

6 Tips For Beginning Bloggers

Contributed by Sheila Ann Manuel Coggins

Some things to consider when starting a blog.

If you're thinking of starting your very own blog (or web log), or you're wishing to reformat your existing one, here are some things you might like to consider to make blogging a fuller experience:

{mosgoogle}1) **HOSTING** - Where do you want to host your blog? You can start your search by checking out these blog hosts.

Blogger is one of the most popular web log hosts right now. If you do not require a lot of flexibility when it comes to function and design, this might be the way to go. Also, you do not need to have your own web host if you opt to use their hosting services. Movable Type is very popular among bloggers who like to manipulate web designs, formats, and functions. However, you need to have some programming skills (or pay for an installation service) and your own web host in order to use this tool.

There are many other blog hosts available out there - both for free and for a fee. Do a quick search and compare each one to see which would fit your requirements.

2) **CONTENT** - What do you want to put in your blog? Are you going to opt for the links plus commentaries style, the short form journal/diary type, or a combination of different styles? Will you be including photos or artwork?

Just remember that the type of content you put in to your blog can make or break your whole blogging experience. You can either gain a regular following (with people who share similar interests and/or attracted to your writing) or you might end up lacking views and readers. Remember to be as creative and original as possible!

3) **THEME** - Although this is related to content, it is a good idea to pay special attention to your web log's main theme or subject. Some popular themes are: internet/web stuff, women's issues, news and politics, sports, travel, photos, art, career, business, writing, and family life, among others. Of course, many bloggers do opt to put a mish-mash of topics in their web logs.

4) **UPDATES** - Will you update daily, weekly, monthly, or randomly? Whatever you decide, you might want to include a short blurb somewhere in your web log about the frequency of your updates. This way, those who like your web log would know when (or how often) to visit your site. You can also choose to add a mailing list if you wish, especially if you won't update regularly.

5) **FEATURES** - Other than mailing lists, what other features can you use in your web log? Do you want to have a search function? A tag board? A comments function? Site statistics and counters? What about lists and polls?

If the web logging tool of your choice does not have these features available, you can also do a search for these features in other web sites. There are many sites dedicated to specific web logging features out there. For example, Blogrolling can help you organise links to other web logs that you wish to put in to your own site. Another example is NotifyList, which is one of the many sites that can host your own mailing list. Just make sure to check if these features are compatible with the your web logging tool.

6) **COMMUNITY** - One defining thing about blogs is that it has a strong sense of community. If you have a blog - and you wish to be connected with other people other than your friends and relatives who just happen to know about your site - it is imperative to join and take part in one or more communities. You can do this in three ways:

- a) by listing your web log in directories/portals,
- b) by joining web rings and taking an active part in your ring of choice; and
- c) by participating in online community projects/collectives (e.g., Friday Five).

Make sure to visit the blogs of other people and communicate with other bloggers via email, comments, tag boards, message boards/forums, and/or instant messengers. Do a search online for these communities. You can also find them linked in different people's blogs. These communities come in various shapes and formats. Some are free-for-all (anyone can join) and some are exclusive (limited memberships). There are those with specific interests (teens only, just for writers, locality-based, etc.) and those that are general in nature.

With these things in mind, you should be just about ready to embark on your very own web logging journey. I wish you many happy blogging moments. And, don't forget to blog back to me!

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