

Resources / Blog / Marketing And Sales / Article

The 4-step guide to writing a blog post from start to finish

Lauren Cochran • August 27, 2019



Ready to start writing a blog but don't know where to start? Here are four tried-and-true steps to producing successful blog posts from start to finish.



JUMP AHEAD

In this article

Why blogging is more relevant than ever in 2019

Step 1: Outline your blog post.

Step 2: Start writing your blog post. Seriously. Just start.

Step 3: Edit, edit, and edit again.

Step 4: Distribute your blog content.

Rinse and repeat these steps to write a successful blog post.

There are a lot of forgettable blogs out there.

Yours doesn't have to be one of them.

But -- and I mean this from a place of love -- it probably is, at least some of the time.

And hey, I'm not blaming you. We're not immune to being forgettable on this blog.

When you've only got six hours or less to put together a long-form post -- that's how long it takes 52% of professional content creators -- cutting corners isn't just natural, it's a survival mechanism.





Here's the thing, though.

Creating a successful blog doesn't mean spending six weeks on a post. It doesn't need fountains of cash to fund a professional writer, either.

What it does take is meticulous planning, savage editing, and patience. Get those three down, and you've got a 434% higher chance of performing well on the search engine results page (SERP).

Plus, the 3-5 pieces of content customers check out before they start talking sales won't just start a conversation.

They'll close it.

Here's how it all works, why it matters, and how to do it in four straightforward steps.



Why blogging is more relevant than ever in 2019

If you're already on board the blogging train and don't need to be sweet-talked into the benefits of blogging for online businesses -- of which there are *many* - - feel free to skip straight into the steps in the next section.

If you're not, though, or just don't feel like scrolling, I'll keep it short. You can read the nitty-gritty in our previous article about [using blogging and SEO for online courses](#) .

The gist of it is this:

Blogging gets your pages indexed by Google. The more you blog, the more pages you get in. On average, websites with a blog have [55% more visitors](#) than websites that don't.





55%

More website visitors for companies who blog



57.8%

Of internet referral traffic comes from Google

podia

More visitors mean more opportunities to turn leads into customers.

Plus, Google accounts for 57.8% of referral traffic on the internet, so anything you do to make your business a bigger player in Google's eyes -- like writing a blog regularly -- can only benefit your bottom line.

And those are just the 'hard' metrics on why blogging is such a vital tool for online businesses.



The softer, but no less vital, side of the blogging puzzle is what it does for trust.

Your visitors *have* to trust you enough to give you their information and become leads, and those leads need the same to become customers.

After all, they're not just giving you a name and an email they can ignore when they make a purchase -- they're giving you bank information and credit card numbers.

And they're doing so with a lot of apprehensions.

Only 48% of Americans reported trusting in businesses as institutions in 2018.

That was a ten-point drop from the previous year.

It's that trust deficit that blogging tackles. After consumers read a piece of educational content from a brand, there's a 9% hike in trust, and consumers are 131% more likely to make a purchase.





48%

Of Americans trust businesses as institutions



131%

increase in the chances of a consumer buying a product after reading content

podia

Those are the stakes.

Earn people's trust and you earn customers.

Don't earn it and you lose them.

Blogging is the most reliable, free way to end up on the right side of people's trust *and* get in Google's good graces. And, until virtual or augmented reality becomes a whole lot more accessible, that isn't going to change this year, next year, or the year after that.



So, if you want to drive more traffic, build more trust, and grow your audience, you want to blog .

And you want to start with an outline.

Step 1: Outline your blog post.

This guide assumes you've already picked a topic to write about. If you haven't, conduct customer research to find potential topics, or check out this [excellent guide from Moz on content ideation](#) .

Otherwise, let me tell you about an experiment.

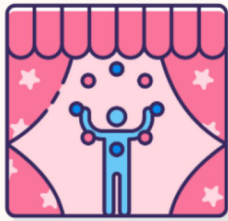
For the sake of this article, I *didn't* follow this step and wrote the first half -- everything you read from this line or before -- without an outline. It took me almost three hours.

Which, since this post will end up around 2500-3000 words, translates to about 20% of the work to be completed in almost half of the day I have to write it. Keeping at that place, it'd take 15 hours to go from start to finish.

15 hours is fine for me. My job is literally editing, writing, and breathing content. But you? Chances are you don't have two workdays to devote to a single post.

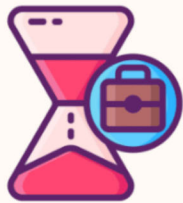


You have other things to work on, assuming you're like the 66% of small business owners who are responsible for three or more areas of their business (sales, customer service, marketing, et cetera).



66%

Of small business owners juggle 3 or more major business functions



19 months

The average time it takes for a side-hustle to become a full-time job

podia

Or, if you're a side-hustler, you're probably in the midst of the 19 months that it takes, on average , for a side-hustle to become a full-time hustle.

That's where outlines come in. Outlines are where you search for your data, put together your graphic assets, and think through your content. They frontload the work and save you time.



And most importantly, outlines are where you outlaw writer's block.

It's the thinking, far more than the inking (to borrow a term from NYT best-seller Ann Handley), that trips people up during content production. If you know what you're going to create from start to finish, it's just a matter of stringing together some coherent words.

If you don't, on the other hand, you're going to run into rambling and writer's block. You don't know where you're trying to end up, so you don't know which direction to head in.

