

PROBLOGGER'S GUIDE TO YOUR  
**first week**  
**of blogging**

concentrate  
on content

set solid  
foundations

put  
yourself  
out  
there

My  
Blog

publish &  
build  
presence

define &  
demonstrate  
quality

strategize  
for  
success

Written by Darren Rowse

---

## Prologger's guide to your first week of blogging

**Publication date May 2011**

Written and published by: Darren Rowse  
[www.prologger.net](http://www.prologger.net)

Producer: Jasmin Tragas

Graphic Design/Layout: Naomi Creek  
[www.starfishblue.com.au](http://www.starfishblue.com.au)

Version 1.0 ©Copyright 2011 Darren Rowse

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical or otherwise, without prior written consent from the publisher, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review. You may store the pdf on your computer and backups. You may print one copy of this book for your own personal use.

Disclaimer: The information contained in this book is based on the author's experience, knowledge and opinions. The author and publisher will not be held liable for the use or misuse of the information in this book.

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
How to use this book	5
Getting started	5
<b>Day 1 – Set solid foundations</b>	<b>6</b>
Task 1: Set up an ideas folder [2 minutes]	7
1.1. Exercise	7
Task 2: Brainstorm post ideas [10 minutes]	7
2.1. Exercise	8
Task 3: Set a posting rhythm [10 minutes]	10
3.1. Exercise	11
Task 4: Plan your first week of content [5 minutes]	11
4.1. Exercise	11
Task 5: Create your launch post [30 minutes]	12
5.1. Exercise	12
Wrapping up Day 1	13
<b>Day 2 – Publish and build presence</b>	<b>14</b>
Task 1: Publish your launch post [15 minutes]	15
1.1. Exercise	15
Task 2: Create a “my story” post [15 minutes]	15
2.1. Exercise	16
Task 3: Develop a publishing process [15 minutes]	16
3.1. Exercise	17
Task 4: Generate ideas for pillar content [15 minutes]	18
4.1. Exercise	19
Task 5: Establish a social media presence for your blog [20 minutes]	19
5.1. Exercise	19
Wrapping up Day 2	20
<b>Day 3 – Concentrate on content</b>	<b>21</b>
Task 1: Publish your “my story” post... and promote it [15 minutes]	22
1.1. Exercise	22
Task 2: Create a pillar content post [30 minutes]	23
2.1. Exercise	23
Task 3: Generate ideas for a series using mindmapping [10 minutes]	24
3.1. Exercise	25
Task 4: Plan your next post [15 minutes]	25
4.1. Exercise	25
Task 5: Engage with others [15 minutes]	26
5.1. Exercise	26
Wrapping up Day 3	27

<b>Day 4 – Understand the blog as a product</b>	<b>28</b>
Task 1: Publish your pillar content post... and promote it [15 minutes]	29
1.1. Exercise	29
Task 2: Create your next blog post [30 minutes]	29
2.1. Exercise	30
Task 3: Experiment with formats and headlines [20 minutes]	30
3.1. Exercise	31
Task 4: Create a content plan [15 minutes]	31
4.1. Exercise	32
Task 5: Promote a valuable resource through social media [15 minutes]	32
5.1. Exercise	33
Wrapping up Day 4	33
<b>Day 5 – Put yourself out there</b>	<b>34</b>
Task 1: Publish your latest post... and promote it [15 minutes]	35
1.1. Exercise	35
Task 2: Start your pillar content series [30 minutes]	35
2.1. Exercise	37
Task 3: Use blog comments to generate content ideas [20 minutes]	37
3.1. Exercise	37
Task 4: Research audience needs using social media [15 minutes]	38
4.1. Exercise	39
Wrapping up Day 5	40
<b>Day 6 – Define and demonstrate quality</b>	<b>41</b>
Task 1: Publish the first post in your series [15 minutes]	42
1.1. Exercise	42
Task 2: Distribute a good link or resource to your social network [5 minutes]	42
2.1. Exercise	43
Task 3: Create the second post in your series [30 minutes]	43
3.1. Exercise	44
Task 4: Create a basic style guide for your site [20 minutes]	44
4.1. Exercise	45
Task 5: Revise your site's About page [20 minutes]	45
5.1. Exercise	46
Wrapping up Day 6	46
<b>Day 7 – Strategize for success</b>	<b>48</b>
Task 1: Review your blog's direction [30 minutes]	49
1.1. Exercise	49
Task 2: Identify content gaps [30 minutes]	50
2.1. Exercise	51
Task 3: Refresh your publishing plans [15 minutes]	51
3.1. Exercise	51
Wrapping up Day 7	52
Your Second Week of Blogging	52

# Introduction

The adage “start as you intend to continue” is really appropriate to blogging. Your first week of blogging is sure to be exciting, but it can also throw up challenges that you never expected. Many a beginning blogger has lost focus in the all-important first week as they struggle to respond to unanticipated hurdles. Those diversions can undermine the blogger, ending their blogging career before it’s even begun.

That’s where this ebook comes in. Yes, a successful blog combines a number of ingredients that must be carefully balanced. But in your first week of blogging there are certain tasks that will take priority. Tackle these, alongside an astute selection of other key activities, and in seven days you’ll have laid the foundations for a blog that succeeds not just for weeks or months, but in the years to come.

In this ebook I’ve drawn on my own experience in starting more than 20 blogs over the last ten years. I’ve made more than my fair share of mistakes, and have had the chance to put together a sort of mental checklist that I complete with every blog launch. In these pages I’ve written down that checklist for the first time. I hope it helps you launch your next blog.

## 1. How to use this book

Every blog is different. Each niche has its own unique rules for success.

I believe the daily tasks that I’ve suggested here will be applicable to a broad range of blogs, and to most bloggers. But keep in mind that you may need to do other things in the first week of your blog’s life, depending on your objectives and your niche. It’s also possible that some of the tasks that I’ve mentioned here, which may be necessary for other bloggers, may not be appropriate to your goals.

Ultimately, you’ll be the best judge of which tasks are essential, which are non-essential, and what others you need to add. This ebook has been designed to provide a practical framework to direct your work in that vital first week of blogging. Which, and how many, aspects of that framework you apply to your own blog is up to you.

## 2. Getting started

I won’t be covering blog platform selection, template choice, design, or other technical aspects of blogging in this ebook. I’ll assume that you’ve chosen a blog platform and have created a layout for your pages.

The reason for this is that the act of actually setting up a blog is much easier than actually establishing an online presence that’s credible, well positioned and robust. Few bloggers have trouble setting up a template and dropping in content; far more of us have trouble sustaining that effort in the longer term. So I’d like to focus on these less concrete topics in the coming pages.

For more information on platform selection and design, see the ProBlogger articles on:

- [Blog Networks](#)
- [Blogging Tools and Services](#)
- [Blog Design](#)

# Day 1

## Set solid foundations

Day 1 of your new blog is about planning. Armed with an idea or topic, many bloggers jump right in and spend their first day writing, but as we'll see in this chapter, a little time spent planning now will help you avoid headaches later.

I'm guessing that, since you're reading this ebook, you already have an idea of the topic you want to write about. This will naturally lead you to form an idea of the people who might be interested in your blog.

So we'll assume you have an idea of your niche and your audience. Perhaps you've made these choices yourself, or you've had them decided by clients or colleagues (in the case of business or corporate blogs).

On Day 1 of your new blogging venture there are five foundational steps you'll likely need to take:

- set up an Ideas folder **[2 minutes]**
- brainstorm ideas around your topic **[10 minutes]**
- choose a posting rhythm **[10 minutes]**
- plan your first week of content **[5 minutes]**
- write your launch post **[30 minutes]**

**TOTAL TASK TIME: 57 MINUTES**

# TASK 1

## Set up an ideas folder [2 minutes]

I've mentioned the importance of establishing a [repository for ideas](#) in the past. If you're going to continually produce quality blog content, you'll need post ideas.

Whether you're working on a usual text-based blog, a vlog (or video blog), or a photo blog, you'll need to make coming up with content ideas a part of your life.

The Ideas folder is the first, essential step in the process. It simply works as a repository for post ideas that you may have. Now, those ideas might come to you at odd moments – on the bus, while you're stacking the dishwasher, when you're noodling around on the web, and so on. The purpose of the Ideas folder is to provide a place for you to save those ideas so you don't lose a single one.

My Ideas folder is a digital folder on my computer. Yours might be a real folder into which you place cuttings, jottings and napkins on which you've noted post ideas over lunch. Or it might simply be a physical notebook in which you can note and flesh out post ideas. Set up your Ideas folder in a way that suits your personal preferences and working style – and is accessible for you at all (or most) times.

### 1.1. Exercise

1. Think about your lifestyle, obligations and commitments.
2. Identify the note-taking mechanism that you think will be most useful for you.
3. If it's an electronic Ideas folder, create a new directory on your computer with your blog's name, and within that directory create a folder called "Ideas".
4. If it's a physical collection, find a notebook or physical folder that you can use to record and store post ideas. Choose a safe location where you can store your collection of ideas – ideally, a spot where you know it won't be in others' way, and won't be moved in your absence.

# TASK 2

## Brainstorm post ideas [10 minutes]

Now that you've created an Ideas folder, let's get some ideas in there!

For some of us, brainstorming can seem indulgent, but I find it invaluable in coming up with good post ideas.

To brainstorm, you need to put aside a short period – I recommend ten minutes or so. Clear your mind of other considerations, shut the door on distractions and dedicate yourself to idea generation. Have your notepad – physical or digital – handy so you can jot down the ideas you come up with.

On ProBlogger we've covered a huge number of ways in which you can come up with post ideas (including [using press releases](#), [practicing what you preach](#), and [others](#)), but for your first brainstorming session let's focus purely on the ideas that are already in your mind.

If you don't think you have any ideas in mind, this exercise might just surprise you!

## 2.1. Exercise

1. Consider your blog's topic. Let's assume for this example that you breed poodle dogs, and your blog is about owning poodles as pets. Eventually, you want the blog to be a mechanism through which you can sell the dogs you breed.
2. Have a think about your blog's audience. Really think about who these people are: their gender, age range, and any characteristics that they share. For [poodlesaspetsblog.com](http://poodlesaspetsblog.com), your audience might be adult males and females who have an interest in owning a purebred dog as a pet, and adults who already have a pet poodle that they love and want to care for the "right" way.
3. Choose one of those audience segments – in our example, we might focus on people who are interested in owning a purebred dog as a pet and are considering owning a poodle. Now spend a few minutes listing some of the questions those people are likely to have about your blog topic. At this point, don't concern yourself with what might be a "good" idea, what ideas might suit particular types of posts, or anything else. Just write down every single idea you can think of.

