

Become a Blogger – Tips and Tools

1) **First-person:** Readers respond to personal narratives. Even just a few lines of commentary added to a newspaper quote bring an additional perspective to the article. Unlike journalism, bloggers are encouraged to be opinionated and subjective.

2) **Less than 500 words:** Blog readers rarely complain that a post is too short. The simplest of weblogs are simply linked pointers to other sites of interest; typically it's good to write posts with a handful of links and a couple of quotes. If your post happens to be essay-like and long, it should be broken into two parts and the second part published after a "Read more" link to another page.

3) **Illustrated:** Photos and graphics are compelling to the eye and break up text for easier reading. Even better, photos of a person add visual cues to readers about the content. It's also good to link to videos or sound clips.

4) **Develop a voice and style:** Blog posts are casual and personal. Though we keep any eye on the traditional stylebook for technical correctness, your tone should be more like a personal email to a friend than a business letter.

One method is to summarize articles into essay-like posts, interweaving commentary and the article, with few direct quotes. More online-friendly is a style like so:

One to two sentences of setup with link.
Paragraph or two of a block quote.
One punch line to end it.

An actual example of this used on Blog for America:

Pop Go the Weasels

Republicans have run into tough times getting a budget passed on Capitol Hill. **Poor guys:**

Unable to ensure a majority for a contentious budget-cutting bill even after jettisoning a plan for oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, House Republican leaders this afternoon pulled back from a floor debate.

Democrats and other House officials said they had been informed that the budget vote that had been promised repeatedly by the leadership would be postponed. The turmoil was the latest sign of Republican dissension and represented a major embarrassment for the Republican leadership, particularly Roy Blunt of Missouri, who is serving as temporary majority leader and would like the job on a full-time basis if legal troubles persist for Representative Tom DeLay.

... The decision to drop — at least for now — the long-sought push to open the wildlife refuge in Alaska to oil drilling was a major victory for Republican moderates, who insisted they would oppose the budget cuts demanded by conservatives if the drilling plan was included.

In an effort to discourage House and Senate leaders from putting the provision back in during negotiations to resolve differences between their two bills, several of the moderates declared today that they oppose any final version that included drilling in the Arctic.

Sad, just so sad. Maybe it's time we sent more Democrats up there to help.

This is a very web-friendly format which most blog readers are familiar with. Visitors are looking for an obvious quote from an original source, a link to that source, and some indication of what the blogger thinks of the item. This type of posts contains all of those elements – and though the commentary could bear with a little expanding, it suits the medium very well.

5) **Use HTML:** The essence of the web is the hyperlink, and basic HTML is easy for any non-techie to master. HTML, in its most basic form, is simply a set of codes which go around text to indicate how they are displayed in a browser. Every tag is opened with a code and closed with a code, so nearly all HTML is written in pairs.

Simply place your opening and closing tags around the text you wish to change:

Bold = `bold text here`

Italics = `<i>italicized text here</i>`

Underline = `<u>underlined text here</u>`

Blockquote = `<blockquote>quoted text (indents left and right)</blockquote>`

Center = `<center>centered text here</center>`

Links = `linked text here`

You probably won't need more HTML than that on a daily basis, but if you're interested in learning more, there's a thorough tutorial online here:

<http://www.davesite.com/webstation/html/chap01.shtml>

6) **Watch for special characters:** Microsoft Word documents often insert “magic quotes” (curly quotes and apostrophes) into text. These are Microsoft-specific and do not render properly in most blogging software – they'll show up as question marks or squares. If you are composing or editing in Word, it's advisable to paste your text into a plain text file to find and replace quotes, apostrophes and m-dashes with plaintext versions.

To add an m-dash (double length dash) to your post, use this code: `—`

To add an upside-down exclamation point, use this code: `¡`

To add ~ over an N, use this code: `ñ`

7) **Start your own blog:** The easiest way get your own blog is to use an existing blogging service. The most popular ones are [Blogger](#) and [Wordpress](#). You can follow their user-friendly steps to get your blog up and running quickly.

A second alternative is to host blogging software on a web server. This is more complicated and requires a good bit of technical know-how, but you'll be able to control your data and customize your blog as much as you want. Another benefit is that you can host the blog at your own domain (like www.mygreatblog.com). Examples of popular personal blogging software are [Wordpress](#), [Typo](#), and [Movable Type](#).

Hosting your own blog is also the only option you have if you want to create a community blog, like Daily Kos. Examples of popular community blogging software include [Scoop](#), [Soapbox](#), and [CivicSpace](#).