You're going to end up with another forgettable blog post.

There's no hard-and-fast rule about how to put together an outline. Every writer I've ever met has their own style of outlining, and every business needs to hit different metrics in their content.

The format I developed (and later foisted upon the content team) is this:

[Header title]

Main Point:

Stats:

Case Study:

Examples:



I fill it out in sequential order, sometimes writing in shorthand and sometimes in full, flowing sentences, and keep at it until I have an outline that can get me from start to finish without ever leaving the document.

This is an example from an outline I put together earlier:

XX tips to upsell, cross-sell, and profit - Outline ☆

File Edit View Insert Format Tools Add-ons Help Last edit was on July 22

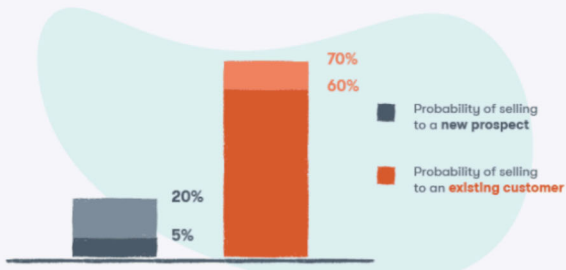
100% Normal text Arial 11 B I U A

Outline

- XX Tips to Upsell, Cross-sell, and ...
- What is upselling?
- What is cross-selling?
- Upselling vs. Cross-selling exam...
- XX tips for how to upsell and cross...
- How to upsell and cross-sell from ...
- [Unique Name] Conclusion

Let's get to it.

What is upselling?

1. Main Point:
 - a. Define upselling in paragraph format. Upselling is a sales strategy where a customer is offered a more expensive variant of a product, often at a discount, to net a higher sale. It's common on many ecommerce sites and offline locations.
 - b. McDonald's (in)famous "would you like to supersize that?" is a good example, if a tired one. Another example might be a linens retailer who sells several varieties of sheets. If a customer was buying a 300 thread-count queen fitted sheet and was offered a 500-count sheet of the same size, that would be an upsell.
 - i. Doesn't have to include a discount, but considering how effective using discounts to sell xx products (interlink) can be, it's worth considering.
 1. <https://www.podia.com/articles/how-to-use-discounts>
 - c. It's also easy to do with the right storefront management system, though you need products that fit your audiences -- more on that later (allude to tips section)
2. Stats:
 

Category	Probability
Probability of selling to a new prospect	20%
Probability of selling to an existing customer	70%

And that's it. However long or short your outline ends up will come down to your preferences. So long as it has the basic building blocks for an article, it's golden.

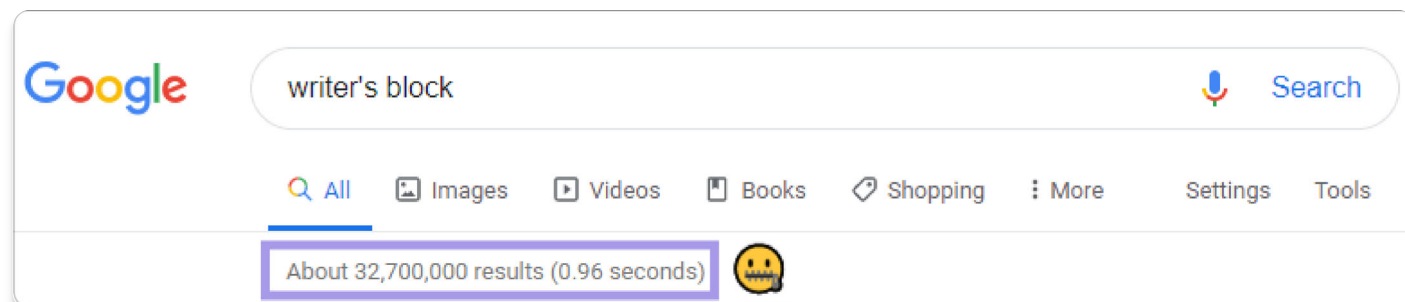
Now, after you've nailed down your outline, you need to move onto both the easiest and hardest step:

Starting your writing.



Step 2: Start writing your blog post. Seriously. Just start.

There are about 33 million search results for the term “writer’s block”.



It's not surprising.

Between dealing with impostor syndrome, coping with perfectionism, and fighting procrastination, trying to write something people want to read is an uphill battle long before you open the document.

So, if you double-take when I tell you this -- as most people do -- then I don't blame you:

There is no such thing as writer's block.

Writer's block is an excuse would-be entrepreneurs use to hold themselves back. It's a generic blanket you can slap over works-in-progress as a reason to leave your dreams on the sidelines.

It's one I, too, fell victim to in my earliest career days.



But, as the statistics clearly demonstrate, it's not an obstacle that flourishes very far for professionals. After all, most professional marketers bang out a 500-word post in about two hours .

And given that the average post length for top-performing blogs -- the ones that get shared so much you'd think they were a Netflix account -- is 2,000 words or more , that means the average completion time for a blog post that *really* excels is about eight hours.



2 hours

The average amount of time it takes professionals to write a 500-word blog post



2,000 words

The average length of top-performing blog posts

podia



If you followed the first step, you should be able to hit the same metrics -- or do even better.

The key is just to *start*. Seriously. That's the hardest part. Once you've started typing and have an outline to follow, the writing part is easy.

