

## Why Are You Creating a Blog? Useful Content is Key

A blog requires content, especially if you expect readers and if you want to make money from that readership. In this article, Linda discusses writing issues such as how to find content, how to make a writing plan, and how to maintain a consistent schedule for your writing.

### *Expect Burnout*

I may as well address this subject up front, before anything else. Expect to become burned out over writing entries in your blog on a consistent basis. This is why some people create "wordless Wednesday" blog entries and post a photo...that one day per week allows the consistent blogger to escape from writing on that one day per week.

But, do you need to post every day? How much should you write in your blog entries? Do you have a game plan? What, exactly, does "consistent" mean?

I wanted to tackle these issues before I introduced you to the SEO-friendly WordPress (WP) environment, because all these issues are more important than SEO. You can know SEO (Search Engine Optimization) backward and forward, but if you do not fill your blog with interesting and focused content, none of the SEO in the world can help you build readership.

This is what you need to tackle first, then – your plan for writing and your writing life. By making a plan and following some basic guidelines, you can enter the blogging world (or change your current blogging life up) with ease.

### *The Plan*

I'm about to turn your blogging world upside down, as many bloggers enter blogging with the sole desire of making money. First, it takes time to make money when blogging. You might think about building your blog with the following steps:

1. Plan content
2. Find and write content
3. Make your content useful
4. Find your audience and direct them to your blog
5. Build a conversation with your readers (connect)
6. Start back at number #1

### **Plan Content**

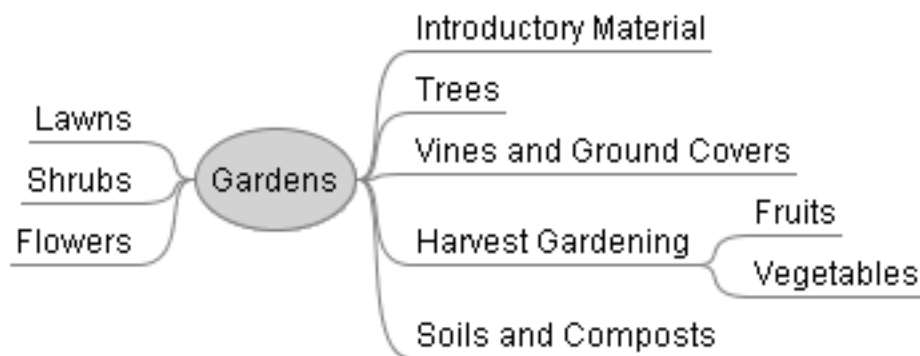
If you already know what you want to write about, do you have a schedule made up of the things you want to write about? Or, did you think that ideas will rain on your head like manna from heaven once you begin writing? My suggestion...don't believe in miracles. Good things come to those who plan.

Think about how often you want to write. Once per week? Twice? Monday, Wednesday and Friday? Decide now how much time you can devote to your writing, and stick to that plan. My suggestion is to start out slow and build momentum if you dare to reach further.

Remember that some day you may burn out, or you may want to take a vacation. While you can write blogs ahead of schedule, would you rather write three blogs before your vacation or five? Take it easy on yourself, and you may end up creating consistent and useful blog entries.

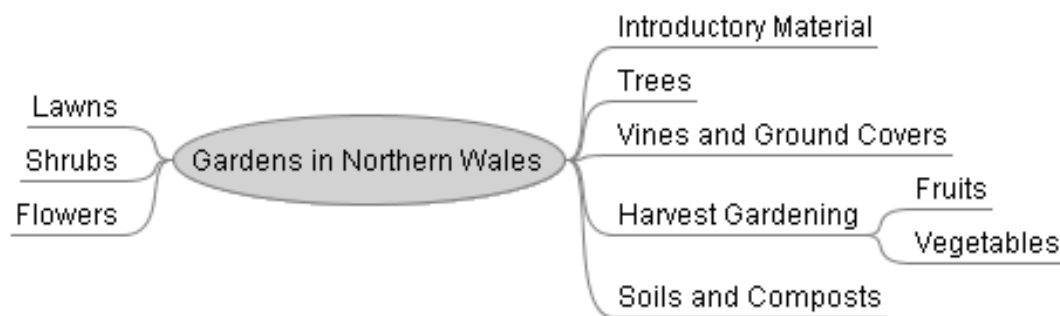
When I want to create a new blog, I find books that might help me with content. Visit the library or attend used book sales and find books that are related to your topic. Use the table of contents in a book to help you define what you might want to write about over the next month or year. In fact, you can use that book's content to help [brainstorm](#) (even just a small brainstorm between yourself and that book) about how you want to develop your site.

Use those books and a [mind map](#) to help hash out what you plan to write about over the next few months. I downloaded [FreeMind](#) (free for Windows, Linux and Macintosh OS X) to show an example of how to work this method of brainstorming. And, as an example, I'm considering creating a Web site on gardening...and I'm basing my basic brainstorming on a gardening book I purchased some time ago.



The layout above helps me to understand the various options I have to write about gardening. These topics are so generalized that there is no need to worry about plagiarizing...just about any general lawn and gardening book that you might pick up talks about these topics. But, I do want to narrow my topics down to a specific area, as not all plants grow everywhere. For instance, you might have a difficult time (at least currently) getting a palm tree to grow in the Arctic without sufficient shelter and environmental controls.

So, I change up the main topic to talk about lawns and gardens in the UK, specifically in northern Wales.



Notice, also, that I created a subdivision under “Harvest Gardening” to include both fruits and vegetables. I could also divide “Flowers” to include annuals and perennials. But, no need to go all obsessive on you at this point...I think you get the picture.

