

MODULE #3: COMING UP WITH IDEAS AND PITCHING YOUR POST

IN THIS MODULE:

This week, we're looking at how to develop ideas for your guest posts and how to write great titles. We're covering the whole pitching process, too, with sample emails you can use plus tips on what to do and what *not* to do when contacting blog editors.

Just a quick reminder: if you've not already introduced yourself in our Facebook group, please do let us know a bit about you here:

facebook.com/groups/successfulguestblogging2018/permalink/115462416008030

It's a private group, so only fellow course members will see your posts there.

Some guest bloggers come up with a bunch of ideas, then look for blogs that might be a good fit for those ideas. I think that's the wrong way round to do things: instead, it's better to get a list of target blogs first (which is what we covered last week in Module 2), so that you can carefully tailor your ideas to the blogs you want to write for.

Figuring Out What the Host Blog Wants

Some blogs will be very specific about the ideas that they're looking for – Carol Tice's Make a Living Writing is a good example, with [detailed guidelines](#) that include a section for the core topics Carol wants posts about.

Many blogs aren't so clear, though. They might well be open to posts on pretty much any topic within their remit.

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A good place to begin, then, is by:

- Looking at the categories on the blog (many will list these in a sidebar). What broad areas does the blog cover?
- Looking at the most recent 10 or so posts. What key topics have they covered?

Ideally, you want to come up with some ideas that fit well within what the blog covers, but that haven't been done to death recently.

Looking at their past posts can also give you useful clues about:

- The length of guest posts – a 500 word post will probably suit a different idea than a 1,500 word post.
- The approaches to guest posts – e.g. maybe the blog seems particularly keen on list posts, image-heavy posts, or “how to” posts.
- Whether guest posters tend to write from personal experience or not – some blogs love first-person accounts (“How I...”) and others prefer a more reader-focused approach.

Coming Up With a List of Ideas

For each target blog, I'd suggest listing several ideas – ideally at least five. This gives you the chance to pick your strongest idea(s) to pitch, rather than pitching the first thing that comes to you.

When I'm coming up with ideas, I often write a broad topic or starting point in the centre of a piece of paper, then brainstorm different aspects of it around the edge. But there are plenty of other ways to generate ideas. For instance, you might:

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- Open a new document on your computer and write a list of ideas, numbered 1 – 10.
- Use a list of blogging prompts or title templates and come up with potential ideas to fit those.
- Carry around a notebook with you and jot down ideas as they occur to you (a lot of my best ones come while I'm doing dishes).
- Look at the comments on the most recent posts, and pull out any questions or suggestions from readers – these could make for great posts.

Here's an example: a list of potential ideas I came up with for the (writing-related) blog [The Write Life](#). This is exactly as it appears in my notebook – as you can see, it's a fairly rough list:

- charging per project vs per hour
- guide to raising your rates as a freelancer
- how to turn a client down when you don't want to work with them
- how to pitch a guest post (and why you'll want to)
- how NOT to pitch a guest post: the five worst email pitches I've received (and how to do FAR better)
- are you ready to write a book?
- how to get going again on a stalled project
- how to re-find your motivation when you've had a long break from writing

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Selecting the Best Ideas from Your List

Once you've got several ideas for the blog, choose two or three that you think are a particularly good fit. Maybe they fill a content gap, covering something that's highly on-topic for the blog but that hasn't been written about recently – or maybe they're particularly unusual or creative.

Why two or three ideas? While you should pitch one main idea at a time, it's often helpful to have another idea or two that you can suggest in case the main one doesn't work out.

Don't ditch the other ideas completely – hang on to them somewhere safe. Even if you don't ever end up pitching them to that blog, you might find that they work for another site (or even your own blog).