For our poodle blog, we might list the following types of questions:

- Why would I choose a poodle as a pet?
  - Are there different kinds of poodles?
  - What's the history of this dog breed?
  - What kinds of households are poodles suited to?
  - How much exercise do poodles need?
  - What kind of demeanour do poodles have?
4. Next, list five things that you believe the audience really must know about your blog topic. Again, don't try to assess the ideas – just write them down.

For our poodle blog, those ideas might include things like:

- essentials of poodle ownership
  - a poodle owner's guide to pet health
  - basic information about choosing a poodle
  - how to find out if the breeder you're buying from is accredited
  - how well poodles socialize with other pets.
5. Choose one of these ideas you came up with in steps 3 and 4 and create a mindmap for it. I explained this process in [some articles](#) at ProBlogger, but let's go through it afresh now. Take that idea you've chosen and put it in the middle of a blank page. Here, I've used the example of poodle health as a starting point.

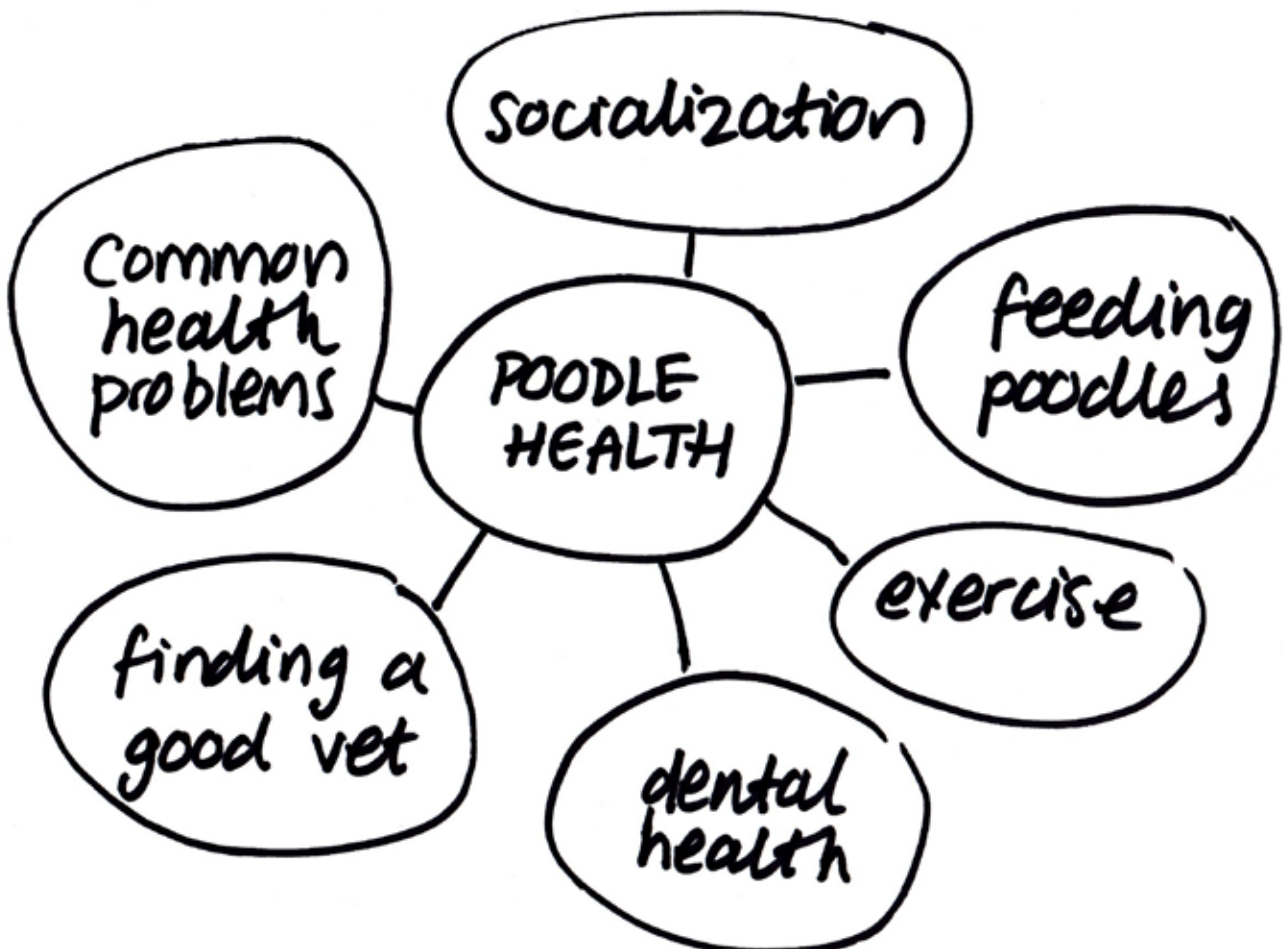


Figure 1.1. Beginning our mindmap



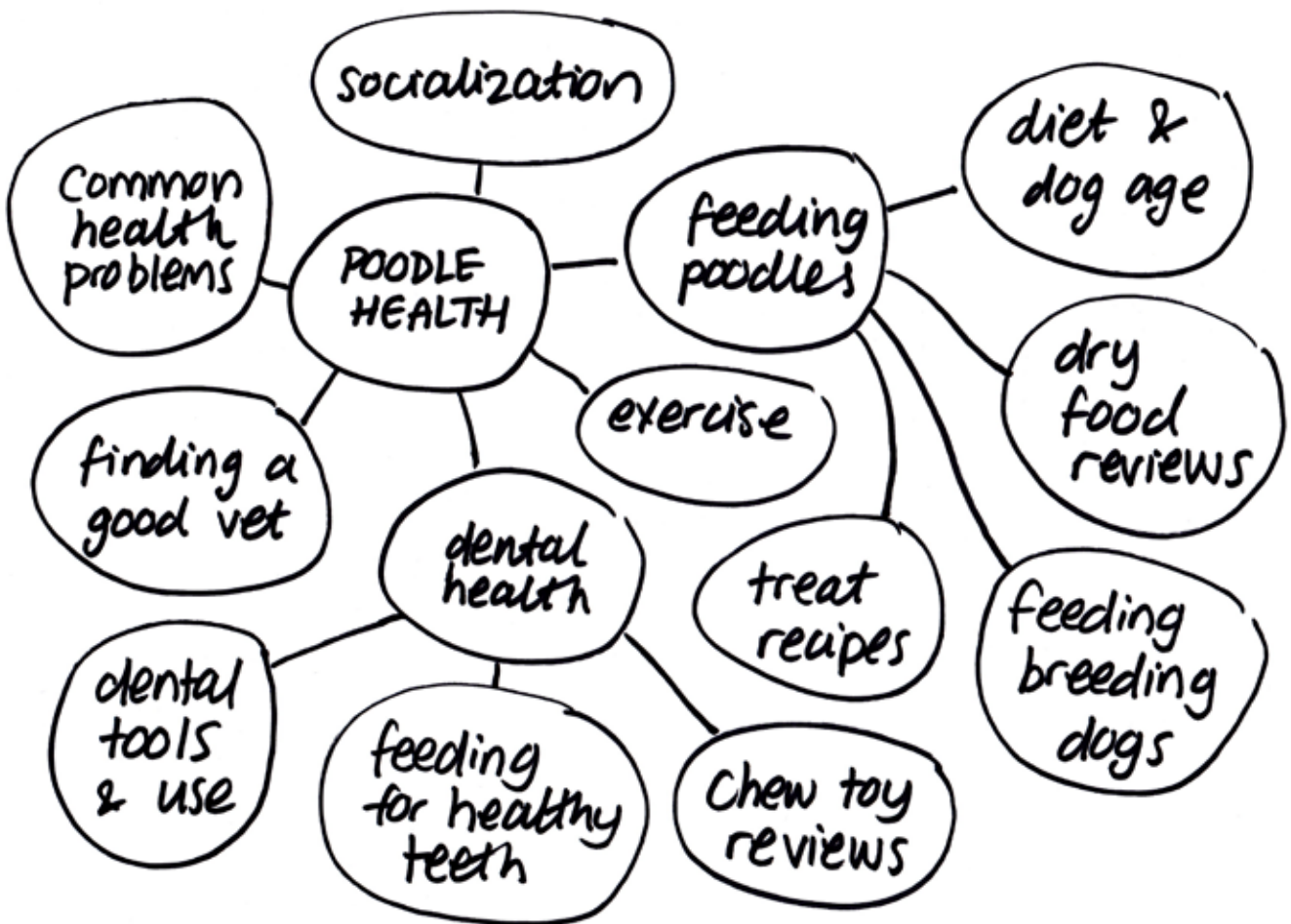
Now brainstorm ways that idea could be extended. For each idea draw a line out from the circle, draw a square or circle (or use a different colour), and write the idea inside it.

Figure 1.2. Building the mindmap



Build on that first circle of ideas, adding ideas to the new ones you've just created.

Figure 1.3. Building ideas on our ideas!



6. Repeat this process for the other audience segments you identified (in our case, people who already own and love a pet poodle).
7. If your Ideas folder is digital, save the file or files you've created to that folder.

## TASK 3

### Set a posting rhythm [10 minutes]

After that brainstorming exercise, you should have at least eight or ten ideas in your Ideas folder. And the temptation to get writing might be almost irresistible!

Hold it off for just a few minutes longer as we step through a couple more small tasks. The first is to choose a posting rhythm.

You've got a collection of great post ideas, yes. But you've also got a life – work, a family, friends and other commitments. Now's the time to open up your diary or calendar and work out a posting rhythm that's sustainable.

### 3.1. Exercise

1. Review your schedule for the next few weeks. Is there a day – or days – when you can put aside an hour to work on your blog? Block out those times for blog work.
2. Look into the future: are any commitments due to arise in the coming months that will impact your blogging work? A new job, night class, or holiday can have a significant impact on your available time. Also consider the schedules of those who depend on you: a change in your partner's or child's schedule might have a flow-on effect for you.
3. Given that information, reconsider the time you've blocked out for blogging in the coming weeks. How confident are you that you can sustain that frequency over the next few months?
4. Think about any other blog-related tasks you may need or want to undertake: promotion, marketing, design, and so on.
5. Now, decide how many blog posts you believe you'll reasonably be able to write and publish each week. Choose a frequency that you feel comfortable committing to for the foreseeable future – at least the next couple of months. You might like to:
  - schedule time for creating post content
  - schedule time to review posts you've created
  - designate a certain day or days each week or month for publishing posts.

## TASK 4

### Plan your first week of content [5 minutes]

Now that you've set a posting frequency, and you have a folder full of post ideas, it's time to schedule your first week of content.

This content plan is a great way to get your blog off to a flying start. If you want to plan beyond your first week, go ahead; the planning you do now will provide a valuable roadmap for the first weeks of your blog.