From this point, I have at least nine topics to write about. If I write three blog articles per week, this simple outline has provided me with three weeks’ worth of article topics. And, these topics can be subdivided even further to provide more ideas about writing. For instance, some flowers grow better in full sun, while other grow better in full shade. More topics.

This simple idea of borrowing outlines to brainstorm topics is one way to avoid running dry on article ideas. And, you can apply this method to any subject, from politics to weddings and from medical topics to hobbies.

## Find and Write Content

Now that you have a plan about what to write about, you need to find information about those topics. If I lived in northern Wales, I might create a garden and grow some plants to provide images and information for my blog. But, I cannot grow everything in my yard that might grow in northern Wales. So, I need further information.

While I could find information on the Web, what I might do instead is find other places and people in the area who are interested in gardening. A cursory search for gardeners and garden shops in northern Wales turns up this information:

The screenshot shows the North Wales Index website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for Web Directory, Message Board, Classified Adverts, Paid Advertising, User Profile, and Help. Below this, a search bar and a sidebar with various site features are visible. The main content area displays search results for 'Garden Centres & Nurseries in North Wales', listing 12 sites. The results include links to 'Linkin for Garden', 'Search Jobs on Yahoo! HotJobs', and several garden centres like 'Kannonchiku - National Rhaps Collection', 'Treborth Garden Centre', 'Abersoch Garden Centre', and 'Hazel's Garden Centre'. Each listing provides a brief description, categories, and locations. The right sidebar contains 'Private Advertising' and 'For Sale' sections with various job and property listings.

I discovered a [list of garden centres](#) in northern Wales, and these garden centres also can supply me with content and information. What can I do with this information? This is a gold mine...I can put new batteries and a blank memory card in my digital camera, take along a tape recorder or a notepad, and go introduce myself to the garden centre owner.

I can take photos, and – if the owner is not busy – ask for an [interview](#). I make sure I have a small list of questions (no more than ten) on a given topic (go back to your topic list) and fire off some questions for some expert answers. An interview is a great way to meet a new acquaintance, and it also is a wonderful way to learn more about any given topic from another person's perspective.

In the process, you have gained new interest in your site, too. Be sure to create links to that garden centre, and don't be afraid to ask for a link in return...especially after you have published the interview on your site. In this [interview with Jakob Nielsen](#), you can see that the interviewer asked only seven questions. And, those questions pertained to Nielsen's expertise in Web usability. None of the questions strayed from this format.

Don't be afraid to go out to interview people in your area, or to reach out to people outside your physical sphere to ask questions for an interview. You can gain much traction for your Web site by offering other perspectives through interviews and through guest blogs. Offering other people's perspectives can free your brain up and provide you with some fruitful downtime while still adding content to your site.

## Make Your Content Useful

By planning content and providing a wide variety of content on a specific topic, you can make your site useful to your readers. If your site is [usable](#) and [accessible](#) and if you have [useful content](#), the design of your site is secondary. So is SEO. Content is the most important issue for your blog, no matter if it is verbal or visual.

Useful content also is how you monetize your site. Unless you get traffic to that site, no affiliation in the world will bring you money. You need traffic, and – to cut your work in half (at least) – provide useful content that your readers will want to return to time and again. Return readership is the Holy Grail...because those readers may provide you with the links you need for SEO and with the word-of-mouth or Web advertising that doesn't cost anything other than your time to create that useful content.

## Find Your Audience and Direct Them to Your Blog

That saying, "If you build it, they will come," is a bunch of hooey if you plan to apply it to your blog. You need to reach out and touch someone through social media to begin to build your readership. [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#) and other social media tools can help you to build community around your blog and its subject matter.

Building readership takes time, because it takes time for readers to trust that you can come up with relevant and useful content on a consistent basis. How much time do you need? Think two years. Yes, two years. By that time, you might have enough useful content and enough readers to consider your blog worth something in the blogosphere (read: a blog with the ability to make money through advertising or to be worth something on the sales block).

## Connect with Your Readers

Finally, you need to connect with your readers. This does not mean that you need to respond to every comment left on your blog; however, if people leave compliments or if they add to the conversation, take the lead and respond to those comments. These readers are, essentially, dropping by your "house" to read and comment, and it's up to you to become the gracious host/hostess.

When you begin to connect with your readers, you build some loyalty. This loyalty goes a long way in maintaining readership.

## Maintaining Momentum

At this point, you may have run out of things to write about. Never fear...just go back to the library and pick up some more books on your topic and brainstorm again. You may realize that you omitted an entire topic within your subject. Or, advances in that subject have offered new material worth writing about.

At times, you may feel you need to take a break from your blog. There is no reason why you cannot walk away...as long as you have prepared your readers for this event. If you cannot write ahead for that week or month off, let your readers know that you're taking a break, and provide them with a time when you'll return. Then, return. Allow your readers reason for them to trust you.

## Conclusion

Throughout this whole process, you are focusing on a subject that interests you...but, in order to share this subject with your readers, you must focus on what they want to know. I've already linked to this article about cutting the noise and creating useful content, but I'll do it again...because it is a fantastic article that every blogger (including myself) can learn from: [Make Your Blog More Powerful by Optimizing the Signal-to-Noise Ratio](#).

During this process, you can focus on making money...just know that making money is down the road, after you have created useful content, developed a reader base and continue to write on a consistent basis. Think of building your blog as a project, much like building a house. A house is not built overnight, and you must make it attractive if you want others to be interested in it down the road (readers as well as potential buyers). To make that blog attractive, centre your focus on content. Anyone can make a pretty blog...but few can create a blog that holds readership.

In the next article, I'll provide you with some tips on how to write your content. You don't need a master's degree to build great content on a consistent basis; however, it does help if you have some time on your side and a sincere interest in what you are writing about.