In this version of my list for The Write Life, I've put my top three ideas in bold, and put notes against the others to explain why I decided against them:

1. charging per project vs per hour (*they've covered this a few times in the past*)
2. guide to raising your rates as a freelancer (*they've covered this a few times in the past*)
3. **how to turn a client down when you don't want to work with them**
4. how to pitch a guest post (and why you'll want to) (*they've covered this a few times in the past*)
5. **how NOT to pitch a guest post: the five worst email pitches I've received (and how to do FAR better)**
6. **are you ready to write a book?**
7. how to get going again on a stalled project (*I've written a similar post for a different blog very recently*)
8. how to re-find your motivation when you've had a long break from writing (*I don't think I have anything new to say about this!*)

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Crafting Titles for Your Posts

So far, we've been looking at ideas ... but before you pitch those ideas as a guest blogger, you need to turn them into post titles.

Here's the difference:

Idea: **are you ready to write a book?**

Title: **Six Signs That You're Ready to Write a Book This Year**

Ideas tend to be quite general. They could be approached in multiple ways (for instance, I could have gone with the title "Six Signs You're NOT Ready to Write a Book" or "Three Reasons You're Not Ready to Write a Book ... Yet").

Titles are clear and specific. They create a framework for the post – in this case, for instance, it's clear that the post will have six different sections.

It's well worth looking at the blog to see what sort of titles they typically use: think in particular about the length and the style (perhaps "hyped-up" or "calm and factual").

Your title doesn't need to be perfect – and in my experience, blogs will often change guest post titles – but it should make it clear that you've thought about your idea and how it'll work as a finished post.

Outlining Your Top Idea(s)

Once you've chosen your best ideas, pick your favourite one to outline (if you want, you can outline the others too). Almost all blogs will want to know what you're proposing to actually cover within your post.

Here's a sample outline – note that in it, I've assumed the post will focus on non-fiction. If I sent this outline to an editor, I'd mention that the post would be about non-fiction books, not novels:

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Six Signs That You're Ready to Write a Book This Year

#1: You've already written at least 20,000 words in shorter pieces (e.g. blog posts, articles)

#2: Other people have responded well to your writing (e.g. in blog comments, or face to face)

#3: You know enough about your topic that you could plausibly spend a day teaching a beginner about it (books need a fair bit of content!)

#4: You've created an outline for your book (or at least some notes towards it)

#5: You can, realistically, find about 3 hours a week to work on your book

#6: You're excited by the idea of writing a book (even if a bit daunted too)

Each of these describes the key point I'm making in each section: I wouldn't use them as the actual subheadings. If you prefer, you could come up with subheadings at this stage. In my experience, editors don't mind exactly *how* you outline, they just want an outline that makes the scope of your post clear.