By setting a schedule and matching post topics to particular publishing spots you can set expectations among your blog readers – expectations that you can live up to!

### 4.1. Exercise

1. Given the time constraints we just identified, and any other tasks you'd like to complete around your blog (marketing, design, and so on), identify the days on which you'd like to publish a blog post in the coming week (or weeks).
2. Open your Ideas folder and take a look at the post ideas you came up with.
3. Choose a post topic for each publishing slot you just set.
4. Block out time in your schedule to write each of those posts, but leave Day 2 free to write your "my story" post (which we'll talk about more in the next chapter).

You've just created a blog publishing schedule – your blueprint for publishing success in the first weeks of your blog. Stick to it as closely as you can and give yourself time to adjust to having a blog in your life.

### Expect to review

After a few weeks or a month you might like to review your publishing schedule to see how well it suits your lifestyle and your readers' level of interest. By that time you'll have a feel for how well the schedule's working and whether it needs adjusting.

## TASK 5

# Create your launch post [30 minutes]

It's time to create some content!

### Timeframes

I've put a 30-minute timeframe on this task, but the amount of time you take to create your launch post will depend on a number of factors: your experience in content creation, how well you know the topic you're blogging about and the audience you're talking to, and so on.

### What's in a launch post?

Your launch post is the first post you'll publish to your blog. In most cases, it should:

- introduce the blog and you as the blogger
- explain why you created the blog
- identify the types of problems the blog will solve, questions it will answer, or help it will provide to visitors.

In your first post you might also like to give visitors an indication of how often you intend to publish new content, invite them to subscribe to your newsletter or RSS feed (if you have one set up) and solicit their feedback on the idea.

## 5.1. Exercise

1. Draft your launch post. Don't be a perfectionist as you create it: just focus on creating content at this point.
2. Have a break for a couple of minutes.
3. Come back to your launch post and review it. Put yourself in the shoes of your blog's visitors and think about whether there's anything you've left out.
4. Enter the post into your blog's content management system (or CMS).

### Peer review: finding a blogging buddy

You may have a friend or peer blogger – a blogging buddy – who might be a good person to review your posts before they publish. If so, you might contact them and ask them to take a look over your launch post. Often, peer review can be a great way to get insights into how visitors will perceive your content, identify information you've overlooked or assumed readers will know, and so on. Give this person plenty of time to review the post, and invite their feedback. If you go down this path, be prepared to consider their feedback with an open mind – don't take it personally!

## Wrapping up Day 1

You're done! Tomorrow, Day 2 on your blog, we'll review your launch post and publish it. But you've achieved great things already on Day 1 of your blog:

- You've identified your blog's topic and audience. This is especially important as you create the initial pieces of content you'll publish on your blog, since it impacts the way you create those posts, and what post topics you choose.
- You've generated a collection of ideas and saved them in your Ideas folder. These will stand you in good stead for content creation over the days and weeks ahead.
- You've planned a publishing schedule for your blog's first week or weeks. This provides a valuable blueprint to keep you on track in the first heady, busy days of your blog's life.
- You've created your launch post – a solid introduction to the blog and you as blogger, for your visitors.

You've done enough for one day. Congratulations!

# Day 2

## Publish and build presence

If yesterday was all about planning, today, Day 2 of your first week of blogging, is time to get your hands dirty. Roll up your sleeves and get ready for action.

Today, you'll:

- publish your launch post **[15 minutes]**
- write a “my story” post **[15 minutes]**
- develop a publishing procedure **[15 minutes]**
- generate ideas for pillar content using yesterday's mindmap and developing it further **[15 minutes]**
- create a Twitter or Facebook account for your blog and post titles and links of the articles you've already published **[20 minutes]**

**TOTAL TASK TIME: 1 HOUR, 20 MINUTES**

Let's get into it.

## TASK 1

### **Publish your launch post [15 minutes]**

Your first task is to log in to your blog's CMS and review the launch post you wrote yesterday.

The reason we left the post overnight is that it's good to review each post with "fresh eyes" before it goes live. I find it really helpful on my blogs to leave some time between writing a post and publishing it.

Not only does this give me space to think about the post – and realize anything important I've forgotten to mention in it – but it also helps me to spot typos and other errors that can be hard to see when you've just created a post.

#### **1.1. Exercise**

1. Log in to your blog's CMS and access your launch post.
2. Preview the post so you can see how it will appear as a published piece on your blog.
3. Proofread the post. Run the blog platform's spellcheck tool over it.
4. Make any additions or amendments to the post that are needed.
5. Preview the post once more.
6. Publish it (or schedule it to publish) on your blog.

Congratulations! You've published your first post and your blog is launched.

#### **Tell a friend**

Launching a blog is a big deal. Why not tell a few close friends or contacts and see what they think? You might want to wait until you have more content on the site before you go telling the world, but at this point consider letting a few people you trust know about your new blog. Having their encouragement and support right now can be really valuable – not to mention inspiring!

## TASK 2

### **Create a "my story" post [15 minutes]**

You've launched your blog and that's great. The next step is really to establish your credentials as a blogger in the topic area you've chosen. A good way to do that is through a "my story" post.

#### **What's in a "my story" post?**

A "my story" post briefly tells the story of your involvement in the niche you've chosen to blog about. It might include:

- how many years or months you've been interested in the topic
- evidence of your passion for, or expertise in, the topic area, including links to other work you've done or related projects you've been involved with
- a brief, heartfelt explanation of your motivations for starting the blog
- a statement of your hopes for the blog's future, including how you anticipate it will meet the needs of visitors.

As we've already seen, it's a good idea to write this post today and review and publish it tomorrow so you have time to review it with fresh eyes.

## 2.1. Exercise

1. Draft your "my story" post, considering and covering the points above that are relevant to yourself and your blog.

For [poodlesaspetsblog.com](http://poodlesaspetsblog.com), we might include such information as:

- your lifelong passion for the breed, which started when you had a poodle at age five
  - an outline of your career as a poodle breeder, including any show accolades you've won
  - an explanation of the reasons why you started the blog: because you think poodles make great pets and you wanted to provide information that would help people make informed decisions about having a pet poodle
  - an image of yourself with your prize poodle
  - your contact information, and/or an invitation for visitors to provide feedback, or tell their own stories, through the post's comments or your contact form.
2. Enter the post into your blog's CMS and save it for publishing tomorrow. Again, if you have a friend or peer who you trust to give you objective feedback on your post run it past them now.

## TASK 3

### Develop a publishing process [15 minutes]

How did you go saving today's post to your CMS? As you put it into the system you may have realized that both today's and yesterday's posts had a few things in common:

- they may have had subheadings, bullet lists, signoffs, and other formatting elements
- you may have included images or other media with each post
- you may have incorporated links to other websites or online resources in the posts
- you may have wanted to schedule them to publish at a later time – this may be the case if you're targeting an audience that's in a different timezone, or the time you've set aside for content creation is a long time before the time at which you want to publish the content.



You're going to be creating content over weeks and months to come. If that content is to be credible, it'll need to be presented to a consistently high level of quality. This way, readers know what they can expect from you.

Creating a publishing process for yourself now is a great way to ensure that your content is as consistent as possible.

### **What's in a publishing process?**

The simplest and most effective way I've found to create a publishing process is to make it up as a checklist of items that I want to tick off for each post before I publish it. A typical publishing process might include the following checkpoints:

- The post has a keyword-rich title.
- The post has an image.
- The image is credited to its creator.
- I've spellchecked the post.
- I've read the post.
- I've fact-checked the information I've included in the post as required.
- I've included a signoff that solicits visitor comments on the post topic.
- I've cross-linked the post to other posts on my blog as appropriate.

Your publishing process may include checkpoints related to blog post review, search engine optimization, article promotion in various locations, and so on.

## **3.1. Exercise**

1. **Spend ten minutes itemizing all the elements you want to include in each post, and the post-publication follow-up that you want to undertake for each post (including promotion, and so on).**
2. **Review these checkpoints, rationalize, and then write up into a checklist, like the one above, that you can refer to before you publish each post.**

### **Keep it handy**

**If you like, print this checklist and place it somewhere you can see it when you're working on blog content.**

## TASK 4

# Generate ideas for pillar content [15 minutes]

It's time for more content brainstorming. As you might have guessed, a big part of blogging is content creation, so it's something that you'll probably need to give some time to every day that you spend working on your blog.

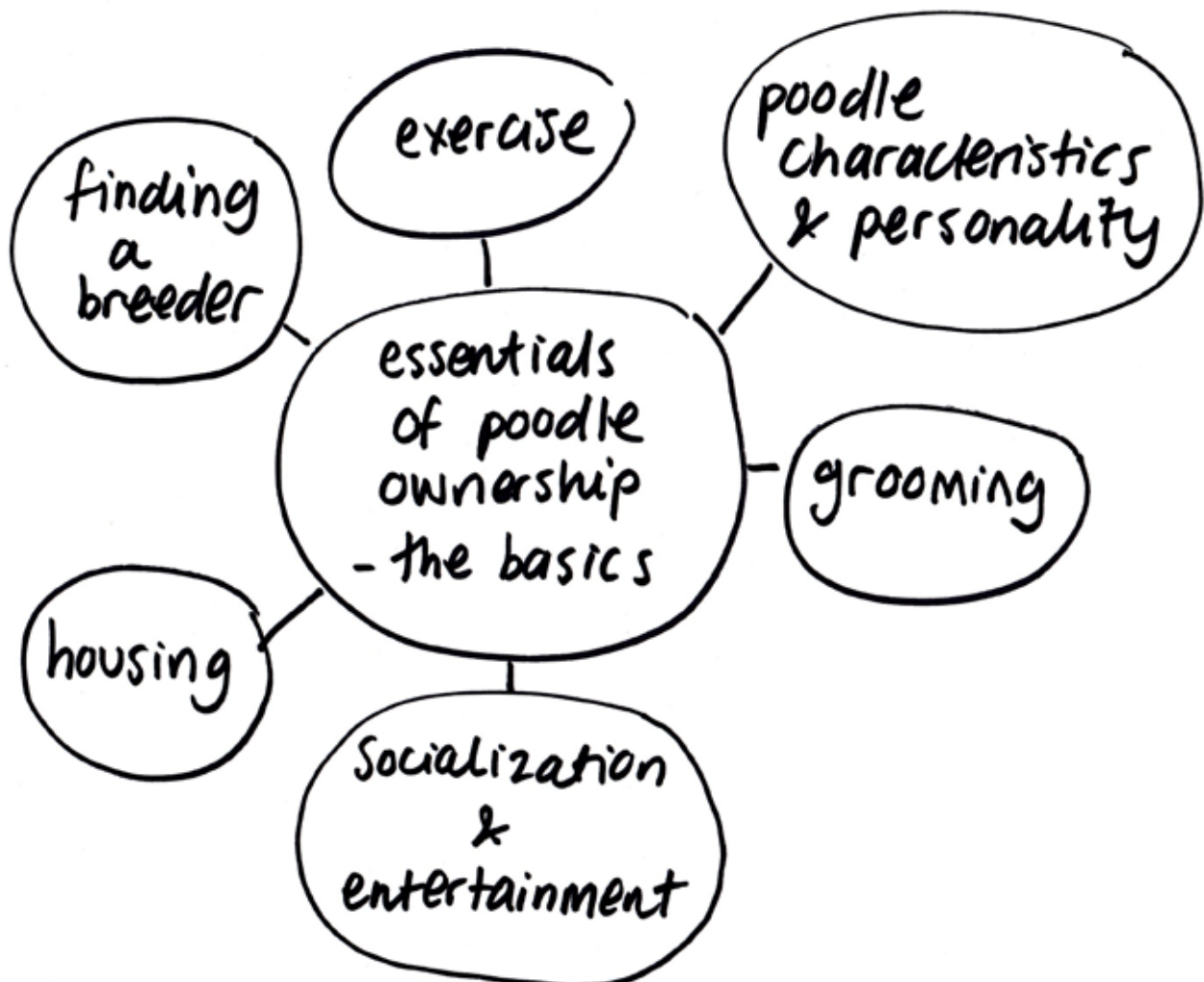
Open up the mindmap you created yesterday. Today, let's think about some pillar content for your blog.

