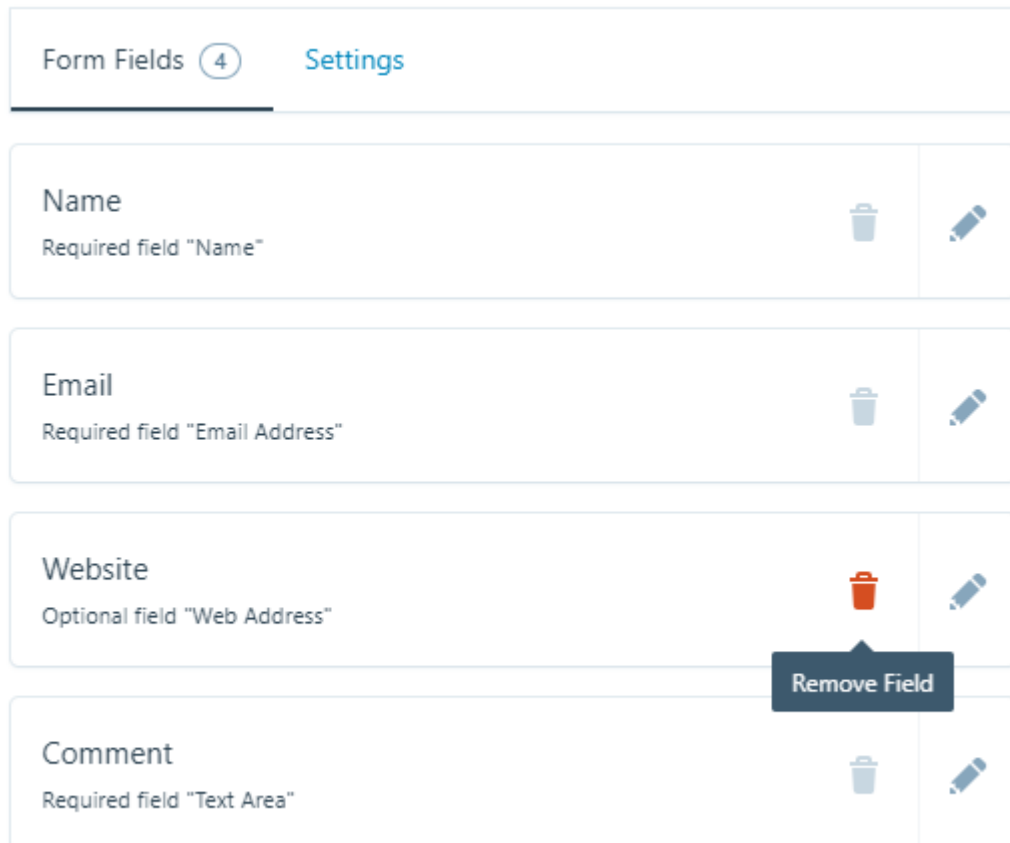
Click the "+ Add" button and select "Contact Form":
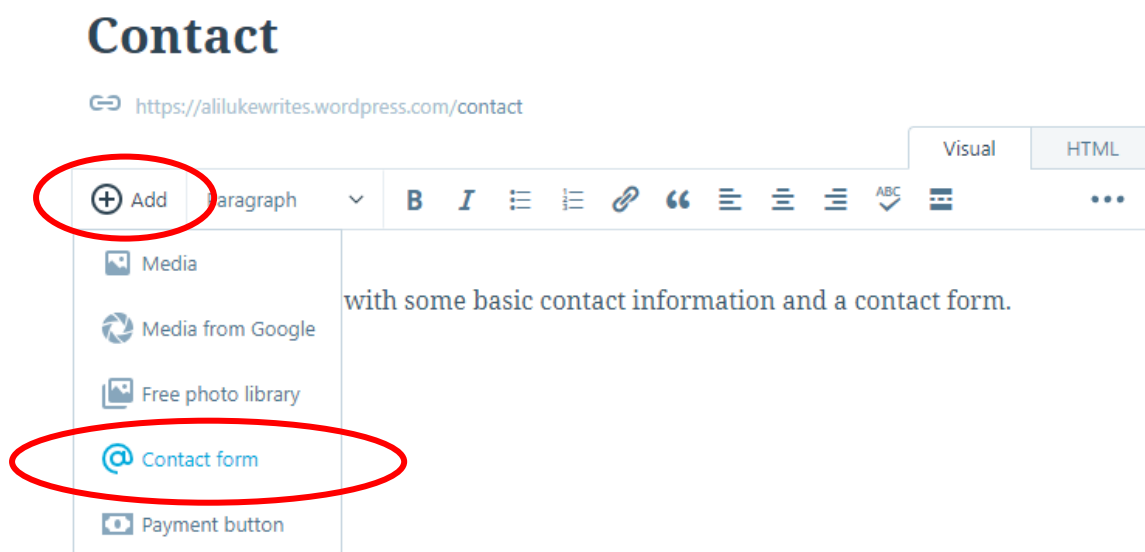
Step #4: Remove the "Website" field from Your Contact Form