But, because I know I'm talking from a place of privilege (I *have* been at this for years), here are some of the do's and don'ts that work for our team:

Don't use a robust word processor like Microsoft Word. All of its bells and whistles are great when you're a student, but they're distracting at their best, and obstructive at their worst, for non-academic writing. Personally, I love [Dropbox Paper](#) and [Google Drive](#) .

Do power through typos, sloppy syntax, and every other perceived error. You'll have time to fix them later -- the most important part of writing is to keep doing it.

Don't edit as you work. It slows you down, and ultimately, creates more work when you do get to the editing stage.

Do divide your work into sections. If you're talking about the different strains of tea, don't create a word-wall so impenetrable it can be seen from satellites in space. Take a divide-and-conquer approach as you're writing.

Of course, even following these do's-and-don'ts and with an outline at hand, you're probably going to run into a snag or two as you're writing. It's natura 

Distraction is a common theme in everyone's work day, solopreneurs included. Almost 40% of employees' workdays are devoted to non-productive tasks.

If you should find yourself drifting away from your blog post, try focusing on writing for just fifteen minutes.



That's what Dr. Larry Rosen , a research psychologist who's spent his career studying distraction, recommends, adding that you should cap it off at 30 minutes. Research has shown that concentration starts to break down after a half-hour burst.

So if you're struggling to focus and keep wandering away from your writing, try silencing your phone and setting a timer on it. Then, turn it upside down so you can't be distracted with notification lights and work for 15-30 minutes uninterrupted.



After that, take a break to satisfy your technology itch (aka, check your inbox for the 90th time today -- people check their phones about every 12 minutes) or walk around, and finally, get back to it until you finish.

Yes, it really is that simple.

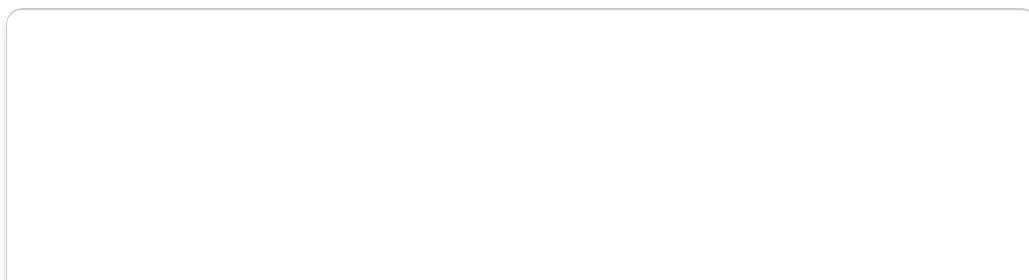
The next step, unfortunately, isn't quite as cut-and-dry.

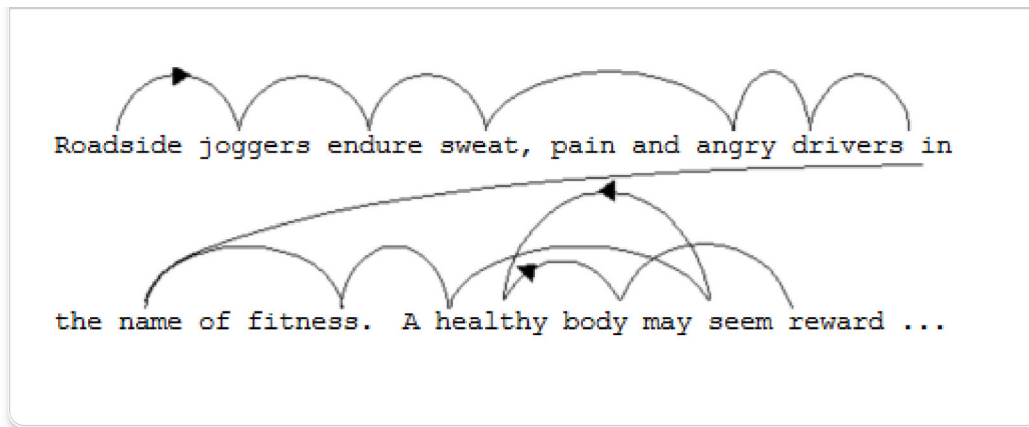
Step 3: Edit, edit, and edit again.

No one writes a perfect first draft. No one can find every single typo, extra space, or extraneous comma from a compound predicate. It's a hardwired limitation in our brains.

You see, when people read, especially people who are *great* readers, they don't parse each word carefully. They sample a sentence like sushi and fill in the gaps. We use something called saccades , which are like little visual pole vaults from focal point to focal point, as we read.

Here's a visual (and experimental) layout of how our eyes move when we're looking at a sentence.





