

7 Solutions to Blogger's Block

It happens to all of us. Sometimes we just can't/won't blog. We are out of ideas. Or, if we do have ideas, they don't gel enough to form a good blog post. Perhaps we are being perfectionists. Or perhaps we are burned out.

Does having blogger's block mean you should give up your blog? I don't think so!

Here are seven solutions to deal with blogger's block:

If the problem is lack of ideas:

1. **Revisit and update an old post.** Check your archives. What post had good traction? Review it and re-use it. Update as necessary.
2. **Shake up your routine to inspire creativity.** Creativity experts suggest shaking up your normal way of doing things – such as taking a different route to work, brushing your teeth with the opposite hand—in order to help your brain form new ideas. Once you have, sit down and brainstorm ten different ideas for blog posts. Write them down. Revisit them as necessary.
3. **Create a “compilation” post.** Instead of writing a brand new post, compile or curate resources, articles or lists. You could do a “round-up” of blog posts or articles (e.g. 5 best articles on SEO) or research a list of resources (e.g. 15 upcoming tech conferences).
4. **Interview someone.** Come up with five questions and pose them to your company president, a colleague, an industry leader or to whomever it makes sense. Alternatively, try interviewing someone via Skype, and post the video of the

interview (and if possible, a written transcript).

If the problem is burnout:

5. **Solicit guest bloggers.** Reach out to people you know—other bloggers, professionals in your industry, friends—and ask them to write a post. Make sure to provide a topic and guidance (and a deadline).

6. **Try a different format.** If you always write your posts, what about doing a video blog or a podcast? Or how about having a graphic post (heavy on images, light on words).

7. **Take a break.** Sometimes you need time off to recharge. You should write a post explaining the blog is on a short hiatus or that you are on vacation. You should probably say when the blog will be back. If you are uncomfortable not having content during your break you may want to re-post popular older posts or seek evergreen content. If you have a white paper or book, you could run excerpts.

What do you do when you are struck with blogger's block? Please share your suggestions and solutions in the comments.

It's so basic, it makes sense!

Have you ever been to a networking event where you meet people, ask what they do and they give you a long rambling explanation or a very obscure description. You are then confused and ask them to clarify, and then they say this: Basically, I do [something you can understand].



Aha by Himmelskratzer on Flickr

Some people can just give you their job's title, such as chief counsel at xyz industries, and you can understand what they do. And some people have easy to understand professions such as doctor, accountant, insurance sales or real estate development.

Also, describing yourself as the "senior" manager or vice president does not help explain what you do.

But take for instance someone I met recently. He started off by telling me where he works (a company with advocacy in the name, but that doesn't actually advocate). Then, he told me they work with individuals who are looking to ensure their access to financing (or something like that). Then he said: "Basically, I sell insurance."

Generally, when you start a sentence with basically, you are about **distill the essence of something to its most UNDERSTANDABLE part**. Like a structural engineer who tells you that basically, she works to make bridges safer. Or the content strategist who tells you that, basically, he works with companies to find the most relevant information for their customers.

So before you go to your next networking event, or write your about page on your website, ask yourself: what is it that you do (or your company does), basically?

If it's basic, it generally makes sense!

UPDATE

Media trainer Brad Phillips has a great suggestion for improving your elevator pitch: start with the why. Here's a link to the post on the Mr. Media Training blog.

How to get more blog readers (and customers) fast

If there is one “secret” to get more blog readers (other than having a relevant, interesting, well written blog), it is this: be likeable. That's it.



Heart doodle by
findingthenow on Flickr

People tend to do business with companies they like. People hire people they like. And people read blogs they like.

If you've ever read Dale Carnegie, you know that one of the main tenets in his teachings is to be likeable. For example, Carnegie says it is better to not to try to win an argument—let the other person be right. He also suggests disarming critics by being nice to them.

Social network behemoth Facebook knows likeability is key. After all, you are asked to “like” pages and status updates.

How can your blog be more likeable? Here are a few suggestions:

Be easy to understand—Instead of throwing around fancy words and jargon, make sure people know what you are saying.

Show your expertise without showing off—If you have to tell people you are superman, then your super powers are failing you (and perhaps you left your superhero costume at the dry cleaners).