### What's pillar content?

Pillar content is foundational or basic content that is essential knowledge for anyone in your niche. It's evergreen content – it never dates or loses relevance – and it's the kind of information that people within your audience would search for using Google, Bing, or another search engine. As you can imagine, pillar content is an important aspect of many blogs.

For poodlesaspetsblog.com, we might take the topic “essentials of poodle ownership” and mindmap that. Here's an example:

Figure 2.1. A pillar content mindmap



## 4.1. Exercise

1. On your mindmap, identify a basic or elementary aspect of your topic that fits the “pillar content” description above.
2. Spend ten minutes brainstorming around that topic. Break it down into its component parts and consider it from different angles.
3. Finally, draw up a list of pillar content ideas that you could create as individual blog posts, or a series.
4. Save this list to your Ideas folder for reference in the coming days and weeks.

## TASK 5

# Establish a social media presence for your blog [20 minutes]

If you’ve never used the Twitter or Facebook social networks, let your blog be your reason to start.

Blogging is an inherently community-focused exercise, and social media are among the best ways to attract visitors to your blog. Visitors who like your blog will want to share it with friends and contacts – and they’ll likely want to do that through social media.

Social networks are popular places for people to research, as well as share, their personal and professional interests, so you really should make the most of this low-cost promotional option.

A great place to begin your foray into social media is to simply create social media accounts through which you can broadcast the titles and links of the content you publish to your blog. From there, of course, the sky’s the limit!

## 5.1. Exercise

1. Choose a social network to join. I’d recommend you consider Facebook or Twitter, since these are the most popular networks. Do a few keyword searches on those networks to see what others are doing within your niche on these networks.
2. Sign up for an account on the network you choose. This will be free; all you need is an email address.

### Your account name

Should you create an account in your own name, or the name of your blog? This is a question of branding, and [this article](#) may help you make that decision.

3. Enter the title of your blog’s launch post and copy and paste in the URL.

### Shortening URLs

If you need to shorten the URL (for example, if you’ve signed up to use Twitter), try using a URL shortening service like [bit.ly](#).

4. Publish this information as a tweet (on Twitter) or Facebook update.
5. Search for peer bloggers or businesses within your niche on the social network you've chosen. Follow (on Twitter), friend or become a fan of (on Facebook) those you find interesting or relevant to what you're doing.

**Who should you follow or friend?**

Rather than seeing social media as a necessary marketing channel, take this opportunity to use the network you choose to your own personal advantage. As well as following peers who you like or admire, consider following people or organizations that you feel you can learn from, that you want to watch (competitors, perhaps), and that are of personal or professional interest to you.

## Wrapping up Day 2

It's been a productive day! You've:

- published your first post, and written your second
- developed a publishing process to help ensure your blog hits a consistent level of quality
- brainstormed ideas for the all-important pillar content that will, in time, be indexed by search engines and pull organic, focused traffic through to your blog
- stepped into the wonderful world of social media, signing up for Facebook or Twitter (or, if you're really keen, both) and making some connections there.

You're well on your way now. Tomorrow we start putting together the pieces: content, social media and your authority within your niche. But for the moment, at least, you can put your feet up!

# Day 3

## Concentrate on content

It's Day 3. You have a functional blog with content (albeit only one piece so far!). You have a folder full of content ideas. You have a social media presence. And you have a passion for your topic.

Things are looking good!

Today we'll take some more steps into the world of blogging, as we see how the concepts of your authority, your content and social media can work together to create a solid blog, with a strong online presence. You'll:

- publish your “my story” post, and promote on social media **[15 minutes]**
- write the pillar content piece **[30 minutes]**
- generate ideas for a series using mindmapping **[10 minutes]**
- plan your next post (or posts!) **[15 minutes]**
- engage in or contribute to a conversation with a niche peer or contact on social media **[15 minutes]**

**TOTAL TASK TIME: 1 HOUR, 35 MINUTES**

It's a big day, with a few challenges. But I hope you'll have fun along the way, too!

## TASK 1

# Publish your “my story” post... and promote it [15 minutes]

If you sent the “my story” post you wrote yesterday to a peer for some feedback, with any luck they’ll have got back to you overnight. Consider their feedback as you prepare to publish the post.

Today’s publication will also give you a chance to use the publication checklist you created yesterday – when you think the post’s ready to go, run through your list to make sure it’s got everything it needs. Once you’re sure it has, hit the Publish button.

Then? It’s time to start promoting your posts through your social media account. While promoting blog posts is only one of the many purposes that your social media account should serve, it shouldn’t be overlooked. Taking a few minutes to get your post out there can return big rewards in terms of traffic and friend-to-friend referrals.

### Other promotions

Don’t restrict your blog promotion to social media, or even merely to online sources. Also consider offline media – [this guide might help you get going](#).

## 1.1. Exercise

1. Consider any feedback you may have received if you sent your “my story” post to a friend or peer for review. Make any changes required.
2. Re-read the post and make sure you’re happy with it. Review the points in Stefanie Flaxman’s ProBlogger [article on writing errors](#), and make sure your post is free of all of them.
3. Take the publication checklist you created yesterday and check off each item for your “my story” post.
4. Publish the post to your blog.
5. Log in to your social media account and create an update that includes your post’s title and a link to it.
6. Publish that update for your contacts to see.

## TASK 2

# Create a pillar content post [30 minutes]

If all that brainstorming yesterday got your creative juices flowing, then there's good news: it's time to create your third post.

Today we'll focus on creating a post that constitutes pillar content. As you'll remember, that's evergreen, timeless content of the kind that people in your target audience will be likely to search for using search engines over the months and years to come.

In choosing the subject of your first pillar content piece, try to make the topic something that's likely to be pertinent to as many visitors to your blog as possible. From the ideas I worked up for [poodlesaspetsblog.com](http://poodlesaspetsblog.com), I might choose the topic "poodle characteristics and personality", since it seems a logical place to start building content.

Once you've chosen a topic, you'll need to think about what type of article you'll write. Pillar content is usually fairly detailed, so the post types you might consider could include:

- a how-to [tutorial](#)
- a carefully structured introduction-style post
- a detailed list or step-by-step post.

For my poodle characteristics and personality post, a tutorial probably won't be the way to go. On the other hand, an introduction ("Introducing the Poodle: types, tastes and temperament") or detailed list post ("Ten Traits of the Popular Poodle") might be good options for me.

### 2.1. Exercise

1. Open your ideas folder and refresh your memory by looking at your pillar content mindmap.
2. Select an idea that you'd like to focus on in your very first topic-specific post.
3. Do a little keyword research – perhaps using the [Google keyword research tool](#) – to get an idea of the most popular search phrases that people are using to access content on this topic. Where it's appropriate, use these popular terms in your post.
4. Plan out your post. As you do so, consider [these ideas for making the post "sticky"](#).
5. Create the post.
6. Save it, and if you have a peer who you've been asking for feedback, send the post through to them now.

## TASK 3

# Generate ideas for a series using mindmapping [10 minutes]

The pillar content mindmap you created yesterday is more valuable than you may have realized. Okay, so we just created a piece of pillar content using that mindmap, but that document can also help you to chain ideas together, to create ideas for post series (or even products like ebooks).

Let's take another look at the mindmap I created yesterday. Those post ideas could form a Poodle Basics series of blog posts, including these parts:

1. Poodles 101: characteristics and personality
2. How to find a good poodle breeder
3. Get set up for your new poodle
4. The essential poodle exercise plan
5. Friends and fun: socialize and entertain your poodle
6. Poodle grooming for beginners

Of course, any of these ideas could stand alone as a post and that's fine. But a bonus of the mindmap is that it makes the collection and collation of ideas easy and can make clear the different ways in which we can put those ideas to work.

So, for example, let's develop one of these ideas further to quickly come up with other ideas for more valuable pillar content – and, potentially, content series. Here, I've expanded on the topic of grooming.

Figure 3.1. Brainstorming a pillar content series





A five-part series on grooming your poodle? That sounds like it has potential. Since the audience for poodlesaspetsblog.com is average people (rather than breeders, for example) I might make the series about grooming your poodle at home – focusing on low-cost tools and professional techniques that can be applied by the average dog owner.

As you work through this exercise, you might also hit on some innovative ideas for presenting this content. For example, even if poodlesaspetsblog.com is a traditional, text-based blog, I might look at those grooming content ideas and realize that video posts would be a great way to present the information. Or perhaps I'll offer illustrations as PDF downloads that my visitors can print to refer to while they're grooming their poodles (so they don't get suds on the iPad!).

### 3.1. Exercise

1. **Build on your pillar content mindmap, fleshing out one or two topics in particular.**
2. **Formulate a logical series of posts using these ideas. Order them appropriately. You've just created a plan for a pillar content series. Nice work!**
3. **Consider how your content will be used by target visitors.**
4. **Note down the ways in which you could present this information so that it's most valuable for your blog's visitors.**

Save your ideas and the content plan in your Ideas folder so that you can come back to it in the days and weeks ahead as you prepare fresh content for your blog.