How to Write Your Pitch

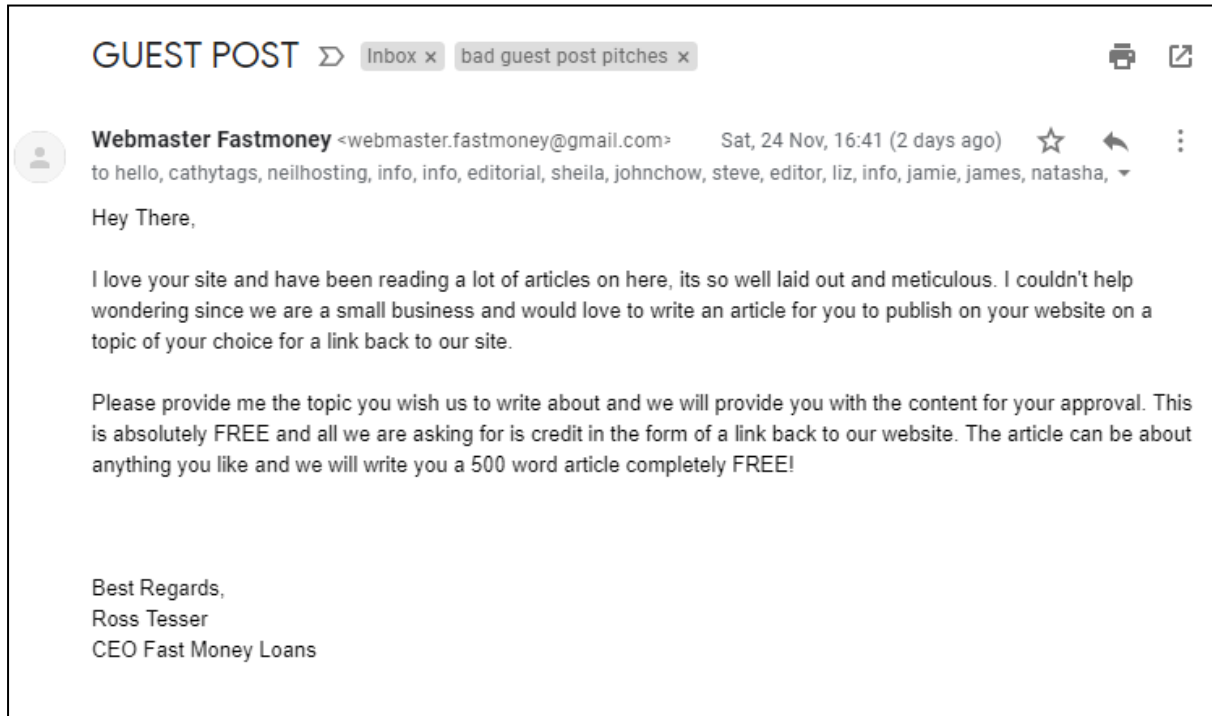
Firstly, make sure you've read the guest post guidelines (see Module 2 for more on this). Some blogs have quite specific ways they want you to pitch posts – Craft Your Content, for instance, has [a submission form](#) to fill in.

Before we dig into pitching your guest post, I wanted to give you a quick glimpse of the competition you're up against ... because it's probably not nearly so daunting as you might imagine.

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How NOT to Write Your Pitch

Here's a not untypical guest post pitch I received very recently:



There are a lot of things wrong with this. To name just a few:

- I've been CC'd on the email along with a bunch of other blog editors. This can create a very annoying situation where people end up replying to everyone (thankfully that hasn't happened with this one), and it also makes it 100% obvious that this exact same email pitch is going to multiple people.
- Ross doesn't bother using my name (he can't, because he's emailing so many other people along with me).
- "I love your site and have been reading a lot of articles on here, its so well laid out and meticulous" rings false (even without knowing that this identical email has been sent to a bunch of other bloggers). If they'd even glanced at my contact page, they'd know I don't take guest posts anyway!
- Did you notice that "its" is misspelt? While I might forgive that in an otherwise excellent pitch, it's hardly a great sign about the quality of the "FREE" article I'd receive.

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- I've been asked to "provide me the topic" – which, besides being ungrammatical, is not how guest posting works: the guest poster should suggest an actual idea.
- "All we're asking for is credit in the form of a link back to our website" – this makes it abundantly clear that *all* Ross cares about is getting a backlink. While it's fairly normal to get a link back to your site in your guest posting bio, this shouldn't be the *only* reason you want to guest post.
- 500 words would be a surprisingly short post for my blog – again, making it clear that Ross hasn't read my blog. (Also, looking at the other people he's emailed, it'd be pretty short for most of their blogs too.)
- "CEO Fast Money Loans" – his site (a) has nothing to do with my topic and (b) sounds pretty sleazy, doesn't it? Calling himself the "CEO" sounds a bit self-aggrandizing, especially as his email address is a free @gmail.com one, rather than an address at his actual domain name.

It's probably obvious, straight away, why my immediate reaction to this is to hit "delete"!

I can absolutely guarantee you that, *whatever* you write, your pitch will be dramatically better than this (and dramatically better than the vast majority of pitches that most bloggers receive).

A Template For Your Own Guest Post Pitch

I know that writing a pitch can feel pretty daunting – so here's a simple template you can use if you're struggling to know what to say.

I've annotated it so you can see why I've included specific things.