Have an approachable tone— People respond positively to cheerful, casual and caring tones, among others, while sarcastic, acid and pedantic tones generally turn people off.

Leave combativeness to soldiers at war—You can disagree with something without attacking it wholesale.

What makes you like reading a blog? What makes you never come back? Let me know in the comments.

*Become a better blogger! Join me for the **How to Write Your Blog** workshop on April 1 (one week from today!) in Washington, D.C. Details and registration [here](#).*

Is Feedly picking up the feed? Test post.

As has happened multiple times already, Feedly has stopped picking up the feed to this blog. My last post, which I wrote on Thursday, March 20, has yet to appear. I am testing to see if this post will be picked up. It is a disaster when you depend on the RSS to work for your readers to be able to see your stuff. Feedly is failing me.

I apologize for any inconvenience if you are getting this through email.

How to lose blog readers fast

Have you ever seen a blog headline that says something like this:

How to lose 10 lbs. fast!

You quickly go check it out to find that the blog post doesn't really exist. You will not be losing 10 pounds fast, but you may be asked to pay ten pounds (if you were in England, perhaps 10 dollars here in the U.S.). In some cases, the blog post will consist of one line providing a bit of the

information you are looking for, and then you will be hit with this: *click here for more*. The “more” is that you are likely being asked to buy a book, seminar, program, etc. to learn the many secrets of fast weight loss (or increasing sales, or whatever).

A variation on this is the pop-up that appears before you can even read the blog post asking you to sign up for a “free” newsletter or sign in as a “member” to read more. In this case, the blog owner wants your information to add to a database as an exchange for providing information.

I may not know how to lose weight fast, but I do know what makes blogs lose readers in a second:

Tease them or try to sell them.

Readers come to your blog to pick up some knowledge, insight, advice, tips or motivation. They do not come to your blog solely to buy something. They do not want to give you their name and email and credit card information. They don’t want to be added to your email list. They simply want to learn.

If you aren’t willing to give information to your blog readers for free, with no strings attached, I suggest you forget blogging and look to other methods of content delivery.

Am I suggesting you have to give away all your secrets for free in your blog? Of course not! But you must think of your blog as a way to help your readers learn something while showing them that you know your stuff.

You *can* promote your events and e-books and seminars, but not by teasing your audience or bullying them into giving you money now. Do it like I will below, and your readers won’t be turned off.

*Avoid blog errors like this one. Attend my **How to Write Your Blog** workshop on April 1 in Washington, D.C. Early*

registration discount ends tomorrow at midnight, so register today to save \$10. More information and registration on the Eventbrite page.

Is robotic social media worth it?

On Wednesday, I wrote about how some Twitter accounts seem to be run by Rosie, the robot maid on The Jetsons. But robotic social media happens on other social networks and even on blogs. Since so many people seem to be doing it, what is the value of robotic social media?

Robotic social media? That's a thing?

First, what do I mean by robotic social media? I mean social media that is cursory, unengaged, formulaic, uninspired, and there because someone thought it was a good idea to be present (but not active) on social networks. It's the one tweet a day that announces a new blog post. Or the automated "thank you for following me" tweet. It's the blog post that has no salient point and seems written just to have some new content on your site. It's the LinkedIn profile that has not seen an update in three years, since it was set up.

Robotic social media nearly always depends on some sort of "social media management tool" that usually cross posts for you, and basically handles social media by algorithm.

Why would you do that?

I have been thinking about why people would use social media in such a non-social way. There are probably several reasons,

for example:

- For SEO purposes
- Too busy to manage social media on your own
- To check off social media on the communications plan tactics

Only one of these could have some sort of value: SEO. Certainly, due to changes in search engine algorithms, social media has impact on search results. The theory is that being present on social media *helps* your search results. However, I believe that search engines reward influence, and being robotic (unengaged) does not lead to influence.

Perhaps, it is even counteractive

I wrote about the woman who admitted she uses a Twitter management tool and that she really hadn't known she "knew" me from Twitter. Now, I know that there's no there there. So no more interaction. Davina Brewer in the comments on that post mentions something that happens every day, with big brands and regular people: no response to direct tweets/messages. In fact, just this morning, I tweeted LinkedIn to ask a question, and still no response.