## TASK 4

### Plan your next post [15 minutes]

Okay, so we just came up with a series of post ideas. That's great, but now we need to think about your next blog post. Earlier today, you created a piece of pillar content for publishing tomorrow. While pillar content is extremely valuable, it's only one of the types of content you'll want to publish to your blog.

What are the other types? There are many: news posts, opinion pieces, personal stories or anecdotes – the list goes on. These more time-critical, less lasting posts are often the ones that give your blog a sense of energy and vibrancy, and give your audience a reason to come back every week. So while they may not still be relevant in a month's – or a year's – time, they are important to your blog.

In this exercise we're going to look at two ways you can get ideas for, and plan, your next post.

### 4.1. Exercise

1. **Think about your blog's topic, and how you've engaged with that topic in the last week. Did anything special, unusual, amusing, or suspenseful happen?**
2. **Make a note of that event or anecdote.**
3. **Open your Ideas folder. Identify a post topic or idea to which that anecdote could be tied or related.**
4. **Plan a blog post on that topic that incorporates the personal experience you noted down a moment ago.**

**OR**

1. Open your Ideas folder. Review the ideas you've come up with.
2. Choose one topic that interests you and plan a list post that addresses some aspect of it.
3. Choose another topic on which you have strong feelings. Plan an opinion piece that explains the issues and your position on them.

Save these post plans to your Ideas folder.

**Making space**

Perhaps it's time to create a sub-folder within the Ideas folder for post planning. This way, you can keep your broad ideas and specific plans separate – and not lose track of any of them.

## TASK 5

### Engage with others [15 minutes]

As we've already discussed, blogging is about community. It's about building relationships with your audience, and having fun exchanging ideas and information with them through the medium of your blog. Of course, there are other media – like the social network or networks you joined yesterday – that also allow for on-the-level communication with your audience members.

These different locations provide enormous, and valuable, opportunities for interaction. There are a few steps you really should take every day to ensure that you're not missing chances to connect with people in your blogging niche – blog visitors, peer bloggers, topic-related organizations, and so on.

**A growing concern**

In your first week of blogging you may not need to spend a lot of time responding to your blog's visitors, since visitor numbers and interaction may be low. Be aware, though, that this should be a growing element of your blogging responsibilities: as your blog grows, your readership will grow, and so will the level of interaction you engage in. Accept this time commitment – and enjoy it!

#### 5.1. Exercise

1. Check the email account that's listed on your blog's contact page. Respond to any emails you've received.
2. Check the comments section at the end of your published blog posts. Respond to any comments that users have made.
3. Log in to your social media accounts. Check @ replies (if you're using Twitter), wall posts (if you're using Facebook), plus any direct messages or contacts that you might have received.
4. Next, read your social network feeds. Get a feel for the discussions that are currently taking place.

## Looking for conversation

To find conversations, contacts and groups that focus on the topic of your blog (or related areas) search the social networks you're using for topic-related keywords. This is a great and simple way to find others who are talking about the things that interest you, but it's often overlooked.

5. **Contribute your own considered idea or thought to one of those discussions. Don't think about promoting your blog – just think about making a valuable contribution and engaging with the others in that conversation.**
6. **Don't forget to check back later – possibly tomorrow – to see if the people you directed your update to have responded to your comment or contribution.**

As you get to know more people through social media, you'll likely find yourself visiting their blogs and sites. If you find something valuable or interesting there, engage in those discussions, too: making thoughtful comments that advance conversations on others' blogs is another great way to engage with the people in your niche, get post ideas and expand your exposure to potential visitors to your own blog.

## Wrapping up Day 3

You've taken some important steps today:

- You published your "my story" post, and announced it through social media.
- You created an evergreen "pillar content" post for publication tomorrow (or your next date of publication).
- You planned a series of pillar content articles.
- You created a couple of ideas for additional blog posts.
- You connected with others in your niche, contributed to some conversations, and maybe made a few new connections.

Not bad for Day 3! You should now be getting into a bit of a groove in terms of thinking ahead about posts and content. You're probably also beginning to see the potential value you can gain from social media and other blogs (if you hadn't realized this before). Tomorrow, we'll build further on this approach. See you then!

# Day 4

## Understand the blog as a product

You're probably beginning to feel more comfortable with blogging now, which is great. Today you face a fresh challenge as you publish your first piece of pillar content for all the world to see. Until now your blog posts have been about you and your goals; today you step beyond that cosy sphere, put up your hand and say to your audience, "I have something valuable to contribute." For many, that can be a big step.

Today's other tasks include:

- creating one of the posts you planned yesterday **[15 minutes]**
- looking more closely at post formats and topics **[30 minutes]**
- practising writing headlines – the key to much of the traffic your posts will attract **[20 minutes]**
- creating a content plan **[15 minutes]**
- using social media to further establish your authority within your niche **[15 minutes]**

**TOTAL TASK TIME: 1 HOUR, 35 MINUTES**

## TASK 1

# Publish your pillar content post... and promote it [15 minutes]

You know the drill by now!

### Keeping to schedule

If publishing a pillar content post doesn't fit with the posting rhythm and the schedule you mapped out earlier in the week, that's fine. I'm going to assume you'll be publishing a new post every day this week, but if that's not what you have planned for your blog, feel free to skip this step and publish as and when your plan dictates.

### 1.1. Exercise

1. Consider any feedback you may have received if you sent your post to a friend or peer for review. Make any changes required.
2. Re-read the post and make sure you're happy with it.
3. Take your publication checklist and check off each item for the post.
4. Publish the post to your blog.
5. Log in to your social media account and create an update that includes your post's title and a link to it.
6. Publish that update for your contacts to see.

Well done. Now you can wait to see what readers think of your very first take on your topic area. Keep an eye out for feedback and discussion of your piece on your blog, in your email and on social media.

## TASK 2

# Create your next blog post [30 minutes]

Yesterday you came up with some post ideas. You may have chosen to work on an idea that tied a personal anecdote from your own experience to one of the topics you'd brainstormed, or you might have worked on list post and opinion piece ideas. (If you were very enthusiastic you might have done both, in which case you've got a *lot* of options today!)

You may find expressing or explaining anecdotes and opinions daunting at first – especially if you haven't done it much in the past. This is where your post planning will come in handy as it'll give you a structure or narrative thread that should keep you on track as you write. Don't fail to look at other posts of the type you're writing, too – seeing how other bloggers have approached opinion pieces, or told personal stories, can provide valuable lessons to help develop your blogging skills.

## 2.1. Exercise

1. Open your Ideas folder and, if you created one, your Post Planning folder. Pull out that post plan you made yesterday.
2. Do a little keyword research – perhaps using the [Google keyword research tool](#) – to get an idea of the most popular search phrases that people are using to access content on this topic. Where it's appropriate, use these popular terms in your post.
3. Review your plan so you know what you want to say, in what order.
4. Create the post. As you do so, consider the points in Ali Luke's ProBlogger article on [spicing up blog posts](#).
5. Save it, and if you have a peer who you've been asking for feedback send the post through to them now.

## TASK 3

# Experiment with formats and headlines [20 minutes]

Read a newspaper or magazine and use it to generate post ideas for your blog, focusing on article formats and topics that might suit. Or draft five headlines you'd expect to see on a blog in your niche, then look into your Ideas folder and see if any of the topics align with the headlines you've written, or if these are entirely new ideas you can add to your collection.

You've done a lot of content creation and planning in the last few days. But all blog posts are not created equal. Each blog post has a number of elements – a format, structure, tone, title, image, and so on. Today, let's take a deeper look at two of these aspects: post formats and post headlines.

I've broken this exercise into two parts, and each should take around 20 minutes. You only need do one today, but you can come back to the other later – or do both if you're extra-diligent!

The first task involves researching post formats. When I say "format", I'm not talking about content types – video posts, image posts and so on. I'm referring to the different [frames you can use to shape the key message in your article](#). We've already talked about list posts, opinion and anecdote. These are types of post formats, but, as you'll see when you work through this exercise, there are others.

The second activity focuses on headlines. Headlines or post titles are a pretty important aspect of a post. A well-honed title can catch the attention of blog visitors, social media users and more. It can help move your post up the search engine results for specific keywords. And it sets users' expectations about what your article will deliver – if it sets the wrong expectation, you're in trouble.

Let's get going.

### 3.1. Exercise

1. Watch the video, [“How to Use a Magazine to Improve Your Blog.”](#)
2. Pick up a magazine – it doesn’t have to be one that’s related to your niche.
3. Flick through it, making notes as you go about the kinds of formats the articles take: lists, how-to’s, seasonal posts, letters, opinion, interviews, and so on.
4. When you’re done, put the magazine aside. Open up your Ideas folder.
5. Go through the article formats you noted down and work out which formats could be well suited to some of the post ideas you’ve listed.
6. As you refine topics into article ideas that fit a particular format, rough out post plans for these ideas and save them to your Post Planning folder.

#### OR

1. Take a look at Eric and Michael Cummings’ ProBlogger article, [“The 8 Most Greatest Tips to Write Unstoppably Killer Headlines Guide Ever”](#).
2. On a blank page, jot down five or more titles that you’d expect to see on blog posts that address your chosen topic.
3. Now jot down the keywords you’ve identified as being popular for your niche.
4. Review your title ideas and see where those keywords are – or could be – used. Revise your headlines to include one or two keywords if you wish.
5. Now open your Ideas folder and your Post Planning folder. See if any of the post titles you’ve come up with correspond to any of the post ideas you’ve saved.
6. If they do, plan posts that will address the headlines you’ve created. Save those outlines to your Post Planning folder.

Whether you chose one or both of these exercises, you should have generated some more creative content ideas for your blog. Small exercises like these can be invaluable for generating post ideas – keep them in mind for future reference!

## TASK 4

### Create a content plan [15 minutes]

Over the last few days you’ve created a lot of content ideas. And back on Day 1 you set a content rhythm to which you wanted to publish posts. Today let’s put those two ideas together in a simple content plan.

#### What’s in a blog content plan?

A blog content plan is a calendar. You can use it to allocate posts you’ve created to publish on particular days of the week or month. As you’ll see, a good content plan will help you ensure:

- that you're covering the full range of topics your blog set out to explore
- that your content is meeting the needs of all segments of your blog's audience
- that you're not publishing too much of the one thing
- that you're prepared to meet the content needs of your blog and its audience
- that you can anticipate blog promotions, busy times and holidays so you're not run ragged creating content at the last minute.

