

Ten Powerful Ways



To Make Your Blog Posts Stronger

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Cover image by [Sarah Deer](#), on Flickr.

Introduction

Do you want blog posts which readers love? Posts which get retweeted, linked to, bookmarked ... even printed out by your fans?

Of course you do. That's how a blog grows, after all.

Maybe you're trying really hard already. You're writing regularly, you're pouring everything you've got into it, but your effort just doesn't seem to be paying off.

Your blog posts seem a bit puny. They're not throwing any punches. No-one even seems to notice them.

I've got some good news for you.

In this report, we'll be going through ten powerful ways to make your posts stronger. **These tips take just a few minutes to implement – but they'll make your blog a real competitor.**

And I've got some even *better* news.

These tips are designed to work on the posts you've *already* written.

You don't need to spend hours and hours putting together new content. There's probably nothing wrong with the content you've already got – it just needs to be a bit stronger.

So, let's get started.

(If you get stuck, shoot me an email any time – I'm ali@aliventures.com – or grab me on Twitter at [@aliventures](#))

#1: Supercharge Your Title

A *huge* mistake which most bloggers make is to writing boring (though accurate) titles. If you've been blogging for a while, you've probably picked up plenty of title tricks along the way – but have you ever been back to spruce up the titles of your earlier posts?

Titles, or headlines, are immensely important: **most readers will only see the title of your post before deciding whether or not to read it.**

How I Crafted This Report's Title

If I'd called this report *Improve Every Blog Post*, you might not have bothered signing up to get it. The title would have been accurate, but not especially compelling.

Instead, I called it *Ten Powerful Ways to Make Your Blog Posts Stronger*. Why does that work?

- **I've used a number.** If you look at any magazine cover, you'll see that numbers are great attention-grabbers (especially big numbers).
- **I used "powerful"** - an attention-grabbing word, especially when combined with "stronger". "Ten ways" wouldn't sound so interesting as "Ten powerful ways"
- **I used "your"** - because I know you're not interested in the *theory* of blogging but in practical ways to make *your* blog even better

Easy Tricks for Great Titles

If you find it tough to write great titles, don't despair: most bloggers find this hard (me included). It can take time to come up with a really good, attention-grabbing title, though there are a few tricks which you can use to help:

- **"How to..."** or **"How I..."** posts are always popular. Readers are motivated by learning how something's done.
- **Numbers** grab attention, especially big ones.

- **Certain words are more intriguing than others.** “Ten Secrets” are more compelling than “Ten Ideas”.
- **Ask a question** which the reader will want an answer to.
- **Some titles follow an easy formula.** Try collecting headlines from magazines (or use the list of popular posts on [Copyblogger](#)) and switch a few words to create your own great title.

You need to make sure your post can live up to the promise made in the title. If you call your post “Everything You Need to Know About Ski-ing” and it’s a 500 word post that only covers the absolute basics, readers will be disappointed.

Exercise #1:

Go through the most recent five posts on your blog. Are the titles as compelling as they could be? Tweak any which aren’t strong enough.

Further Reading

[Copyblogger’s series on Magnetic Headlines](#) by Brian Clark

This is a comprehensive guide to post titles or sales page headlines. It’s a must-read for every blogger. It comes in eleven short parts, so if you tackled just one a day, you’d be done within two weeks.

#2: Add an Eye-Catching Image

When I started out with my blog on Aliventures, I didn't add images to posts. I figured that what readers cared about was the quality of my writing - not how pretty my blog looked.

To some extent, that's true – I have an audience of very literate, engaged readers who enjoy in-depth posts. However, I've found that adding high-quality images makes my posts look more professional and helps break up the text on the screen (very important – if your readers see a whole page of grey, they'll won't read the post).