When I don't get a response, I assume that person/brand/organization doesn't care or doesn't even monitor their messages. I then stop interacting. I bet many people stop interacting or even following brands/organizations when their comments are not even acknowledged.

In my opinion, robotic social media is not worth it. To do something just because you think you have to, and then do it by proxy, is not going to accomplish any goals other than checking something off your to-do list.

As many have said before, social media is a platform not a strategy. If you don't use the platform, it doesn't mean you don't have a communications strategy. Use the platform well,

on the other hand, and you will further your communications strategy rather than stymie it.

*Don't be robotic! Come learn how to blog with me in the **How to Write Your Blog** workshop on April 1 in Washington, D.C. You will learn what makes for an effective blog, how to come up with blog post ideas and how to connect with your audience. Details and registration [here](#).*

5 mistakes to avoid on your blog

When you read as many blogs as I do, you see a lot of really great blogs. Great blogs have interesting and relevant content and they are easy to read. But just as there are great blogs, there are many more mediocre blogs.



Forehead Slap by Terry
Robinson on Flickr

What separates a great blog from a mediocre one? Avoiding these five mistakes:

1. **Being hard to understand.** Perhaps it's the excessive use of jargon, or the spelling and grammatical mistakes, but mediocre

blogs make it hard for a reader to get the point.

2. Not being scannable. Web reading is different than print reading. We tend to favor shorter sentences and the ability to move down the page quickly. In short, web writing should be scannable, that is providing readers with with lots of headings, lists, bullets and short sentences.

3. No dateline. I have heard the argument than by not having a dateline on your blog posts the content seems evergreen. Perhaps. But evergreen content is always evergreen—the date shouldn't matter. In my opinion, blogs are a way of establishing timeliness and currency. If you don't have datelines, readers can't tell when you last updated your blog (which of course is your intention). If they can't tell whether your last post is from last week or last year, you are basically making it very hard to judge if you are still blogging or not.

4. No author information or about page. Have you ever gone to a blog and tried to figure out who the author is? Well, you shouldn't have to channel your inner Sherlock Holmes in order to find out. There should be an about page or an author biography somewhere that is easy to find. People want to know who is writing the stuff they are reading. Even on corporate blogs you could have an author biography for blog contributors (you can use great plugins like the one I use, Biographia) plus a corporate/organizational "about us" page.

5. No sharing capability (or with limited sharing capability). It seems unbelievable that in 2014, when it seems all brands are begging you to follow them on Facebook and Twitter, there are blogs that lack sharing capabilities. It's a plugin and it's free! What's the problem? I also can't stand blogs that only allow you to share to only one social network, especially when that network is Pinterest.

What mistakes do you see on blogs? Please share in the

comments. I am sure there are more out there!

Avoid these mistakes! Come learn how to blog with me on April 1 in Washington, D.C. You will learn what makes for an effective blog, how to come up with blog post ideas and how to connect with your audience. Details and registration [here](#).

Who needs grammar?

Twitter just reminded me that today is National Grammar Day so I shelved what I was going to write (something about nonprofit communications, which I will post later on in the month) so that I could mark this momentous occasion and pay tribute to the power of grammar.

Proper grammar (and punctuation, usage and spelling) makes both written and spoken communication better and easier to understand. Without it, we are left wondering what was meant exactly. After all, if you're trying to make your point, you wouldn't want to mess it up by using the wrong possessive or contraction. And it would affect your writing if you didn't know the effect of your word choice.

Now, I am no grammar queen. That would be Grammar Girl. I recommend buying (and reading too) her very useful reference book: [Grammar Girl's Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing](#).

Another favorite reference is [Eats Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation](#) by Lynne Truss.

You really need to have at least one grammar book on your shelves or in your electronic library.

Who needs grammar? We all do! Oh, and by the way, March is National Reading Month. If you want to improve your grammar, reading (the more, the better) is the key.

Come learn to blog with me! My next How to Write Your Blog workshop takes place on April 1 in Washington, DC. Get more details and secure your place here.