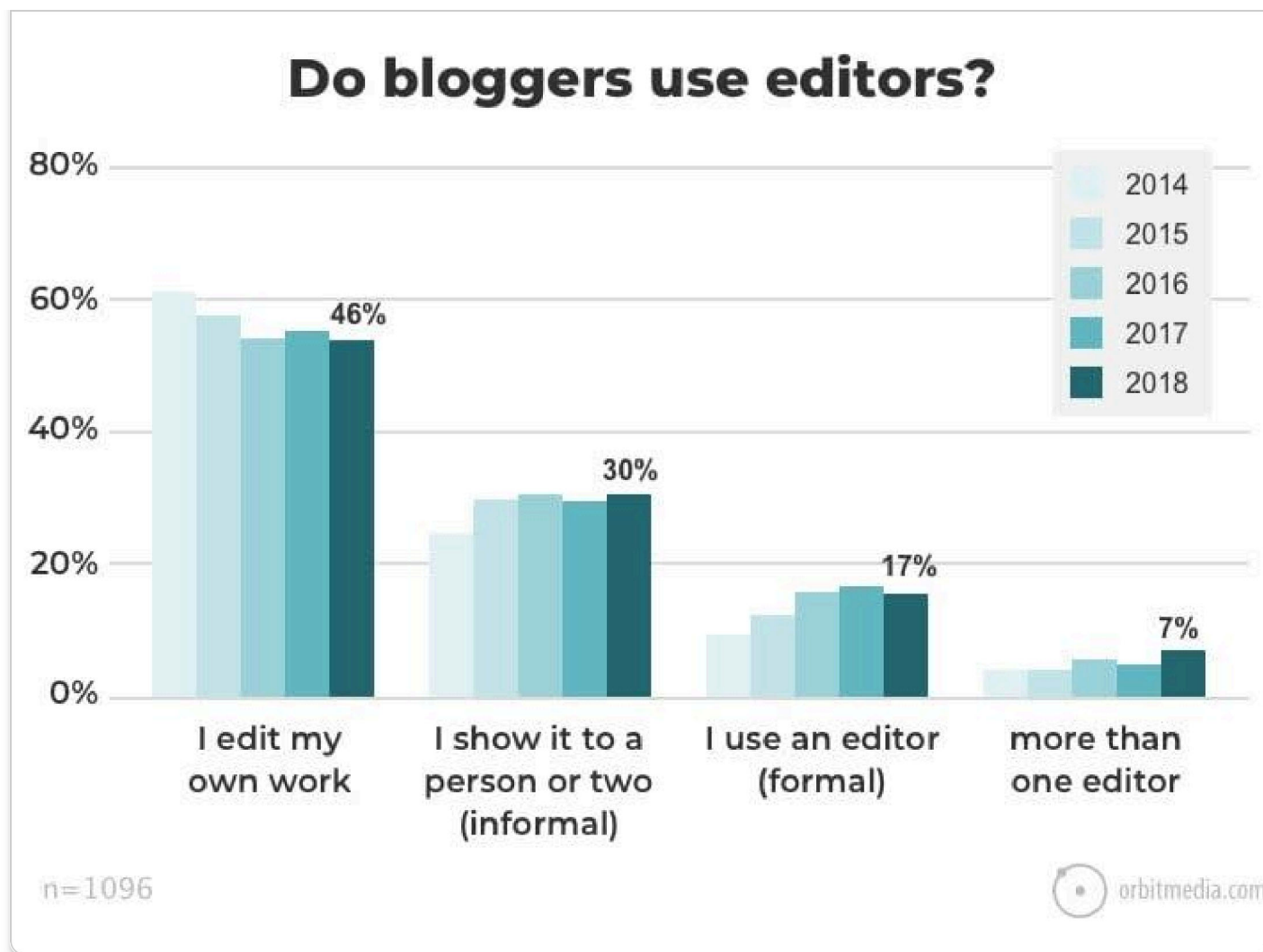
Do you notice how some words aren't read at all? Short words and function words , which are words that relate the grammar of a sentence, are especially prone to getting skipped over.

For example, in the above sentence, most people don't read "the", "in", or "a".

Which is all a very long-winded way to say there's a *lot* of room for errors in a blog post, and a piece sans edits or proofreading is asking for trouble.

This propensity for imperfection is likely why only 46% of bloggers are their own editors and the remainder turn over proofreading to at least *someone* before they roll to publishing.





And it's a great thing that they do. As petty as it might seem, there are numerous studies linking typos to a negative perception of a business.

