



**AN EASY  
GUIDE TO  
BLOGGING**

## what is a blog?

**W**hat is a weblog, better known by its short form, blog? A blog can be as simple as a personal, online diary or as large as a website with a team of editors. The vast majority of blogs are written by one person and intended to be read by friends and family. Others operate like media outlets, featuring news and opinion articles intended for a large audience. Some blogs have a small readership while others are read by hundreds of thousands of visitors per day.

**B**logs come in all shapes and sizes, but most share a handful of features:

- ▶ Reverse-chronological order with new posts at the top of the page.
- ▶ Archives for access to past entries
- ▶ Readers' comments
- ▶ Links to other sites, usually called a blogroll
- ▶ Syndication information that allows users to "subscribe" to the blog

Blog content varies widely. As mentioned, many blogs are essentially personal diaries. Others report or analyze news. Still others

deal with politics, and a large number are dedicated to particular interests. Most blogs do not fit neatly into any single category. A defining characteristic of the vast majority of blogs is their personal nature, reflecting the changing interests and moods of their authors.

Blogs are essentially personal websites, but easier to maintain, updated more often, and offering much greater opportunity for discussion and interaction.

## the blogosphere

**"B**logosphere" is a term coined to describe the world of blogs, setting them apart as a distinct part of the internet. In its broadest sense, the "blogosphere" includes every single blog regardless of subject matter. It's hard to say exactly how many blogs there are, but as of April 2006, the popular tracking service Technorati ([www.technorati.com](http://www.technorati.com)) tracked 36.8 million websites and weblogs. According to its data, 75,000 new blogs are created and 1.2 million new posts written every day. And Technorati's numbers are only part of the picture: many millions more blogs are written in languages and countries not tracked by Technorati.

The blogosphere, like the world, is further divided into smaller communities, also often called blogospheres. The Russian blogosphere consists of blogs in Russian, based in Russia, or about Russia. The Armenian-language blogosphere is populated by blogs in Armenian about many different subjects. One can divide the blogosphere in many different ways and one blog may be part of different blogospheres. But within these smaller divisions, just like in real neighborhoods and communities, there is a great deal of interaction.

## Bridgeblogs

Blogs known as “bridgeblogs” link blogging communities. Some do so by existing and interacting in multiple blogospheres, others were created expressly for this purpose.

Multiple sites play this role, but perhaps the biggest and most well-known is Global Voices Online. Global Voices draws attention to topics ignored by English-language media but important to large numbers of the world’s citizens. Using a wide variety

of technologies – blogs, wikis, podcasts, photo-sharing tools, videoblogs, tags, aggregators, and online chats [see glossary] – it highlights conversations and points of view from around the globe. Its website amplifies, curates, and aggregates the global online conversation with a focus on countries and communities outside North America and Western Europe.

## why blog?

What is the point of blogging? Every blogger has his or her own answer to this question.

### **NATHAN HAMM, REGISTAN.NET ([WWW.REGISTAN.NET](http://WWW.REGISTAN.NET))**

I started my blog, Registan.net in 2003 on a whim. Another blog, Winds of Change, was seeking someone to take on a monthly roundup of news from Central Asia, and I volunteered. I started my blog at the same time.

I have long been a news-junkie, and I had noticed since I finished my Peace Corps service in Uzbekistan that Western media presented a very incomplete and often very inaccurate picture of Central Asia. Through my blog, I wanted to comment on this reporting and add context and depth.

I am now in my third year of blogging. Along the way, my blog has built a solid readership, added other authors, and broadened its scope a bit. I not only comment on current events, but also try to share my enthusiasm for Central Asian history and culture.

I keep blogging because it is such a rewarding experience. That is not to say that there are not days in which the last thing I want to do is write on my blog, but the positives keep me coming back. Blogging has helped me develop my writing skills, and also to keep up with current events. It has allowed me to get to know new people from around the world. My blog has created wonderful opportunities for me – even landing me a job. My original motivation is still there, I enjoy interacting with my readers, and almost every day brings another new reward. As long as that is the case, I plan to keep blogging.

## VERONICA KHOKHLOVA – NEEKA'S BACKLOG (VKHOKHL.BLOGSPOT.COM)

I started blogging in March 2003 when the war in Iraq began and I stumbled on Salam Pax's blog. At that time, I really needed to get rid of my writer's block, and having no stupid editors asking for explanation of what Chernobyl or Crime and Punishment are seemed like great inspiration. Also, I had so much stuff lying around – the notes, the backlog...

In November 2004, I went to Ukraine and was writing about our election. No one was reading me at that time and that was totally fine with me as long as a bunch of my friends replied to me every once in a while. Then the tents appeared on Khreshchatyk and I got a link from Instapundit [a very widely read US blog found at [www.instapundit.com](http://www.instapundit.com)]. So now I have a much larger audience, but I try to write for myself first of all. But since I'm also a journalist without a full-time job, the blog ends up being somewhat journalistic every now and then.