One action that guarantees social media success

Yesterday, an acquaintance posted a picture of an elaborate, girly birthday cake she had made for her daughter's birthday. She had written "Happy 4th Birthday to my baby" as a caption. I commented saying "Beautiful cake! How old is she?" Someone, let's call her Jane, wrote back "ummmm Deborah. She's 4." I then looked at the post and realized that it indeed said the little girl had turned four. I was focused on the picture and my eyes just skipped the "4th" and read happy birthday to my baby." So I responded: "Sorry Jane. I was looking at the picture. Excuse my stupidity." To which Jane (someone I don't know and who doesn't know me): "I know. I just couldn't resist. It just struck me as so funny!"

Now I don't know Jane, but it was pretty obvious that she was trying to make fun of me, a stranger, in front of our mutual acquaintance and all of her friends. If she had stopped for just a couple of seconds and asked herself if the comment was necessary, she may have opted to skip it. People reading it

would have realized I didn't read the caption correctly or they would have ignored it.

This is pretty mild stuff, I know. But people routinely post stuff quickly and with little thought to the consequence. For a "heavier" example, there's the Virginia politician who posted on his Facebook page that pregnant women are simply "hosts" for the baby. He did this to defend his viewpoint that abortion should be illegal. When people criticized him, he redacted the comment, but not before it made news as far away as England, as this article in the Daily Mail shows.

Social media allows people to engage in real-time conversation, but unlike in-person spoken conversation, social media posts are public, searchable and in many cases, permanent.

In person, we can say something dumb or insensitive, and then move on. Perhaps we apologize or explain ourselves. The comments we make are not visible to anybody else outside our conversation (unless perhaps they are recorded, and you don't know it, in which case you may have bigger problems than just saying something stupid).

In social media, we have the illusion that we are having an intimate conversation with one person or a group, but in reality, we are making our thoughts completely public.

Before we post ANYTHING to social media, **we should stop** and ask ourselves: Is this really necessary? Does this comment have the capacity to offend? How will people perceive this comment?

Now, I am not advocating that you spend all day deciding whether to say something on social media nor am I saying you need to edit and approve every uttering. That would be counterproductive. You should simply take a moment and think about what you are saying.

On Monday, Brad Phillips wrote a post called “No Word Was Ever as Effective As A Rightly Timed Pause,” on his Mr. Media Training blog. His argument is that a pause in conversation has two main effects. One is to give the person who is pausing a moment to pull his/her thoughts together instead of blurting out whatever comes to mind. The second is to give the listener the impression that the person is confident enough to pause, and thoughtful enough to give a well-reasoned response.

So next time to you are going to write a comment on Facebook, respond to someone on Twitter or even compose a blog post, PAUSE and think about what you are doing.

In the DC area and interested in improving your blogging skills? Attend the next How to Write Your Blog workshop on April 1. Details and registration are available on Eventbrite.

What shoveling snow can teach you about blogging

Last week, the Washington, DC area was hit by one of the largest snowstorms we’ve had in four years. Some areas got as much as 18 inches of snow. Me, well I only had about 14 inches. When it stopped snowing, I opened my garage door (I couldn’t open the front door because there was too much snow) and this is what I saw:



Snowy driveway, February
13, 2014

The snow was up to my knees and it was heavy. I didn't know where to start.

After three hours of shoveling, some melting and the fact the neighbor cleared his driveway, this is what my driveway looked like:



Shoveled out
driveway, Feb. 13

So, what can you learn about blogging from shoveling out your snowy driveway?

You have to start.

You can't get very far if you don't start shoveling (or

blogging). That driveway will not magically clear itself. And yes, you can wait for the snow to melt...but you aren't going to be able to get anywhere until it does.

You will see results.

Blogging, like shoveling snow, can be a hard, long process. But the results are there if you just start working at it.

It takes as long as it takes.

It may take you three hours or it may take you 20 minutes. My neighbor, who is younger and taller than me, was able to dig out his driveway in about 45 minutes. He also helped my other neighbor do his. There are different levels of skill and ability, but that doesn't mean you can't do it. If it takes longer, it does.

What is stopping you from blogging? Is it that it daunts you? Is it that it is hard? Let me know. And keep an eye out for details about my next blogging workshop, to take place in Washington, DC on April 1.