I'd suggest deleting the "Website" field from your contact form, as not everyone contacting you will have a website (and the more information you ask for, the less likely they are to contact you).

Simply click the rubbish bin next to "Website" to remove that field.
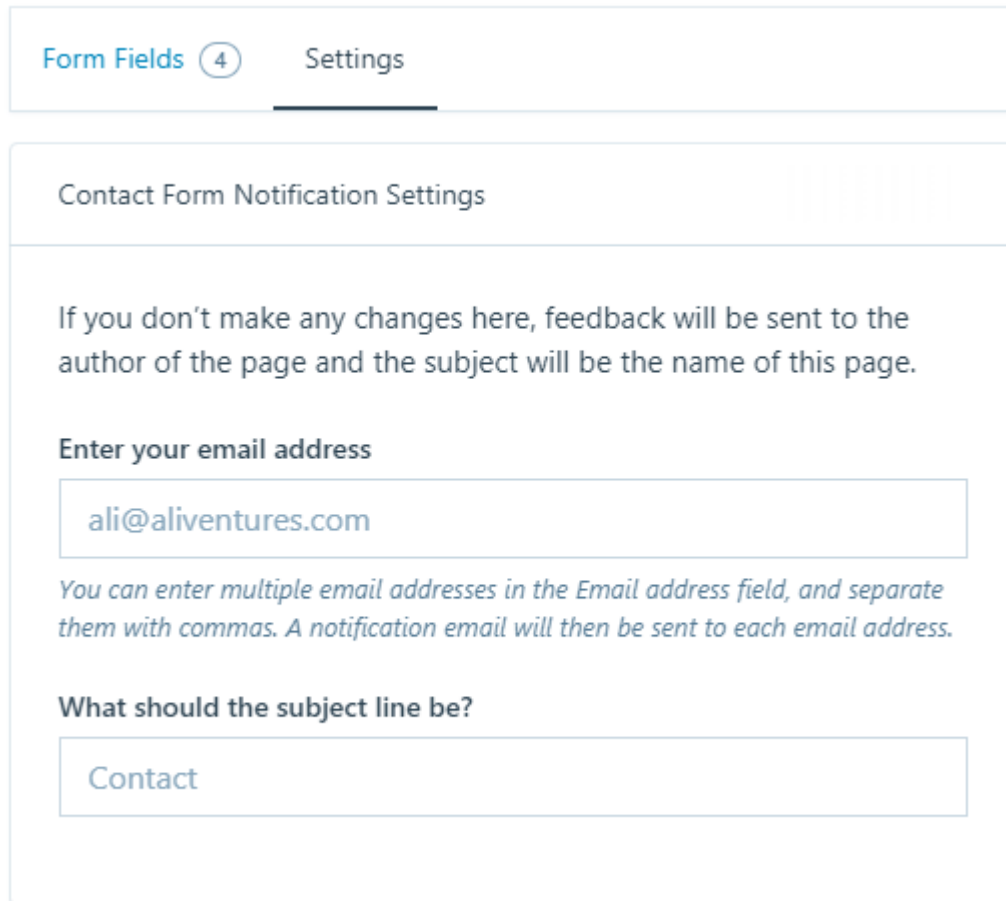
Step #5: Check the "Settings" and Adjust if Necessary