Finding a great image can take ages, though. To speed things up:

- Always use Flickr's advanced search to find *creative commons images which are licenced for commercial use*. If you use Google to find images, you'll either have to check the copyright position for each one, or you'll risk getting sued by an unhappy artist.
- **Consider having a unifying theme for images on your blog.** For instance, [life coach Tim Brownson](#) always uses cartoons.
- **Don't get too hung up on finding the "perfect" image** for your post: give yourself a time limit for image-hunting, if necessary.
- If you're writing about concepts (e.g. "changing your life") try looking for more abstract images. The image doesn't have to be of something which you directly write about.

Make sure you credit the person who owns the image. Normally, you can do that by writing:

"Image by [name]"

where *[name]* is the person's Flickr account name, hyperlinked to their account.

For example:



Exercise #2:

Find a post on your blog without an image – either your most recent post, or one of your most-read ones from the archives. Spend five minutes choosing and uploading a great image.

Further Reading

[A Complete Guide to Finding and Using Incredible Flickr Images](#) – Skellie, on Skelliewag.org

This fantastic post explains why Flickr is a great option, and goes through the different types of Creative Commons license.



#3: Hook Readers With the First Paragraph

The title encourages a reader to click through. The image draws their eye. And then they start reading ... and if you don't hook them straight away, you've lost them.

The first paragraph needs to grab the reader – and set up the rest of the post. You can:

- **Start with an intriguing question.** (e.g. “Have you ever wished you could just walk out of your job – and never go back?”)
- **Use the word “you”** –if you're using it in a slightly negative way, position yourself on the reader's side. (e.g. “Be honest: you procrastinate. We all do.”)
- **Use dialogue.** This doesn't always work, but opening with a line of (real or imagined) speech can really grab attention.
- **Have several short paragraphs.** Plenty of white space is reassuring: it makes it easier for readers to take in the words.
- **Quote someone else.** It's not uncommon for authors to start off their books with one or two quotes which inspired them in some way. If you have a relevant and engaging quotation that's related to your post, you could open with it.

Copyblogger's posts almost always have great opening paragraphs:

<p>by Pamela Wilson 94 Comments</p> <hr/> <h3>4 Ways to Keep Your Lifeless Blog from Boring Your Readers to Tears</h3>  <p>You'd better sit down.</p> <p>I want to tell you something, and you're not going to like it.</p> <p><i>Your dreary blog is putting me to sleep.</i></p>	<p>by Sonia Simone 34 Comments</p> <hr/> <h3>How to Consistently Attract High-Quality Traffic to Your Site</h3>  <p>What's the first thing any business with a website needs?</p> <p>Traffic, right? Without it, you're dead in the water.</p>
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Pamela starts her post by addressing the reader directly as “You”. This is also an intriguing opening (“You’d better sit down” makes us wonder what on earth she’s going to tell us).

Sonia starts off with a question, and makes sure that it has an answer that readers can’t help but agree with.

Next time a blog post grabs you right at the start, pause a moment and figure out *how* the blogger did it.

It won’t take you more than five minutes to tweak a sub-par opening paragraph – but those minutes could mean that hundreds or thousands more readers actually make it past the first few lines.

Exercise #3:

Choose one of your recent posts. Re-read the first paragraph. Does it grab attention? Does it fit well with the rest of the post? Revise it – using one or more of the above ideas – and update the post.

Further Reading

[11 Ways to Open a Post and Get Reader Engagement](#) by Darren Rowse on ProBlogger

A comprehensive look at post openings (and a great example of how opening a post with dialogue can work well!)

#4: Use “You” – the Right Way

Unless you’re blogging for a very staid corporate site, you’ll want to make your posts conversational and friendly. **Talk to your readers just as if you were replying to a comment or hanging out on Twitter.**

The easiest way to do that is to use the words “you” and “your” (just like I’ve been doing in this report). Any time you’ve used a general word like “people” (or “some people”), try replacing it with “you”.

(If you’re saying something a bit negative, you can use “we” and “us” to put yourself alongside the reader.)