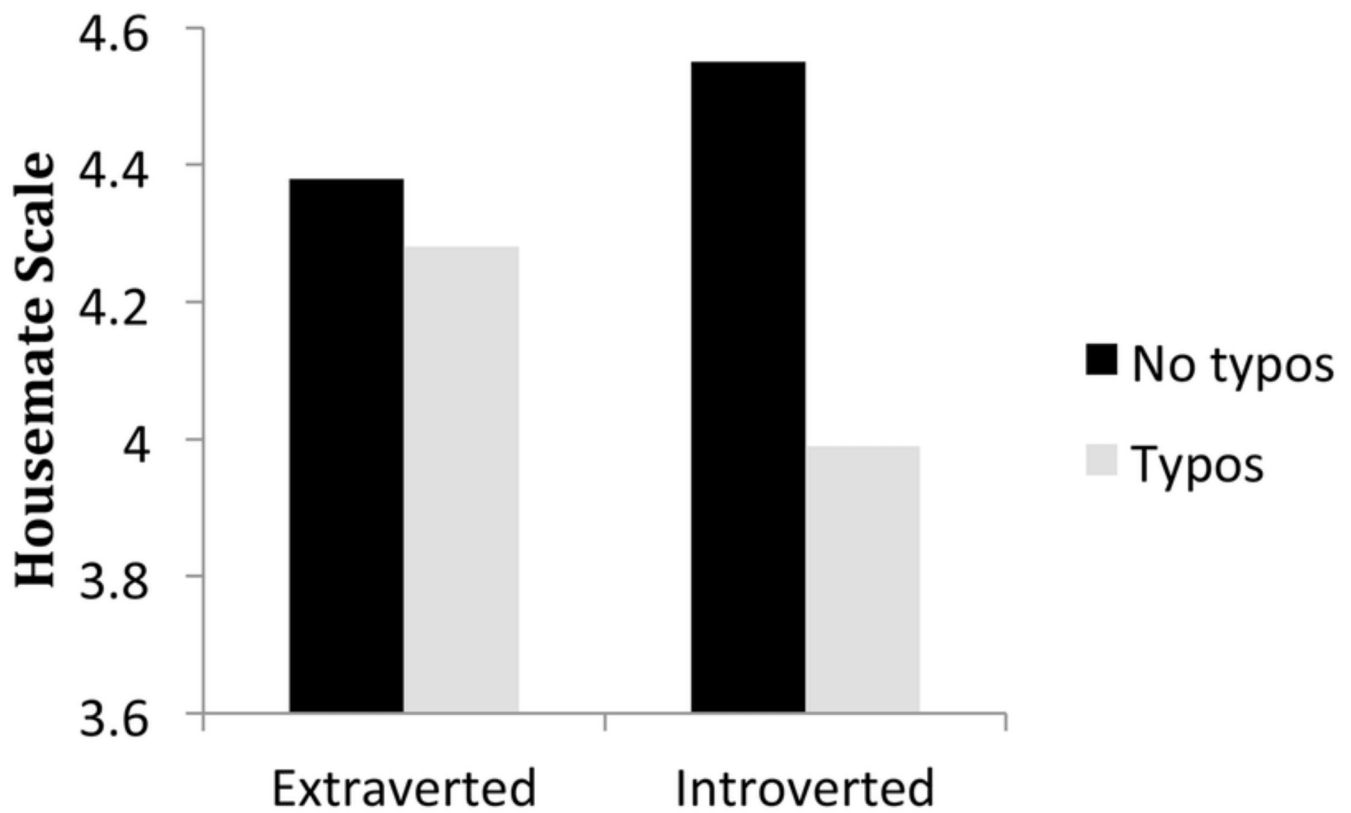
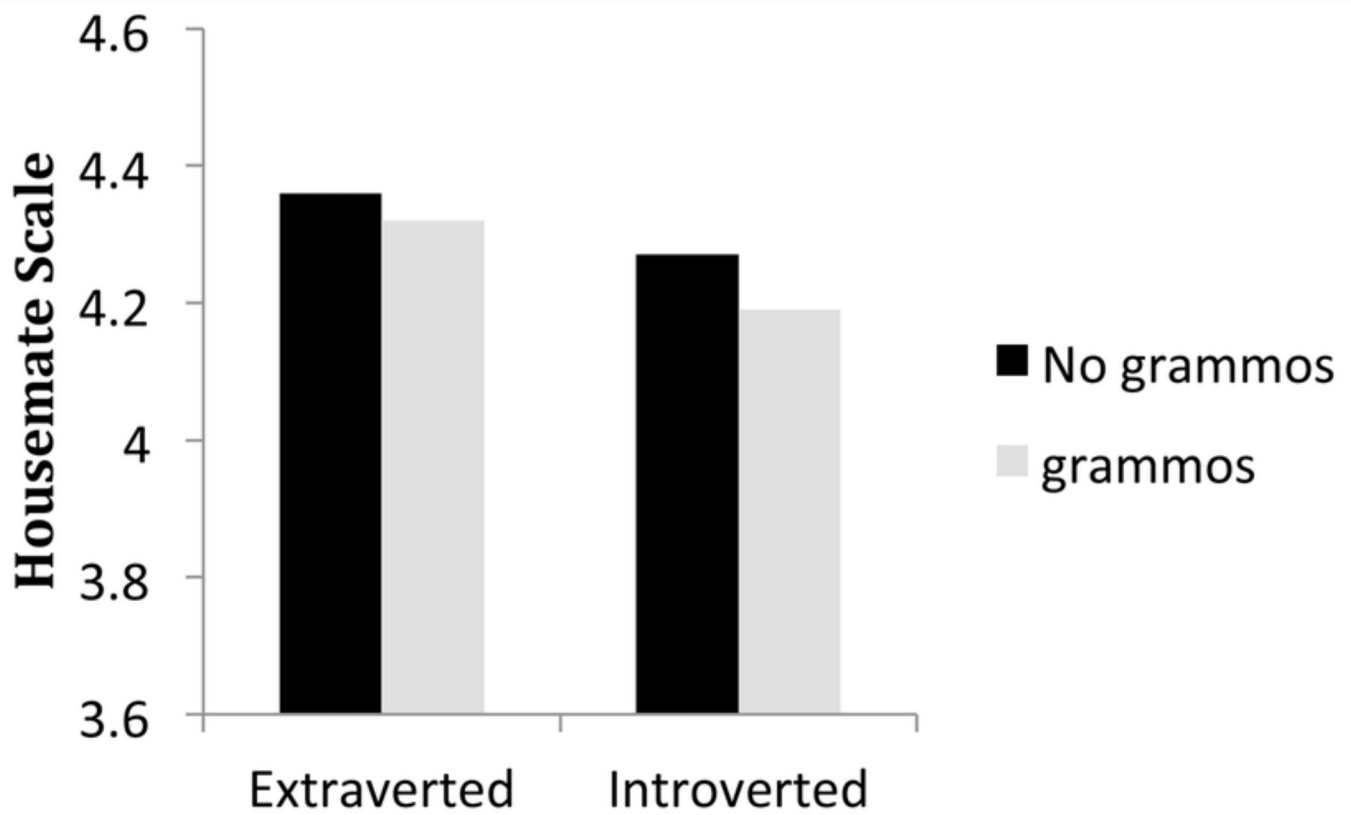
Interestingly, "grammos", or errors which indicate a misunderstanding of grammar rules, impact perception differently than typos. Both have a negative social impact, particularly among more introverted audiences, but typos are far more egregious, one study found.