## 4.1. Exercise

1. Read Georgina Laidlaw's ProBlogger article, "[Easy Content Scheduling for Beginners.](#)"
2. Create an calendar for yourself: make a spreadsheet, create a [Google calendar](#) for content scheduling, print a blank calendar from your computer and stick it to your wall – whatever suits you.
3. Open your Post Planning folder.
4. Allocate each of the planned posts to specific days in your calendar. If you've decided to colour-code your posts on the basis of topic, format, or some other element that's relevant to your audience, apply that colour-coding.
5. Sit back and review your content plan as a whole. Ask yourself if there are any obvious content gaps in terms of topics, article types, and so on.
6. If you find a gap, open your Ideas folder and take a look at the ideas you've generated. Find one that's appropriate for the content gap you're working on and slot it in. Then plan that post and save the plan to your Post Planning folder.

This procedure is a really great way to stay on top of your blog's content needs. Your blog will have an ongoing need for fresh content, and the content plan you've just created is the key to making sure you can meet that need with top-quality content that your readers love.

## TASK 5

# Promote a valuable resource through social media [15 minutes]

If your brain's hurting right now, don't worry: in this task, you get to do a bit of web surfing. Sound good? I thought so, too!

One of the really valuable elements of social media is that it allows us to share information with our contacts. This is valuable for us as users because we can rely on the personal referrals of others – when our contact Joe A. Blogger links to an article or resource, he's picked it himself and is endorsing it. If we've liked Joe's links in the past, we know we'll probably like this one too.



As such, sharing resources through social media is a good way to give back to your social network, build your authority, and help your contacts, all at the same time. Checking out the links of others is excellent for gaining valuable tips and references to information, too.

## 5.1. Exercise

1. Visit some of your favourite sites in your blog's niche.
2. Find an article, link or resource that you feel is valuable and relevant. Perhaps it's also amusing, educational or thought-provoking. Maybe it's all three!
3. Copy that link.
4. Create an update in your social media account that says something enticing about the resource you're linking to – explain why it's worth looking at. Paste in the link and publish your update.

This is a good practice to get into. Soon, every time you research your topic or field, it'll become second nature to promote quality content to your social network in this way. And your contacts will love you for it.

### Quality over quantity

Don't be tempted to send every article or resource you come across to all your social media contacts. Instead, choose only the best resources – the ones that you like the most. Your followers and friends will appreciate it if you champion quality over quantity, so while it's great to send out links to excellent information, make sure that information really is excellent, every single time.

# Wrapping up Day 4

You're more than halfway through your first week of blogging. Think back to where you stood on Day 1 and I'm sure you'll feel like you've come a long way. Blogging entails a steep learning curve, but, as you're proving, it's manageable!

Today, you've:

- published your first authoritative, pillar content blog post
- written a news, opinion or anecdotal blog post for your next publishing spot
- experimented with post formats, or titles, or both
- created a content plan
- added value and authority to your social media presence by distributing among your contacts a resource that you felt was invaluable.

Already the work you've done puts you ahead of many others out there who take a haphazard, unstructured approach to launching their blogs. Well done!

Remember the content series you brainstormed yesterday? Tomorrow we'll get started writing that series. But for now you can take a break, relaxed in the knowledge that your blog's content is planned for at least the next few weeks.

# Day 5

## Put yourself out there

A new dawn, another day on the blog. Today we'll focus on delving deeper into your niche. Instead of relying on your own sense and knowledge of your topic, today's tasks look at how you can use the work of others to develop your blog – and yourself as a blogger.

Today you'll:

- publish your news, opinion or anecdotal post and promote it on social media **[15 minutes]**
- create the first piece in the pillar content post series you planned out on Day 3 **[30 minutes]**
- use blog comments to generate content ideas **[20 minutes]**
- use social media to find out what your target audience wants to know about your niche **[15 minutes]**

**TOTAL TASK TIME: 1 HOUR, 20 MINUTES**

As you're probably realizing, the process of researching your niche – for content ideas, to expand your knowledge, to get to know others in the niche, for a clearer picture of your target audience – is an ongoing, essential aspect of the blogger's success. You can't operate in a vacuum. Let's see what you can gain by looking around the blogosphere today.

## TASK 1

# Publish your latest post... and promote it [15 minutes]

The time has come to put yourself on the line and publish a blog post that's a little more "you". More personal posts – opinion pieces, anecdotal content or reinterpreted news articles – can present challenges not only in their writing, but also in their publication. Be brave!

Of course, not everyone feels such a sense of exposure when they publish their own views on their niche. In that case, what are you waiting for? Let's publish that post.

### 1.1. Exercise

1. Consider any feedback you may have received if you sent your post to a friend or peer for review. Make any changes required.
2. Re-read the post and make sure you're happy with it.
3. Take your publication checklist and check off each item for the post.
4. Publish the post to your blog.
5. Log in to your social media account and create an update that includes your post's title and a link to it.
6. Publish that update for your contacts to see.

Don't forget to watch for, and respond to, comments on the blog post itself, as well as social networks.

## TASK 2

# Start your pillar content series [30 minutes]

A couple of days ago you planned a series of pillar content articles. Today it's time to begin creating that series by working up the first in your series.

As you'll see, creating a series of posts is slightly different from making one-off posts. Let's look at the [poodlesaspetsblog.com](http://poodlesaspetsblog.com) example to see what that means. My content plan for the pillar series included five posts which would cover:

1. coat clipping
2. brushing
3. nail trimming
4. washing
5. eye and ear care

The first thing I need to think about here is the order in which I'll publish my posts – is there a logical order in which they'd be best presented? I tend to think that starting with the most basic – or common – tasks will probably make the series most approachable and useful.

So I might start with brushing – something most poodle owners will need to do daily. Next? Probably washing, then coat clipping. Nail trimming seems a logical follow-up, because eye and ear care is the topic that's likely to intimidate new poodle owners most. My readers will probably want to get comfortable with clipping their dog's nails before they start dealing with these more delicate areas.

The order of your posts will depend on the topics you're covering and, importantly, what's logical given the characteristics of your target audience. It's important that you give this question some thought before you begin creating the content.

### **Other considerations**

A number of content elements tend to come into play when you're working on a series of posts. Consider how you might use these – or add to this list specific elements related to your niche and userbase.

#### **Parallel format**

To create a sense of consistency and coherence between posts in the series you might apply the same post format or structure to all of the posts.

#### **Titling**

Will you use the same title for each post, with a part number following it (e.g. Poodle Grooming Basics, Part 1)? Or will you use the same beginning for each title and change the ending to suit the post topic (e.g. Poodle Grooming Basics – Coat Clipping)?

#### **Other means of communicating the series**

If you use completely different titles for each post, how will you communicate that the articles form a series? You could, for example, use icons, tags, or categorization to identify the content as a series. You might also identify in each post's introduction that it's part of a series and, at the posts' ends, mention the topic that you'll cover in the next post on the topic.

#### **Linking**

You might want to link from each post in the series to some or all of the others. Perhaps you'll link each post to the one that comes before it, and the one that comes after it, in the series order. Or perhaps you'll include a standard notice at the beginning and ending of each post that includes links to all other parts in the series. Alternatively, you might simply link each of the posts to a separate page that introduces the series and contains links to its parts.

#### **Forward and back references**

As you mention the topics of other posts in the series within a given piece, will you mention that you've already covered that topic (if you have) or that the topic will be addressed in an upcoming post in the series? If you do, will you link those references to the appropriate posts?

#### **Publication timing**

How often will you publish a new part to your series? Will you interleave other posts with the series in your publishing schedule, or publish the parts one after the other in an unbroken rhythm? For peace of mind, will you hold off publishing any parts in the series until you've prepared all its posts?

As you can see, there are a lot of elements that you'll need to consider if your series is to be as strong as it can be. Often, I find it useful to draft the first post in the series, then review it in light of the fact that it's part of a bigger whole. This way, I can make decisions about titling, structure, and so on, in light of a piece of content that I've naturally created to meet a specific need. I think this can help to ensure that each piece in the series remains as powerful as possible, since I'm not shoehorning content into a series format that I've created on the basis of theoretical idealism rather than cold, hard, post-creating practice.

## 2.1. Exercise

1. Open your Ideas folder and refresh your memory by looking at your pillar content series mindmap.
2. Consider the parts in your series and work out a logical order in which you'll prepare and publish the posts.
3. Review the issues I raised above and make some instinctive decisions on those that relate to your topic and series.
4. Create the first post in your series.
5. Save it, and if you have a peer who you've been asking for feedback send the post through to them now.

Nice work. I hope you're feeling a sense of momentum that you can rely on to maintain the first-post spark throughout your entire series. That's the other challenge of creating a series, but it's one that becomes easier to master the more series you create.

## TASK 3

# Use blog comments to generate content ideas [20 minutes]

Today I want to show you a helpful technique for getting a feel for the kinds of information that your blog's target users are seeking. This is an especially helpful technique for generating content ideas – especially if you're ever stumped and need ideas quickly.

The idea is simple: look through the comments that users have made on your blog posts and interpret what these say about those visitors' information needs. Don't have any comments on your blog yet? No problem; visit popular sites in your niche, review their comments and interpret what they say about your target audience's needs.

### Extra benefits

If you go off-site to other blogs and sites within your niche, you'll be doing yourself a favour: you'll get a feel for the content others are publishing, the issues they're covering, and so on as you search for valuable commenter insight. Offsite research really gives you the chance to do two jobs at once.

## 3.1. Exercise

1. Look through the comments on the posts you've published so far to your blog.
2. Make note of any questions that visitors have asked outright, but also jot down any topics on which their comments show they need more information.
3. Now visit one of the leading blogs in your niche. Go through the most recent articles, reviewing the visitor comments on each one.
4. Again, make notes about the kinds of questions users are asking.

5. Open up your Ideas folder and add these ideas to your list. Perhaps some of them are already on your list – or you can see ways to angle some of your existing ideas to provide the information that users are seeking.
6. Create a mindmap for at least two of the ideas you've picked up from your research.
7. Plan a fresh blog post (or two!) using your favourite of the ideas you've just come up with. Save the plan to your Post Planning folder.

See how easy it is to generate post ideas using reader comments? This technique is one of my favourites – as your blog grows and attracts more users and commenters you'll find it a great way to build your content inventory and address the needs of visitors at the same time.

## TASK 4

# Research audience needs using social media [15 minutes]

Social networks have provided another great means to conduct audience research. Whereas the previous technique really focused on generating content ideas for immediate use, this technique offers a means by which to get to know specifics about your blog's userbase (or, at least, those that you're connected with through social networks).

### Losing track...

I've estimated 15 minutes for this task, but if you're anything like me, you'll find that once you start researching your niche and audience on social networks you lose track of time and end up spending ages scouring the web for juicy tidbits, good people to follow or friend and so on. It's a good idea to try to keep your social media time contained from the first, so that you don't get into the habit of having it chew up half your blogging time (or more!). Perhaps consider setting a timer for a fifteen-minute block that you'll spend on this task.

In this exercise, we won't be idly surfing around your network of choice; instead, we'll get a feel for the direct-research capacity of these media. We'll choose a topic of interest, then formulate a question to ask your social network contacts.