Click on the "Settings" tab. You should see something like this:

If the email address shown isn't the one you want to use for receiving the contact form messages, enter your chosen email address here.

You might want to enter a different subject line – e.g. "Message from AliLuke.com" or "Contact Form message". All emails sent through this form will have the same subject line.

Step #6: Add the Contact Form to Your Page

Once you're happy with the settings for your form, click the blue "Insert" button at the bottom of the screen:
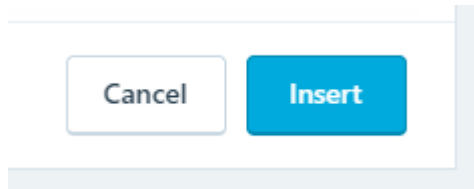
You should now see the form in your page itself:
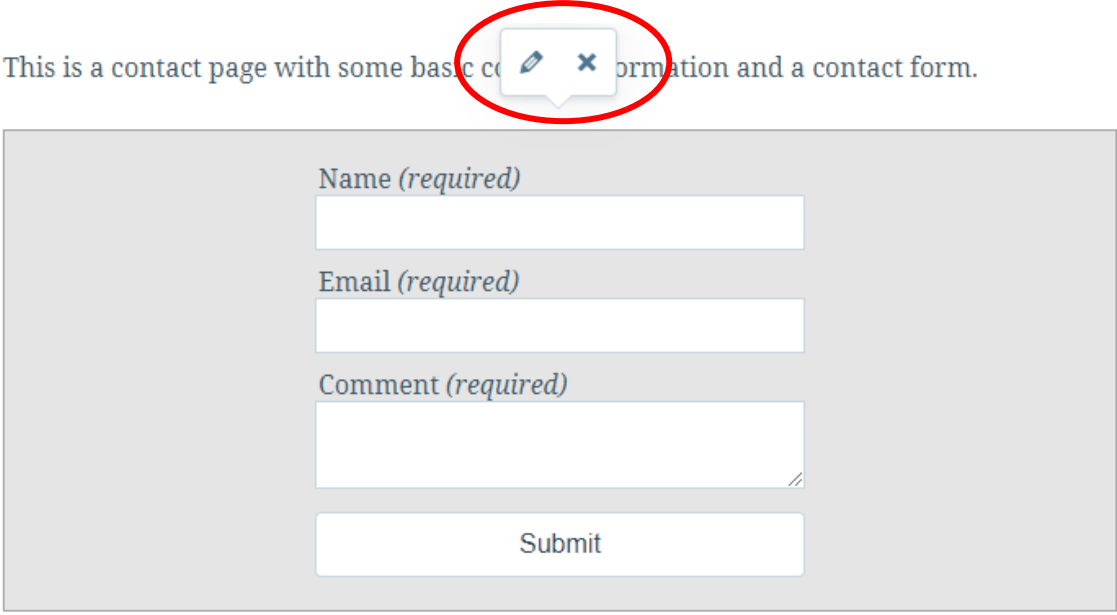
(Note that it will be styled differently on your live contact page, with the exact fonts, colours, etc depending on the WordPress theme you're using.)

