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# How to Start Blogging



## Why blog?

Blogging makes it easier for government to talk about its work, share information, and connect with people who have a common concern. Linking posts to named authors puts a human face on what is otherwise a faceless organization. This personal dimension lends credibility and a sense of openness.

Keep in mind that blogs work best when they have a specific purpose. Generic blogs aren't as effective because they don't give people a reason to visit them.

You might use your blog for:

- Describing any work you're doing or thinking about
- Outlining new concepts or practices in a certain area
- Sharing ideas and what you're finding
- Inviting public opinions on plans or developments
- Replacing your newsletter

In this guide, we'll review:

- Defining your audience
- Crafting an editorial calendar
- Writing tips and blogging best practices
- Building your readership
- Helpful blogs and resources

## 1 Finding Your Audience

To attract readers and keep them coming back, you need to define your audience.

- Build a foundation with Google Analytics data
- Reach out to users and find out what they care about and why
- Review and refine your message to meet your readers' desires

Use [Google Analytics](#) <sup>[1]</sup> to create a framework to build on (Check out our [web guide on Google Analytics!](#) <sup>[2]</sup>). Start with high-level attributes like age, sex, location, language, and technology. See what ads people

click on, the types of websites they frequent, and what they're in the market for. Pay attention to external search keywords that come up frequently?this is the stuff drawing people to your website, and writing blog posts related to those subjects would likely draw more traffic to your site. Site search data shows you what users were most interested when they got there.

Survey your readers for information. You can use Drupal's built-in Webform content type or a third-party services like [Survey Monkey](#) [3] or [iPerceptions](#) [4]. User feedback is a crucial complement for your analytics results. Round out demographic information like education, income, employment, and industry. Ask about attitudes, predispositions, opinions, habits, concerns, and interests.

Combine your information to visualize [who your typical users are and what they want](#) [5]. This puts you in a good place to get your blog started and craft your editorial calendar.

## 2 Crafting an Editorial Calendar

Keep your communications team informed and on schedule with an editorial calendar.

First, decide how often to post per week. Don't let ambition decide your blog frequency. You should consider factors such as:

- The size of your staff
- The range and depth of material to cover
- Any other projects you may have going on

Be realistic, and keep in mind that readers value **quality** over quantity.

Use Google Analytics to find the hours and days of the week on your site to help you decide on what time and days of the week to blog. Publishing posts during your website's peak traffic windows maximizes your blog's exposure.

Build a stockpile of interesting ideas and trending topics everyone can write on. Here are some ways to generate ideas:

- Brainstorm with your team for 30 minutes a week, throwing out as many suggestions as you can.
- Look at the topics on your most visited pages, recurring external search keywords, and the most popular subjects in your Site Search data in Google Analytics.
- Tap into your user responses from your webforms or third-party surveys.

Once you've got a comfortable idea bank, you can move onto building the actual calendar. While there are many tools available online and off for scheduling and collaboration, we recommend using Google's web apps:

- Have every team member create a work-specific Google account.
- Create a new Google Calendar and share it with everyone.
- Create an event for each post's publication date and assign a writer based on who is up in the blog rotation.
- Create a new Google Doc, fill it with all of your initial ideas, and share with your team. This is your new idea bank.
- Keep your idea stockpile fresh by updating the Google doc when you come across or think of any

new ideas.

- If you decide to use an idea from the idea bank, don't delete it from the document. Instead, apply a strikethrough (Alt+Ctrl+s) to track what's been covered.

Keep your blog on a routine. If you plan to publish on Mondays, make sure you publish on Mondays. Have your posts ready at least a week before their publication dates to prevent delays in publishing. Your blog won't be successful if your readers can't depend on it.

## 3 Writing Tips for Bloggers

Writing great blog content is deceptively difficult. People read differently online than they do offline, and that presents unique challenges when you're trying to grab a reader's attention. It'll take time and practice to hone your skills, but here are some tips and guidelines to help guide your way:

- Write like you're talking to the reader one-to-one. Use conversational pronouns (?you?, ?us?, ?our?, ?we?), contractions (?can't? instead of ?cannot?), and simple, familiar words (?buy? instead of ?purchase?).
- Break content into chunks, keeping paragraphs short and using lists and bullets when you can.
- Put the most important information first, followed by the details.
- Many people only read headlines, so keep them simple and descriptive.
- Don't assume your readers already know the subject or have read related pages. Don't use jargon, explain any technical terms, and if you have to use an acronym, write it out.
- If you can say it with fewer words, do it. Cut down on adjectives and adverbs, and delete any redundancies (?refer back? should just be ?refer?, and ?actual facts? are simply ?facts?).
- Don't say ?click here? for links?make the link text an action like ?Download the guidelines for 2015?.
- Keep verbs in present tense, and stick to active voice to avoid confusing the reader. Unsure of the difference? In active voice, the subject performs the action (?Congress debated the bill?). In passive voice, the subject is acted on by the verb (?The bill was debated by Congress?).

Check Daily Writing Tips? [blog on writing in plain language](#) <sup>[6]</sup> for more tips.

## 4 Dealing with Comments

Blogs can?and should?spark conversations. Allowing comments on your blog can help you learn more about your users, improve your user experience, and increase your site's credibility. However, beware: Allowing comments could also blow up in your face if an army of spammers, trolls, and hostile citizens use it as a soapbox.

Before you open up your blog for comments, make sure you have a [concise comment policy in place](#) <sup>[7]</sup> to handle the good, the bad, and the bizarre. Don't be surprised if you get comments and criticisms that have nothing to do with your post. If you want to delete offensive comments, tell your readers that directly. Before you remove a comment, take a screenshot so you have a record in case you need it in the future.

We recommend monitoring your comments daily so you can keep engagement fresh and catch offensive

content quickly. Have a member of your team to dedicate roughly 4 hours a week to approving of and responding to comments. If you can't dedicate the time to managing the section, you aren't going to benefit much from it and are better off keeping the comments closed.

## 5 Blogs to Help You Blog

As you develop your blog and refine its voice, keep researching. What makes for a good blog? What are the latest trends in blogging? Which bloggers in government are most successful?

Here are some of our favorite websites:

- [DigitalGov](#) <sup>[8]</sup> regularly posts about the latest news, projects, and trends in digital services in the public sector. Check out their assessment of [the state of federal blogging in 2016](#) <sup>[9]</sup>.
- [GovLoop](#) <sup>[10]</sup> is a social network and knowledge base with a blog, resource library, and newsletter.
- [GovDelivery blogs](#) <sup>[11]</sup> about technology and engagement trends in the public sector. They also offer a resource library and periodic learning webinars.
- The [Content Marketing Institute](#) <sup>[12]</sup> has a fantastic blog that will keep you current on the latest trends in blogging, a resource library, and a newsletter.
- Check in with [Georgia.gov's blog](#) <sup>[13]</sup> to see how your fellow state agencies blog.

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