### Formulating your question

You don't want to ask your connections a yes-or-no question: this exercise is about engaging with your friends and followers to find out what's on their minds. Your question should:

- tap into the topic you're researching
- ask contacts about how a specific aspect of that topic affects them
- encourage them to share their thoughts, concerns or limitations regarding that topic.

It's not as difficult as it sounds, although it can be more difficult if you're using Twitter and also have a 140-character limit to contend with!

Let's consider an example using my [poodlesaspetsblog.com](http://poodlesaspetsblog.com) website. Among the topics I first brainstormed for the blog was "dry food reviews". I'm aware that product reviews can be one way to generate an income from my blog, through affiliate marketing.

### What's affiliate marketing?

Affiliate marketing is the relationship in which a blogger generates sales of a product for a product owner and receives a percentage of each of those sales for their work. For more on using affiliate marketing on your blog, see this ProBlogger article by affiliate gurus, E-junkie.

This is a nice idea, but will it fly with my audience? Should I consider doing tinned food reviews? What about specialized food products? Does my audience even care? If so, what motivates their buying decisions when it comes to food – cost? Availability? Nutrition?

As you can see, I have a lot of questions about this area. So I decide to ask my Twitter followers about it. I could just ask, "What do you feed your poodle?" but this is a pretty generic question and not really one that's likely to start a passionate discussion. The thing to remember about social networks is that they're time-critical and they're personal. So more attention-grabbing questions around my topic could include:

- I'm looking to change my poodle's feeding regime. Any brands or products you can recommend?
- Tell me: what did you feed your poodle today? And why *that* product?
- It's doggy dinner time! What matters most to you about pet food: value for money, nutrition, or something else?
- Poodle-lovers, what are you dishing up for your pooch tonight? An old fave or a new product you can share with us?

None of these questions will generate all of the answers I seek. However, they'll stand a good chance of soliciting at least a few responses – and I can start conversations with those poodle owners in the hopes of getting insights on some of the other questions I have.

## 4.1. Exercise

1. Open up your Ideas folder and the first mindmap you made for your topic. (You could just as easily do this using the list of topics you gathered from the blog comment research you completed earlier.)
2. Make a note of any ideas or topics on the mindmap that you feel may be of little interest to your user base, too advanced for them and so on.
3. Also make a note of any topics or ideas that are so broad that you don't know where to start posting about them.
4. Review these topics and pick one that you'll research using social media.
5. Log in to your social media account (or accounts if you're using more than one network).
6. Review the conversations and information being posted to see if any aspects of that topic have come up for discussion recently.

7. **Formulate a question that you can ask your audience directly. It may relate to, or build on, existing discussions, or, if there are none, it might launch a new discussion on that topic.**
8. **Post your question to your social network.**
9. **Over the coming hours and days keep a close eye on the responses you get. Reply to those who respond, thanking them, asking them for clarification or discussing their comments more with them.**

After a day or so you'll likely have engaged with a few of your contacts and found out more about their thoughts on the topic that, previously, had you baffled. This might give you a clearer picture of the degree of experience or sophistication your contacts have in regards to your topic area. It might also give you more insights into the way they approach the topic of your question, or related topics.

As you go, don't forget to drop the content ideas sparked by those engagements into your Ideas folder.

## Wrapping up Day 5

If you thought blogging was a simple create-and-publish proposition, you've undoubtedly realized that that perception wasn't quite accurate. As today's tasks reveal, being a great blogger involves as much listening as it does talking, and as much reading as it does posting.

- You published the first blog post that revealed your personal take on some aspect of your topic.
- You created the first in a multi-part series of pillar content posts – and got a feel for the ways in which this process differs from creating one-off posts.
- You generated content ideas – and did a little audience and market research – using blog comments.
- You launched your first ever social media research experiment! ...by asking your contacts a well-honed question about their take on a topic you want to blog about.

Gathering information is one thing; interpreting it is something else entirely. The way you understand the information you gain through research depends entirely on you: your experience, world view, attitudes, character, and so on. Over time, as your understanding of, and engagement with, your target audience, peers and niche grows, your interpretation of information will naturally evolve. That's fine – it's all part of the blogging journey.

Tomorrow, we'll use the information you gained from today's research to improve your own blog.



# Day 6

## Define and demonstrate quality

You're well and truly up and running now. Today's tasks involve building on the foundations you've already put in place:

- publish the first post in your series, and promote it on social media **[15 minutes]**
- while you're there, send a link to a good peer or niche resource to your social network **[5 minutes]**
- create the second post in your pillar content series **[30 minutes]**
- create a basic style guide for your site **[20 minutes]**
- revise your site's About page **[20 minutes]**

**TOTAL TASK TIME: 1 HOUR, 30 MINUTES**

## TASK 1

# Publish the first post in your series

**[15 minutes]**

I don't need to tell you how to publish a blog post! Just remember to check back on those decisions you made about presenting your series yesterday and make sure you're still happy with them. You might find that fresh eyes (and the feedback of your blogging buddy) cause you to rethink some of those choices for greater impact.

### 1.1. Exercise

1. Consider any feedback you may have received if you sent your post to a friend or peer for review. Make any changes required.
2. Re-read the post and make sure you're happy with it.
3. Reconsider the decisions you made on how you'll present the series on your blog. Make sure you're comfortable with those choices, and make any amendments you believe are needed.
4. Take your publication checklist and check off each item for the post.
5. Publish the post to your blog.
6. Log in to your social media account and create an update that includes your post's title and a link to it.
7. Publish that update for your contacts to see.

Wait! Before you leave your social network, take a moment to do the next task.

## TASK 2

# Distribute a good link or resource to your social network [5 minutes]

Yesterday you spent some time looking at any comments that have been made on your own blog, as well as those that visitors have made on other blogs in your niche. In the course of that process, you undoubtedly came across some pretty impressive content that you know will interest your social network.

So today, while you're logged in to your social media account, why not distribute that link among your contacts?

## Other update options

If you want to try something a bit more interesting than simply making an update that contains a link to the resource you've chosen, consider these options:

### **Post a snippet of your comment on a resource you like**

More self-promotional than simply posting a link to a good resource, in this update you'd quote part of your own (insightful, valuable) comment on someone else's content, and include a link to that content.

### **Post a quote from the resource itself**

Find a particularly relevant or impressive snippet within the resource you're linking to and quote that in your status update or Tweet.

### **Post the link with a question you have about it**

A good way to start a discussion is to post the resource link with a question you have about the resource as a means to solicit discussion with your contacts. You could ask for their take on the issues covered, whether they feel the resource is valuable or how they see its advice fitting into their approach to the topic area, for example.

## 2.1. Exercise

1. **Create a status update that includes a link to a really valuable resource you've found within your niche.**
2. **Spellcheck the update and check that the link works (especially if it's a shortened URL).**
3. **Publish that update for your contacts to see.**

Make publishing updates to valuable resources within your topic area an ongoing part of your social media strategy. The more involved you get with your niche online, and the more you engage with social networks, the more natural this will become.

## TASK 3

# Create the second post in your series

## [30 minutes]

Creating the second part in your blog series should be fairly straightforward. You've got Part 1 nailed down and today you've honed your ideas about how the series content will be formulated and presented.

Part 2 of your series may be relatively easy to write, but remember to stay on track and keep the bigger picture of the series plan as a whole in mind. To be honest, it's often the middle of a post series that seems most difficult to me. It can be hard to keep the motivation up and the spark alive in your content at that point.

The more posts you create the easier you'll find it to push through these issues to create great series content.

## 3.1. Exercise

1. Open your Ideas folder and get out the pillar content series plan.
2. Think about the article you're going to write and plan it in detail if you wish.
3. Review the decisions you made about series presentation earlier today.
4. Apply those decisions as you create the second post in your series.
5. Save it, and if you have a peer who you've been asking for feedback send the post through to them now.

This sounds simple enough, but as you write, you'll get a feel for the challenges of creating a coherent whole from multiple posts. Each of those challenges is an opportunity to really make your series work well, so look hard for creative solutions that will really set your content apart from that of others in your niche.

## TASK 4

# Create a basic style guide for your site

### [20 minutes]

As you've prepared and published blog posts over the last few days, you may have realized that the more content you have, the more complicated things get. Take a look at your blog right now, and you might find that some article titles are capitalized, while others have only one capital, on their first word. You might have included a "Further reading" section in one post, but scattered links throughout the body content of another. Perhaps you referred to "Ebooks" in one post and "e-books" in another.

Variability in the way you present your content can cause a number of problems:

- It can catch readers' attention, distracting them and drawing their focus away from your content and messages.
- It can dilute your voice or brand.
- It can make your site look less than professional.

For these reasons, it's a good idea to create a style guide for your blog. As well as countering these negative possibilities, a style guide can help out in some fairly unexpected places:

- If you ever decide to accept guest posts, a style guide will also help to ensure that their content is presented in line with your own.
- It can help you to ensure that off-blog content, like emails, articles, videos, advertisements, ebooks, reports, and promotional collateral is consistent with your on-blog brand.

### What's in a style guide?

A style guide is a collection of rules that you'll use to guide your everyday decisions about presenting content on your blog. The great value of a style guide is that it saves you time: instead of searching laboriously to see how you spelled "ebook" the last time you used the term, you can just glance at your style guide.

Your style guide doesn't need to be lengthy, but it should answer the types of questions that you find yourself asking every time your work on content. You might include information on:

- spellings, particularly those related to your niche topic (shall I write “nail-clippers” or “nail clippers” on my Poodle blog?)
- capitalization of specific words (Poodle or poodle?), post titles, and so on
- inclusion and treatment of images within posts
- inclusion and treatment of video and downloadable resources within posts
- treatment of multi-part series on your blog
- text formatting within posts, including headings, subheadings, and so on
- treatment of quotes from others within your posts.

As you can see, the types of information you include will depend on your niche and the nature of your blog. Your style guide can be as detailed or informal as you like – some of the best are the simplest, which simply contain a list of the key issues that need to be addressed before each post is published.

## 4.1. Exercise

1. **Take a look at the blog posts you've published (and drafted!) so far.**
2. **Make a note of any inconsistencies you see between them: headings, text formatting and so on.**
3. **Also note down any topic-specific spellings that you want to make consistent.**
4. **Make a decision about each point you've listed.**
5. **Create a document that shows how that decision will affect the content on your blog. Include examples of usage if that will make things easier for you.**
6. **Save the document alongside the post publication checklist you developed on Day 2. If you like, print your style guide and pin it up next to your checklist for easy reference.**

As an extra challenge, you might consider going back to the posts you've already published and applying your freshly selected styles to them, to make sure that all of your content is consistently presented.