A Norwegian journalist asked me during the Orange Revolution whether the purpose of my blog was to make the world know about Ukraine. I told him no because if the world doesn't know anything about Ukraine, it is the world's problem. We continue to exist, even if in obscurity. I write my blog because I feel like writing it and not because I want to educate anyone. I am very grateful that people read me. I am very happy that they find some of my stuff interesting. And I have made so many new friends thanks to blogging. This is why I keep doing it.

## and you?

We all have something to say and things to share with others. Blogging gives everyone with access to the internet the opportunity to write about what is important to them. Odds are that you have something you want to say or share with a wider audience, and with a blog, you will become part of a global conversation.

No matter what interests you, you can start a blog about it. **So, what will you blog about?**

Blogs are open to all on the internet, and easily found through search engines, which gives you the opportunity to make an impact. If having an online diary is what inspires you, then by all means have one. But writing about current events – what is going on in your town, your region, your country, the world – and adding your personal perspective is most likely to appeal to a broader audience. Especially if you are writing from a part of the world in which there are few bloggers, your voice and point of view will be an exciting addition to the global discussion.

## making an impact

In recent years, traditional media has been paying increasing attention to blogs and bloggers. There are many reasons for this. One is that many blogs discussing current affairs engage in regular media criticism, pointing out the shortcomings of news reports, highlighting inaccuracies, and exposing biases. Another reason for the increased attention is that many bloggers have expertise and perspectives that may be lacking in the mainstream media. Blogs can hint at big stories on the horizon and provide context reporters may not otherwise have. Many bloggers draw attention to stories not reported in the traditional media, acting as unpaid reporters to highlight neglected issues.

Journalists and bloggers are increasingly working together both formally and informally. Individual bloggers and organizations such as Global Voices Online are exploring ways for blogs and traditional media to build on each other's strengths. Many bloggers rely on the press for subject matter. More and more journalists look to bloggers for perspectives and

expertise to improve their reports, and journalists increasingly have their own blogs, often hosted by the outlets for which they work.

### The Killian Documents

Even before this collaboration really got underway, blogs had already had an enormous impact on the way news is reported. Perhaps one of the best known examples came during the 2004 US presidential campaign in response to a CBS News report on documents criticizing President George W. Bush's record of service in the National Guard. After the report aired, blogs such as Power Line ([www.powerlineblog.com](http://www.powerlineblog.com)) and INDC Journal ([www.indcjournal.com](http://www.indcjournal.com)) raised questions about the documents' authenticity and contacted experts for their opinions. Bloggers responded quickly and vigilantly to poor media reports, pointing out inconsistencies and misinterpretations of expert opinions. Due largely to their criticism and persistent reporting of the story, CBS eventually apologized to its viewers and a handful of the employees involved in producing the original story resigned.

## setting up a blog

For step-by-step instructions on setting up a blog without threatening your personal safety, please see the TOL Guide to Safe Blogging.



# building a successful blog

**A**fter you have set up your blog, how do you make it a success? Well, first a blogger needs to figure out how to measure success.

There are many ways to do so. Some measure success by the number of visitors. Others may measure success in dollars and cents. The truth is that few bloggers make any money from their work and only a small percentage ends up with enormous readership. But then again, most bloggers don't start their blogs for fame or fortune. Each blogger decides for him or herself what success means. That said, here are a few tips for creating a successful blog.

## *Meet the Neighbors*

Almost every blog fits into some online community. It pays to be an active member of the blogosphere to which you belong. If, for example, you blog about art, it's a good idea to read and comment on other art blogs. Add the blogs you read to your blogroll, and send a few polite emails to certain bloggers letting them know you have started a blog, perhaps with a link to a post of yours you think is particularly good. One good way to find blogs similar to yours is to search on Technorati ([www.technorati.com](http://www.technorati.com)).

## *Find Your Voice*

In short: Be Yourself! Every blogger has his or her unique voice, and this should be cultivated and used at all times. Write about what interests you and inject some personality into your posts. Even if you are

writing about something as arcane as tax reform in Mongolia, it helps to have personality in your writing. One of the biggest differences between blogs and traditional media is that the former have lots of personality, which is probably why so many people enjoy reading them.

## *Keep it Current*

One of the quickest ways to lose readers is to not post anything new on your blog. That doesn't mean you have to post 10 items every day, but you should try to post regularly and fairly often to keep readers coming back.

## *Make It Interactive*

Encourage readers to comment and be involved in comments yourself. You will find your readers have interesting perspectives that you may have overlooked, and by encouraging readers to be involved, you are much more likely to build a readership that has a stake in and regularly visits your blog.

Offer Something Special – One surefire way to build a successful blog is to offer something no one else offers. While many blogs comment on reports from traditional media, much rarer are the blogs that do original reporting. If you can, try to offer readers something they will not find anywhere else. Onnik Krikorian of the Armenian blog Oneworld Multimedia (<http://oneworld.blogsome.com>) regularly posts interviews, translations, and his stunning photographs, none of which is found anywhere else.