In the study, participants were asked to rate phrases like "this person is like me" and "I'd like this person as a housemate" on a scale ranging from true to



false based on emails with typos and grammos. The result? All participants rated individuals less positively because of errors.

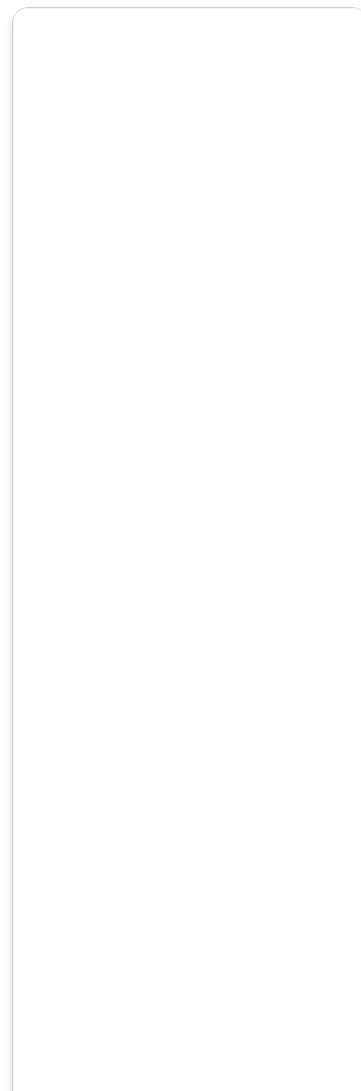


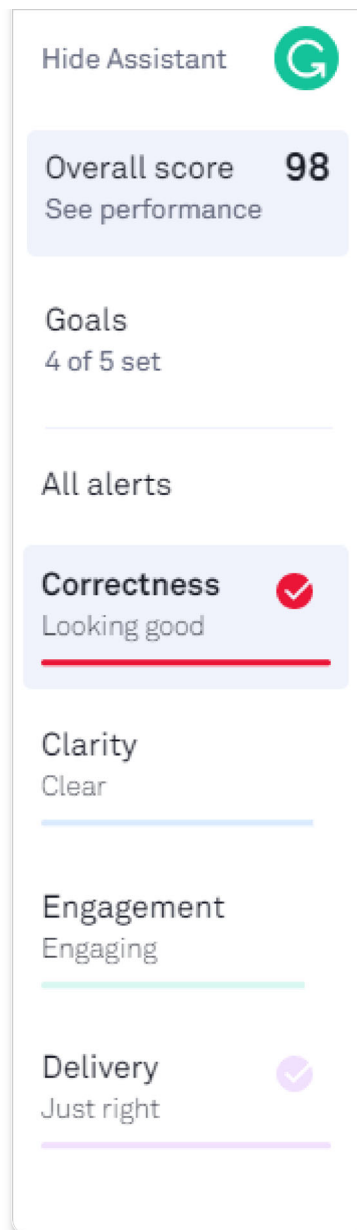


OK. Hopefully, I've made the point about editing and why this step is so important. If you have the funds, Upwork isn't a bad place to find a formal editor, and there are a ton of amazing freelance editors available for specialized industries.

If you don't, though, the second-best thing after hiring a professional is finding a patient friend to proofread and catch typos and let a word processing software do the rest. Grammarly is our tool of choice, though it's not perfect.

In addition to (mostly) catching grammatical errors and typos, it's also good for flagging clarity issues, wordiness, engagement problems, and delivery snafus.





Otherwise, if you're going to self-edit entirely, which is something I've definitely done throughout my career, you need to give yourself a break before you do it.

There's no way around it.

After all, you already know what you meant to write. You *just* put the finishing touches on it.



Trying to edit it in the same sitting is going to force competition between the blog post in your head and the version that exists in reality, according to Tom Stafford , who studies typos of the University of Sheffield in the UK.

He explains it succinctly:

"We don't catch every detail, we're not like computers or NSA databases . . . Rather, we take in sensory information and combine it with what we expect, and we extract meaning."

So, don't try to dive into editing in the same hour as finishing it. Give yourself at least half a day -- I prefer to give myself a full night of sleep -- and then scan over it carefully, run it through processing software, and check it *one more time* after you publish.

Then, and only then, start sharing your blog post.

Step 4: Distribute your blog content.

The last step is pretty straightforward and it's going to vary a lot for different businesses, so I'll keep this short and sweet.

After you've published, it's time to get it out on your marketing channels to promote it .