Also consider reviewing other site content, like main pages (About, Contact, error pages and so on), navigation items and any emails or autoresponders you've set up for the blog.

## TASK 5

# Revise your site's About page [20 minutes]

When we began this journey, I explained that I'd assume that you already had a blog set up and ready to go: you'd chosen a blogging platform, picked a theme, set up the site structure and populated your main pages with content.

However, as [Lea Woodard's ProBlogger article](#) explains, your About page can make or break your blog – especially in the eyes of first-time visitors. Now that you've established the blog, published a few posts, got to know your target visitors and mapped out a little of your future, it's probably a good time to revisit the content you put on your About page.

## 5.1. Exercise

1. **Load your blog's About page in your browser (or if you prefer, print it out). If you don't have one yet, create a new page on your site and call it "About".**
2. **Objectively assess your About page on these points:**
  - Does it introduce you?
  - Does it include an image of you?
  - Does it tell the reader what your blog will give them?
  - Does it meet any other objectives you might have set for the page (for example, encourage visitors to sign up for your blog's newsletter or RSS feeds, to follow you on a social network, provide testimonials from respected peers, etc.)?
  - Does it end with a call to action? Even something as simple as an invitation to check out the latest posts, linked to your homepage, can go a long way in keeping readers on your blog after they've read this page.
3. **Your review will likely have brought to light a few places in which your About page could be improved. Make those improvements now. If you're starting from scratch, create an About page that meets these requirements.**
4. **Apply your publishing checklist and style guide to your About page to make sure this content is in line with the rules and quality standards you've set for your blog.**
5. **Save the About page to your blog. If you like, run this page past your blog buddy, or a close friend or niche peer, to see if there's anything they feel you've left out, understated or could rework.**

You might consider asking your social network for feedback on your updated (or new) About page – invite them to take a look and let you know if they spot any errors, or have any questions or suggestions. Giving your social network a chance to critique and help develop your content can help boost their sense of engagement with your brand, and loyalty to your blog. Don't be shy about engaging with your friends and followers.

## Wrapping up Day 6

You're almost through your first week of blogging – there's only one day to go!

Today we focused on building on the foundations you've already put in place on your blog, by:

- publishing pillar content and drafting some more
- engaging with your contacts on social media to promote your content as well as others' resources that you find valuable

- creating a style guide to ensure the consistency of the content you produce and publish on- and off-site
- revising your blog's About page to ensure it reflects the person you are and the direction in which you're taking the blog.

This was important work – these tasks added significant value to your blog. Tomorrow's task list takes this philosophy one step further, as we make sure you're in the best possible position to drive your blog successfully into the future.

# Day 7

## Strategize for success

Today marks a change of pace as we step back and review what you've accomplished and where you're headed. This review will allow you to make adjustments to your approach that will put you in good stead for the weeks and months ahead.

I really think that many of us underestimate the value of reflection. But, as a blogger, this is a very valuable way to learn and improve. Stepping back and thinking objectively about what you're doing, how your audience is receiving that and where it's all headed is something I do regularly. I encourage you to do it, too.

Today's tasks provide a good review proforma that you can evolve to suit your needs over time:

- Review your blog's direction [30 minutes]
- Identify content gaps [30 minutes]
- Refresh your publishing plans [15 minutes]

**TOTAL TASK TIME: 1 HOUR, 30 MINUTES**



# TASK 1

## Review your blog's direction [30 minutes]

Over the last week you've published some content and you've done a lot of brainstorming. You've established a social media presence and, with a little luck, you may also have connected with your target audience and got a few ideas about what those people want from a blog like yours. You've likely spent some time on other sites in your niche. And yesterday you took a fresh look at your About page and rejigged it in light of all the work you've done.

Now's a good time to pull all these threads together to refresh the vision you have for your blog's direction.

### What does "direction" really mean?

Where's your blog heading in the medium- and long-term? Your blog's direction will be determined by the goals you've set, and the content you publish, and if your blog is to succeed, these factors will be influenced by – and align with – your audience's needs and desires.

To formulate a direction for your blog, you will ideally balance all three of these factors and use them to inform your decisions about content, promotion, audience engagement, and anything else that relates to your blog.

### 1.1. Exercise

1. Open up your content schedule, your Post Planning folder and your blog.
2. Take a look at the content you've published, the posts you have planned and when you plan to publish them.
3. Consider any feedback you've had on your blog and your plans – through post comments, social media, your blogging buddy and any other sources.
4. Ask yourself, "Do the plans I have align with the feedback I'm receiving from my audience?" Note any ways in which you think there's a disparity between your plans and your audience needs or wants.
5. Now look at your About page and consider whether the goals and purpose you've set for the blog agree with:
  - your content plans
  - the audience feedback you've obtained
  - where you believe your blog sits within its niche, in comparison with peer and competing sites.

Note any points at which you think your plans, the audience needs and your positioning could be more closely aligned.

Simply put, this review should indicate how well your blog is doing what your audience wants it to do. It should also give you an idea of your blog's prospects for meeting audience needs in the near future.

Perhaps you've identified some gaps or differences between what you had in mind and what your audience wants. Perhaps your content schedule and planned posts don't reflect the blog's true purpose as closely as you'd like. Even if you don't identify any gaps between your blog's purpose, your content plans and your audience needs, you may be able to identify areas for improvement, such as:

- post plans that could be honed to better serve the audience and reflect your blog's purpose
- content scheduling mismatches (perhaps your content won't address all audience segments within a timeframe that you feel is reasonable, for example)
- ideas in your Ideas folder that aren't really on-target for your audience or purpose and need to be discarded
- the possibility that you need to further develop or refine your blog's stated purpose.

From here, you'll want to work out what you'll do about these discrepancies. It might seem obvious, but I'd encourage you to research potential solutions for each of the issues you've identified – discuss them with your blogging buddy over a coffee, check your favourite blogging sites for helpful advice, search the web to see what others are saying about the same problem and swing by some forums to seek the advice of other site owners who may have faced the same challenges.

### Using information to set direction

It's one thing to find areas for improvement in your blogging approach. It's another to address them in a way that strengthens your blog's direction.

Don't restrict yourself by thinking that there's one right answer to these challenges, or telling yourself that you must get everything right, all the time. Honing your blog's direction, and keeping it on track, is an ongoing process and one that involves trial and error. No one has all the answers and even if they did, your blog is as unique as you are.

Once you have a few ideas about how you can strengthen your direction, give some a try. Monitor the results and review them as you go. Then hone that approach further – perhaps by implementing some of the other ideas you gained from the review. Over time, you'll get a feel for what will likely work with your audience and niche and what may not. This can make adjusting your approach somewhat easier and more intuitive over time.

Remember, though, that this review process is about identifying areas where you can tighten up your blog's direction – and there will always be room for improvement!

## TASK 2

### Identify content gaps [30 minutes]

The review you just completed may have given you a few insights into areas in which your content schedule is a bit thin. Perhaps there are topics that your audience wants to know about, but which you haven't brainstormed. Maybe the post plans you have around a certain topic fail to address an aspect of it that your audience wants to know about.

Identifying content gaps through this kind of review process is another great way to get post ideas, come up with questions you want to research with your audience, as well as extend your content plans and schedule into the future. Couple it with a review of your current content schedule and you'll likely find a few holes in the coverage that you want to fill.

## 2.1. Exercise

1. Review the list you just made of aspects of your blog that could be improved. Identify points at which content could be used to strengthen your blog's position.
2. Make a list of the types of posts, or post topics, that might help achieve that goal.
3. Turn to your content plans and schedule and look at the topics your blog will cover in the coming weeks.
4. Work out which of the topics and posts on the list you just made do not appear in your content schedule.
5. Add those topics to your Ideas folder and mark them as priority items for you to brainstorm around, and research if you need to, in the coming week.
6. If you have some ideas for posts on those topics, jot down some post plans now and save them to your Post Planning folder.

## TASK 3

# Refresh your publishing plans [15 minutes]

I hope that the reviews you've just completed have inspired you to hone and improve your offering to blog visitors. Today's final task is to make plans to do just that.

## 3.1. Exercise

1. Review your content schedule.
2. Slot in the posts that you planned at the end of the last task.

### Content scheduling considerations

In working out where to publish specific types or pieces of content, you'll need to strike a balance across a range of factors, including:

- audience demand for the information
- availability of similar information on peer or competing websites
- competing audience demands for content on other topics
- your chosen posting rhythm
- the spread of topics your blog's direction dictates you should cover each week or month
- how much brainstorming and research is required before you can create posts that remain to be written
- your schedule, and when you'll have time to create the posts.

3. Review your refreshed schedule. Are you comfortable with it – both in terms of your workload and the needs of your audience?
4. Make any amendments that you feel are needed for the content plan to support your blog's direction as strongly as possible.

## Wrapping up Day 7

At the beginning of this chapter, you may have thought, "Three tasks? Today's a walkover!" But as you've probably realized, these tasks require a different mindset from the everyday, creating-and-communicating blogging tasks.

What you've looked at today is your blogging strategy. I find that setting aside strategic tasks so that you can tackle them with a fresh mind and a singular focus is a really good way to go, so if you found it helpful, perhaps you'll continue this approach as your blog evolves.

Undertaking a regular strategic review is also really helpful – don't put it off, make time for it! It's all too easy to get bogged down in the daily blogging tasks and you can very quickly get off track if you don't make time to review how closely your daily work matches up with your blog's direction.

Try to set aside a regular time every week or two when you can grab a coffee and a notebook, step back from your blog and ponder the bigger picture.

## Your Second Week of Blogging

Congratulations! You've made it through your first week of blogging. And your hard work has paid off:

- You have a blog and a social media presence.
- You have a strong direction – you know why you're blogging, who you're talking to, and where you're heading.
- You're building an audience.
- You've got a clear picture of the content that will publish to your blog in the coming weeks.
- You have a number of post plans, and plenty more for development in your Ideas folder.

That's not all, though. I expect that as you've worked through this guide, you'll have had all manner of ideas you want to try on your blog – and off it. Perhaps you want to [set up an email newsletter](#), join some [other social networks](#) and [build your following](#), write a [guest post](#), look at [potential monetization options](#), get your head around [search engine optimization](#)... or something else entirely!

There's plenty to learn about and try as you embark on your second week of blogging. To stay on top of what's happening in the blogosphere, I'd like to invite you to subscribe to [my RSS feed on ProBlogger](#) – that way you won't miss any of the news from the ProBlogger blog. Of course, I'd love to hear your thoughts on this ebook, too – say hi on [Twitter](#) or [my Facebook page](#). They're also good places to meet other bloggers, share your experiences and ask questions.

I look forward to seeing you around the blogging traps – and to watching your blog flourish.