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Hi [name],

Would you be interested in a guest post titled “[title of post]”? ¹

This would cover:

[list of bullet points] ²

If that doesn't sound quite right for you, another couple of posts I'd be interested in writing are:

- [idea 1]
- [idea 2] ³

I run my own blog at [name and link] and you can see examples of my work there. ⁴

Thanks, and looking forward to hearing from you, ⁵

[your name]

1. If you do already know the blogger or even regularly read their blog, you might want to start off with a more personable sentence. Otherwise, just get straight to the point. Make it clear that you're offering a guest post (or they might think you expect to be paid) and suggest a title, not just a topic idea.
2. Your outline doesn't need to be detailed, but you do need to give the blogger an idea of what you'd expect to cover in your post (in case they want to you to take it in a different direction).
3. You don't *have* to pitch other ideas, but I think it never hurts! If your main idea isn't a good fit for some reason (e.g. they've just agreed to take another guest post on the same topic), one of these ideas might do the trick.

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4. If you have your own blog (and it's in a reasonable state for visitors!) then include the link to it, so the blogger can check out your writing. If you've already guest posted on other blogs, you could instead or additionally include links to your published pieces there (no more than three or it gets a bit overwhelming).
5. It's up to you how you close your email – I think this is a friendly, not-too-formal way of doing so. But you could also write something like “thanks for your time” or “best wishes” if you prefer.

What if the Blogger Doesn't Reply to Your Pitch?

Once you've sent the pitch, hopefully you'll hear back within a few days. If you don't, be patient: bloggers tend to be very busy, and they may be inundated with guest post submissions.

If you haven't heard anything after a couple of weeks, though, it's perfectly reasonable to follow up. Here's a simple, polite email template you can use:

Hi [name],

I just wanted to check if you received my guest post pitch on [date]?

1 I've copied that email below in case it went astray. 2

No problem if it's not quite right for you, or if you need some time to think about it. 3

Thanks very much,

[your name]

1. It's helpful to include the date of your original pitch, so they know you're not following up after an unreasonably short length of time (some people email me after 2-3 days, which simply isn't enough – it makes me feel badgered)!

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2. Do make sure you include the original pitch: you don't want to send them trawling through their inbox for it.
3. Some would-be guest posters get a bit stroppy about their pitch: this line helps make it clear that you're not going to kick up a fuss if the answer is "no, not for us".

What if you still don't get a response? At this point, I'd let it go. Maybe the blogger only replies to guest posts that they're interested in – or maybe your emails are getting eaten by their spam filter. You're best off investing your time and energy in pitching someone else.

What if the Blogger DOES Reply to Your Pitch?

Chances are, you'll get a reply to your guest post pitch. It'll fall into one of these categories:

- **NO:** No, sorry, not for us / we're not taking guest posts.
- **MAYBE:** This isn't quite right, but how about doing it this way?
- **YES:** Sounds good, send me a full draft.

NO: If you get a "no", you could pitch a different idea (if the blogger hasn't told you that they're not taking guest posts at all).

MAYBE: If you get a "maybe", where the editor wants you to change your outline, it's up to you how you want to proceed. I've never had an editor request unreasonable or ridiculously extensive changes to my pitch, but you may feel that you're only comfortable writing the post as originally pitched.

It's fine to say something along the lines of, "That's a bit beyond the scope of what I'd feel comfortable covering. Sorry!"

YES: Hurrah! Now it's time to write the draft of your post ... which you might be relieved to hear we'll be covering next week. ;-)

It's worth noting at this point, though, that it's possible for a blog editor to request the full draft only to later reject the post. This won't necessarily be because your writing wasn't up to scratch (e.g. maybe they initially liked the

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idea, but they later realize it's a bit too similar to something else they've got in the pipeline).

Also, even if the host blogger doesn't ask you to specify when you'll get the draft to them, if it's going to take more than a couple of days, it's helpful to send an interim email along these lines:

```
Hi [name],  
  
That's great, thank you! I'll have the full draft to you by the end of next  
week (Friday 7th).  
  
Best,  
  
[your name]
```

That way, they're not left wondering whether you've received their reply.