At the high-level, distribution channels can be divided into:

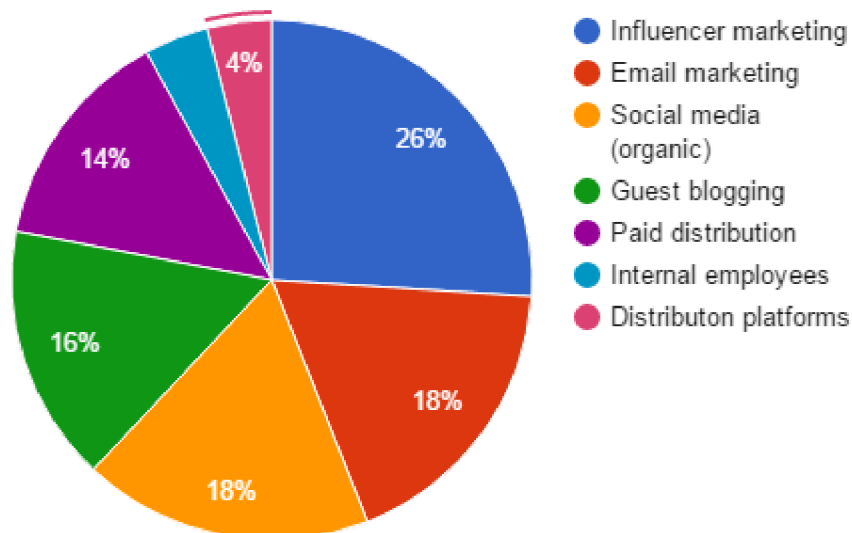
Social media

Direct shares (such as what you send to someone over a DM, or an individual email)

Email lists (what you send to subscribers)

Paid advertising

The most popular distribution channels for professional marketers roughly follow this division, as well. Check it out.



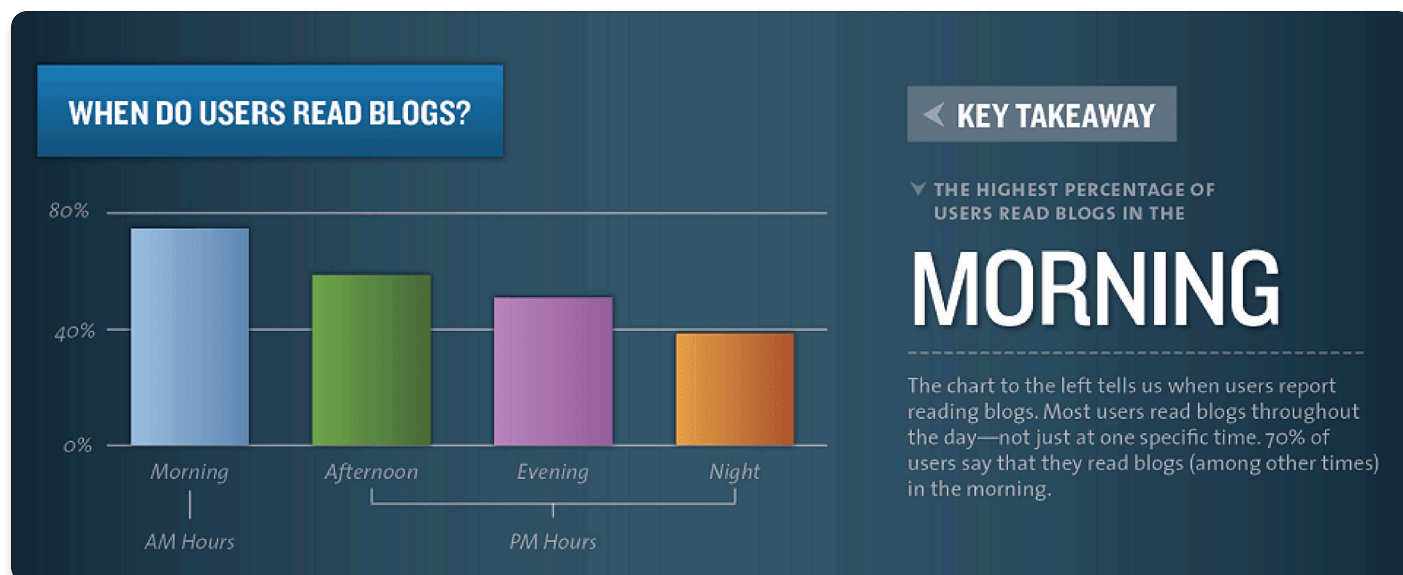
We've talked a lot about many of these channels in the past, so if you're curious about diving in, these resources may be helpful:

For organic social distribution -- [How to market an online business and turn a tidy profit](#) .

For email marketing -- [A step-by-step guide for going from zero email subscribers to a profitable launch](#) .

For paid social distribution -- [How to sell more digital products using social media](#) .

As for *when* to promote and publish your material, the morning seems like a safe bet. [70% of readers](#) report enjoying their blogs in the early hours of the morning.



The secret to making promotion work is to do it a lot more than you think you should, especially on your social media channels.



Social media is like the shores of the Pacific: whether or not someone sees your article wash up on their feed is a numbers game.

If you only have one wave out there, a lot of people are going to miss it. It'll get buried by the ever-growing swell of content your competitors and colleagues are putting out.

So you have to post and promote as often as possible. Don't promote the same things back-to-back -- that *can* come off as spammy -- but don't hesitate to slate the same article up for promotion throughout the week or month.

"You'd be shocked by how often you can post," Laura Roeder of social media management tool Edgar told us in [an exclusive webinar](#) .