# writing a successful post

There's no magic formula for writing a good blog post, and for every good post a blogger writes, there is sure to be at least one not-so-good one. There are many different kinds of posts, and an exhaustive list is impossible. Instead, what follows is a fairly good formula for writing a post about current events.

The key to any good post is to add value. Some blogs just cut and paste reports from media outlets. This gives readers little incentive to read the blog rather than just reading the story on the website of the news agency that published it. Blogs that add something extra to quotations from media reports, on the other hand, do give readers a reason to visit. With that in mind, here is one possible way to write an interesting post:

- ▶ Find a subject: Read news websites to find potential subjects. Perhaps you will find a unique story you want to bring to your readers' attention. Maybe you'll notice two stories that tie together nicely. Maybe you'll notice something inaccurate or misleading in a report you read.
- ▶ Introduce your subject: Begin your post with a brief introduction of the subject and a mention of the story on which you are commenting.
- ▶ Quote: Include excerpts from the story to which you're responding.
- ▶ Analyze: Respond to excerpts as necessary. If you notice something inaccurate, explain what is wrong with the quoted section. Perhaps the quoted text will inspire you to write on other issues. Each case will be different.

For numerous examples of this style of post, visit the blogs at neweurasia ([www.neweurasia.net](http://www.neweurasia.net)).

## ethics

### *Fairness*

Being fair is subjective, but you should make every effort to extend the same respect to others that you wish for yourself. This means you should be willing to listen to others' viewpoints and allow criticism of your work. Be willing to listen to others and examine your motivations.

### *Transparency*

Be honest and open with your readers about your biases and conflicts of interests. For example, if you write about an

organization that has given you money, you should disclose this. Similarly, if you write regularly about political issues, you should make your beliefs known so your readers can be aware of possible biases. This does not mean that you must share with readers every last detail about your life, but where there is a risk of bias or a conflict of interest you should disclose.

### *Independence*

Be your own blogger. Write what you think needs to be written and what you

honestly believe to be true rather than bowing to powerful interests with a stake in what you write.

### *Honesty*

Only say what you know to be true. When you have reason to doubt the truth of a statement, say so. If you are speculating, make it clear that you are doing so. Additionally, say what you do not know when writing a story.

### *Link References*

If possible, link to the material you reference, even if you disagree with it. This gives your readers the opportunity to make up their own minds, and bolsters your arguments by making your evidence easily accessible.

As a corollary to this rule, be sure always to present your evidence. If your references do not exist online, make clear your sources as best you can. Providing the evidence to back up your claims is not only honest, it will help you make stronger arguments.

### *Respect Sources*

If you interview someone or receive information from someone to use in a post, respect the source's wishes. Find out if you are allowed to credit the source of your information or how you are allowed to use the information you receive. Remember, in some cases, not respecting a source's wishes could lead to the source losing his or her job or to arrest if the information is particularly sensitive.

### *Publicly Correct Mistakes*

If you should find that something you asserted or a story to which you linked in a post is untrue, correct the misinformation quickly and publicly. This is usually best done by adding an update to the original post so mistake and correction are in one place.

### *Do Not Slander*

Do not make false or malicious statements about others. If you disagree with another blogger or with a public personality, do not indulge in personal attacks or false statements. Try to make well-reasoned and fact-based arguments.

## don't put yourself at risk!

In some parts of the world, the authorities view bloggers and blogging unfavorably. In some countries, people have even gone to jail for expressing their opinions online, in a blog. So you need to stay anonymous, protect your identity, and blog safely! Many security issues are a matter of common sense, but for more information, please see the TOL Guide to Safe Blogging, which also touches on some of the more sophisticated ways of blogging anonymously.

SAFE BLOGGING &  
ONLINE PRIVACY  
MADE EASY

# glossary of common blogging terms

**Aggregator** – Software or online service allowing one to read or share content from the syndication feeds of selected blogs.

**Atom** – A particular type of syndication feed.

**Blogroll** – A list of links to other blogs and websites usually appearing in a column on the homepage of a blog.

**Feed** – An RSS or Atom feed is a file showing the latest posts and updates to a blog.

**Permalink** – Contraction of “permanent link.” A link for an individual post that allows others to link directly to or bookmark the post.

**Podcast** – Contraction of “iPod” and “broadcast.” Podcasts are delivered

through RSS and Atom syndication feeds to which users can subscribe with special podcast aggregators. Can refer to a particular episode of a podcast or the method of delivery.

**RSS** – Really Simple Syndication, a particular type of syndication feed.

**Syndication** – Alerts readers to updated content on a website, making it particularly suited to blogs, which are updated often. Also allows other websites to reproduce all or part of another website or blog’s content.

**Wiki** – From the Hawaiian “wiki wiki,” meaning “quick.” Websites that allow users to quickly and easily change, add, or remove content.

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