What if You're Pitching a Blog You've Already Written For?

Then you're in a great position because it's pretty much impossible to screw this up. ;-)

Assuming that you were reasonably easy to work with the first time round, chances are, they'll be delighted to have another post from you.

Here's an email you can send – again, I've annotated it so you can see why I've included certain things:

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Hi [name],

I really enjoyed writing “[post title]”¹ for you a few months ago² – thanks!

Would you be interested in another guest post from me, titled, “[title of your new post]”?³

This would cover:

[list of bullet points]⁴

If that doesn't quite work for you, another couple of posts I'd love to write are:

- [idea 1]
- [idea 2]⁵

[Or if there's a particular topic you'd like to have more posts on, just let me know and I'll see what I can come up with.]⁶

Cheers,⁷

[your name]

1. Remind them of the post you wrote before, and name it (ideally, link to it too) – I know it'd be nice to think they'd remember you instantly, but the reality is that they may have published dozens of guest posts since yours!
2. If it's been a *really* long time since you wrote for them, you might want to open your email with something more like: “I know it's been a while! I loved writing [title of post] for you a few years back, and now that I'm getting back into guest posting, I wondered if you'd be interested in another guest post from me...[etc]”
3. As with any pitch, do give the title of your proposed post.

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4. Include the outline, too. With blogs I know super-well and write for a lot, I often give the outline as a very informal quick list in italics, I don't necessarily write it all out in bullet points.
5. It's helpful to pitch a couple of extra ideas, in case your initial one misses the mark. (Even when you know a blog well, you don't know what others posts they might have in the works.)
6. You don't necessarily need to include this line or anything similar – it depends a bit on your relationship with the editor, and it's perhaps particularly appropriate if you're freelancing for them (i.e. being paid)!
7. You'll notice here and throughout the email, my language is a bit more informal than in the initial pitch. You may need to adjust this depending on your own relationship with the editor or your comfort level with being formal/informal!

Do's and Don'ts When Emailing Editors

All the blog editors I've worked with have been perfectly nice people – so please don't worry that you have to follow some complicated set of rules for fear of offending someone!

I'm sure most of these are common sense, but you'd be surprised how many would-be guest posters get them wrong.

Do ... be patient. It's fine to check up on a pitch if a couple of weeks have gone by, and it's fine to send a quick follow-up email if you've been told that the blogger will "be in touch with edits next week" and you've heard nothing (again, leave it a full extra week though).

But don't pester a busy editor. If you pitch them and email every couple of days, that's way too much – and they'll probably turn down your post just because you seem like you'll be a pain to work with.

Don't ... tell them you like/read their blog unless it's true! Trust me, it's normally obvious when it's *isn't* true ... and it won't do you any favours.

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By all means, though, if you are a regular reader, do say so. I'd suggest giving some specifics (e.g. "I've been reading your blog since early 2017 – I particularly loved the series you did last year on")

Do ... give them the things they're likely to need. For instance, if they don't specify that they'll need a bio and an author photo, you might attach those anyway along with your first draft so that they have them to hand. You might also want to include links to your social media profiles.

Pretty much every blog you're guest posting on will give you a bio, and in my experience about a third will want a photo. It's also not unusual to be asked for social media links (particularly Twitter and Facebook).

Don't ... give them loads of stuff they *aren't* going to need. For instance, they don't need the whole story of how you came to be interested in this topic (however fascinating or moving that story is).

Editors are busy, so unless *they* indicate they're happy to have a more chatty, conversational relationship by email, keep your emails focused and to the point. (It's fine to include something like "hope you have a great week" or "have a good weekend" – but don't go off into tangents that aren't related to your post.)

Do ... be reasonably responsive to requests for edits. Okay, I'll admit I'm including this because I'm sometimes the one screwing it up (oops). If an editor asks you to make changes to your piece, you don't need to drop everything and do it instantly – but they will expect some sort of response within a few days.