While *you* might see your twenty tweets or Instagram stories talking about the same content, the majority of your followers won't, so every opportunity you can find to get your content in front of them is one you need to take.

After all, they say the only opportunities you regret are the ones you don't take, right?

SIGN UP NOW

Get your free Podia account

Join the 150,000+ creators who use Podia to create websites, sell digital products, and build online communities.



Start free →

Rinse and repeat these steps to write a successful blog post.

Speaking of missed opportunities, don't let the chance to [try Podia for free](#) pass you by while you're building your blog and audience base.

Otherwise, here's the deal with blog posts:

Blogs are the best way to build trust with your audience and start attracting organic traffic.

Blogging helps tackle the trust deficit consumers have with businesses -
- put plainly, it makes you seem like more than a faceless institution. It makes you seem *helpful*.

The first step to writing a blog is to outline it. Outlines eliminate writer's block and keep you on point throughout the process.

The second step is to start writing it -- and to focus *only* on writing it. Editing comes in the next step.

When you do get to editing, don't stack the odds against yourself and try doing it alone. You'll have a much harder time catching your own



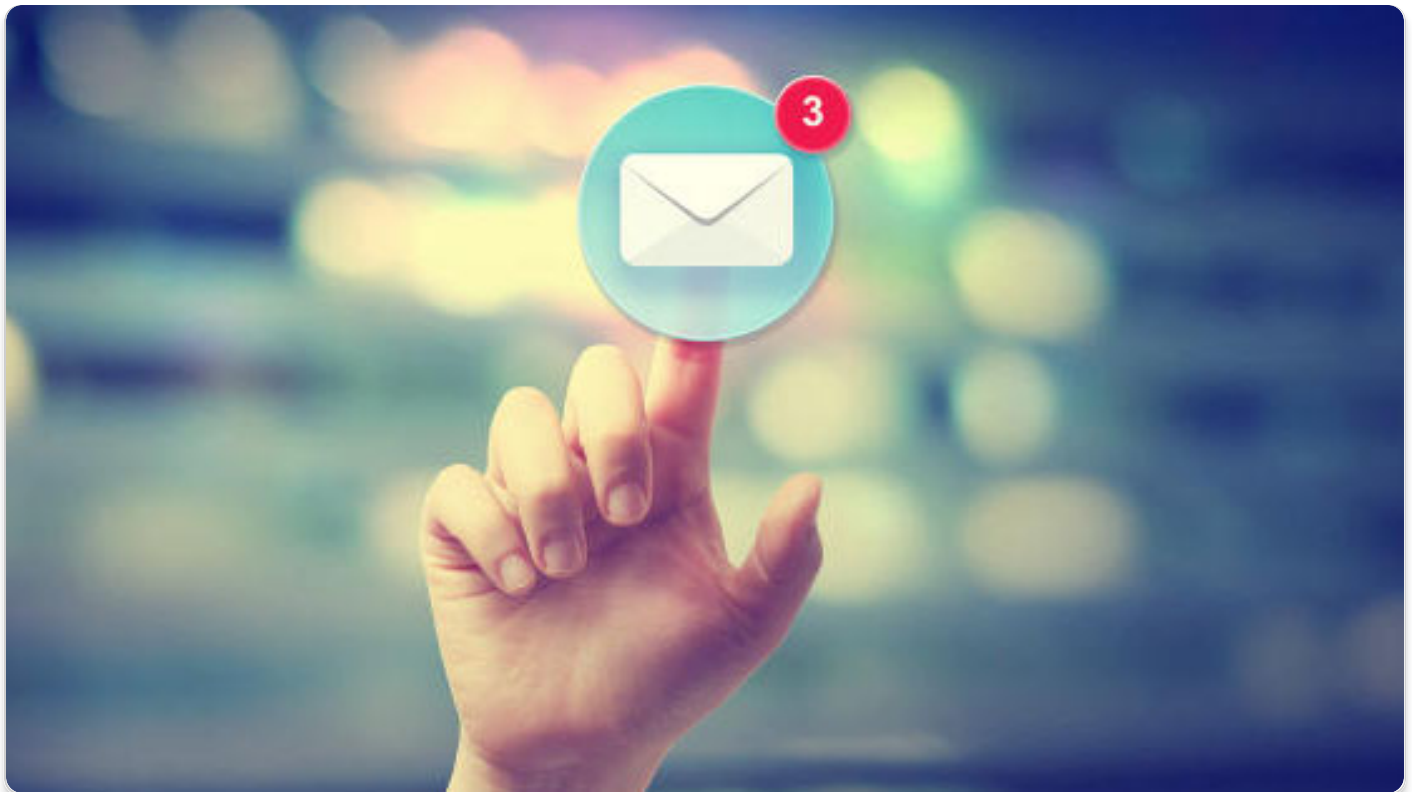
errors than someone else will because it's a competition between the post you think you wrote and the one you actually did.

Finally, after you've proofed, polished, and published your blog post, distribute it. Don't be afraid to distribute it often, either, especially if you're using social media. You'd be surprised at how often you can post.

Is every blog post a breeze to write with this system? No. Not even for me. But is it a lot easier with these four steps than without it? I've staked my career on it.

MORE FROM THE BLOG

Keep on reading



MARKETING AND SALES

9 best email marketing platforms for creators and small businesses