If you want to make any changes to the form, click on it and you'll see a small pencil just above. Click this to edit the form (or use the X to delete it if you want to start over!):
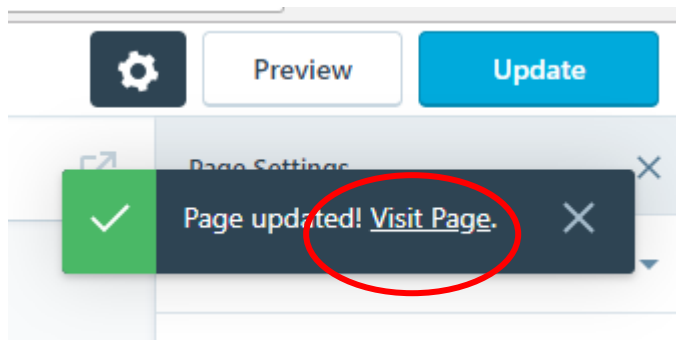

Step #7: Save Your Updated Contact Page

Finally, you need to click the blue "Update" button on the top right of the screen to save the changes to your Contact page:
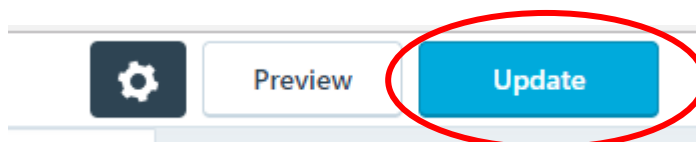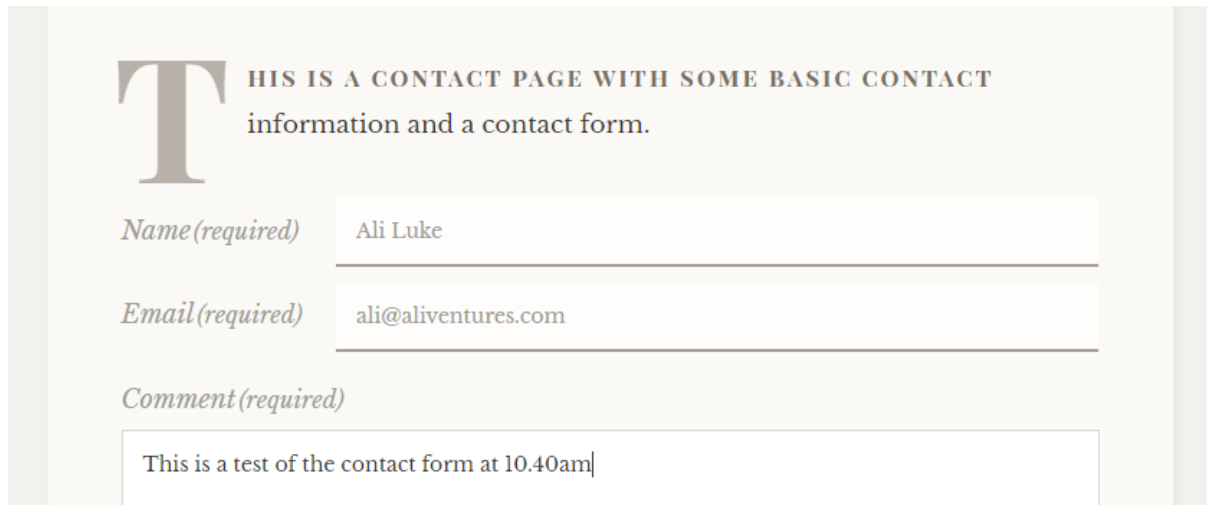

Step #8: Go to Your Contact Page

Go to the contact page of your website (you can use the "Visit Page" link that appears after updating, or click on the permalink just below the page's title):

Step #9: Test Your Contact Form

Type some information into the contact form, then click the "Submit" button:

You should see a "Message Sent" confirmation with the details of your message.

Step #10: Check Your Email

Finally, check your email to make sure the message arrived (give it a few minutes if it isn't there immediately).

If it doesn't arrive, double-check the "Settings" for the contact form to make sure it's going to the right email address – see Step 5.

As always, if you get stuck at any point, do come and post in our Facebook group, or email me (ali@aliventures.com). The Facebook group is here:

facebook.com/groups/blogonspring2018