If you don't have time to make the edits fairly soon, email with something like, "I'm very happy to make those revisions. My schedule is packed this week, and I don't want to rush the edits – so could I get them to you on [e.g. Friday 14th]?"

Don't ... be too precious about your work. Some editors will change a line or two and that's it. Others will want to make sweeping changes to your post. Ultimately, if you're really not happy with the edits, or if they're asking you to do a huge amount of extra work, you can withdraw your post altogether.

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But normally, it's best to go with what the editor suggests. Don't push back against every single edit. (It's fine to challenge one or two, if you feel that your original really is better than their proposed change. Often in these situations, I find it works best to find a third alternative that'll suit both me and the editor!)

Do ... pitch again if you enjoyed posting on that blog. While some blogs will only take a limited number of posts from guest writer (I've just pitched one that only takes one per year per writer!), many will be happy with posts once a month.

Of course, your time is limited, and your writing is valuable: you may not want to be giving away that much of it. This is where it's crucial to know *why* you're guest posting (see Module #1), so you can figure out if the benefits are worth it.

Don't ... ask the blogger to tell you what they want you to write. It's fine to include this as an aside ("Of course, if there's a particular topic you'd love to have more guest posts on, just let me know and I'll see what I can come up with.") You shouldn't, however, make it the main point of your email.

When you're pitching, you do need to pitch an actual idea – even if you've already written for the blog before.

I know there's been a lot to take in this week, but if you remember just one thing from this module, make it this: your guest post pitch will be *far* better than most that the blogger sees, so please don't worry about getting every single detail right. Just make it clear and coherent, and follow any specific points in their guest post guidelines as best as you can.

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Your Module #3 Assignment

ASSIGNMENT

Your assignment this week is in three parts, and you can tackle as many (or few!) as you want

#1: Select one of the blogs from the list you made last week, and write down a list of at least five (ideally ten) ideas that could work there.

#2: Pick two ideas to flesh out: give them a title, and create a simple outline.

#3: Write a pitch (you can use the template in the module, or write it in any way you like) and send it to the blog's editor. Obviously do follow the guest posting guidelines – see Module 2 for more on that.

Once you've completed the assignment, or got as far as you're going to get, come and "check in" on Facebook to get your reward stamp for Week 3. If you're willing to, share your top idea with us (or as many of your ideas as you like):

[facebook.com/groups/successfulguestblogging2018/learning_content/?filter=190031478571267](https://www.facebook.com/groups/successfulguestblogging2018/learning_content/?filter=190031478571267)

If you prefer not to use Facebook, you can email me (ali@aliventures.com) with "Module #3 check in" or similar in the subject line.

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Module #3: Further Reading

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

[9 Guest Post Pitch Emails That Got the Gig](#), Carol Tice, Make a Living Writing

This is a great piece because it gives real-life examples of guest post pitches that worked – and Carol explains briefly *why* they worked. In some cases, she also says what the writers could have done even better.

[11 Successful Bloggers Share How To Craft The Perfect Guest Post Pitch](#), Karol K, BloggingWizard

In this post, Karol shares very detailed advice from a number of bloggers covering a range of blogging, marketing and writing related sites. There are loads of great insights here into exactly what makes bloggers pay attention to a pitch (including some very specific details, like having a professional-looking email address).

[100+ Blog Post Title Templates That Grab Attention](#), Pauline Cabrera, TwelveSkip

This detailed post gives some general tips about writing titles before going on to list loads of handy templates that you can use either to generate ideas, or to come up with catchy titles for your existing ideas.

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What's Coming Up Next Week:

Well done on reaching the end of this week's module. Remember, if you have questions at any point, please do ask in our Facebook group. If it's something you'd prefer to discuss privately, you can send me a message via the Facebook group or you can email me at ali@aliventures.com.

Here's what to expect in Module 4 next week:

MODULE 4:

Next week, from Monday 3rd December, we'll be looking at writing your first guest post. We'll cover how to structure and craft your post (making sure it'll be a good fit for your target blog), how to handle edits, and how to do other tasks like sourcing images and formatting your post correctly.