Avoiding the Plural “You”

The biggest mistake which bloggers make when using “you” is to use the *plural* “you”. This can be jarring and even distancing for the reader. For instance, I could write:

“Some of you know that I’m a writer.”

But that’s confusing. After all, you’re reading this report on your own, not as part of a group. You may or may not know that I’m a writer. So instead, I’d be better off writing:

“You may know that I’m a writer.”

Sure, your blog posts might have hundreds of readers. But these people are experiencing your posts individually and separately – so write as if you’re writing to just one person. It’s much more personal and engaging, and it’ll keep your readers coming back for more.

Writing a “You” Focused Post

If I’m struggling to get the right tone for a post, I sometimes think of an individual reader – maybe one who’s left a comment or emailed me. I write as though I’m writing to just that one person.

Lots of bloggers write great “you” focused posts, but one person who does that really successfully is Naomi Dunford of IttyBiz. She’s built up a huge audience of very loyal fans, in part due to her extremely personable writing style.

Here’s an example, from [Think You’re Not An Expert?](#)

You run a growing company.

You have courage. You have strength. You have faith, and hope, and optimism.

You act, even when it’s scary as hell. You make impossible decisions. You stick your neck out.

You help people. You make their lives better. You teach them, or lead them, or make them laugh, or bring them joy.

This whole post is focused on the reader. At some points, Naomi offers different alternatives so that each individual reader feels acknowledged, like in “You teach them, or lead them, or make them laugh, or bring them joy” above, and later in the post with:

Your wife says she supports you but you know she thinks you’re a screwup. Your husband says he supports you but still expects you to be around at 3 for carpool. Your mother says she supports you but sends you Help Wanted ads for retail jobs.

You can use the same technique yourself, any time when you want to give specific examples but you know that not every example will apply to every reader.

Exercise #4:

Change three titles on your blog to use “You” or “Your”. For instance:

“How Anyone Can Write Faster” -> “How You Can Write Faster”

Further Reading:

[The Two Most Important Words in Blogging](#) by Brian Clark on Copyblogger

This post explains *why* the word “you” is so important (in fact, according to Brian, it’s the most important word in blogging).

#5: Add a Link to Another Post

Links are the lifeblood of blogging. Without links, the blogosphere would die: it would be impossible for readers to find new posts.

Of course, your blog has plenty of links already – which you might expect readers to use. These links are probably in your sidebar or along the top of the page, leading to pages (like “About” or “Services”) and to your archive and category pages.

Often, though, readers need a bit more direction. **Get into the habit of putting at least one link into every blog post.** You might put it at the end as further reading, [like Sid Savara does](#) (image to the right).

Further Reading

This isn't the end – it's only the beginning. If this article has struck a chord with you, first please tell someone else about it. Tweet it out, email it to a friend, or send someone an instant message – they'll be glad you did.

Second, here's a hand picked selection of articles to continue with similar themes and lessons that you'll enjoy. Check them out, and if you haven't already done so, make sure you get your free copy of [personal development 101](#).

- [Instant Procrastination and Excuse Buster – Drop Your “If Only”](#)
- [7 Common Procrastination Excuses](#)
- [You Are The Something You've Been Waiting For](#)
- [Procrastination Thumbscrews – Know Your Procrastinating and Time Wasting Weaknesses](#)
- [You Work Too Damn Hard To Make Excuses](#)
- [How To Stop Wasting Your Time And Start Accomplishing Your Goals](#)

You can also link individual phrases within a post, to help readers who're new to your blog. This example is from Daniel Scocco's [101 Blog Tips I Learned in 2006](#) on Daily Blog Tips.

57. [focus on timeless content](#)
 58. [have an “About” page](#)
 59. [have a picture of yourself on the “About” page](#)
 60. [crate your own “Advertise Here” page](#)
 61. [use meta tags wisely](#)
 62. [learn the basics of SEO](#)
 63. [use pictures whenever possible](#)

Putting Links Into Old Posts

When you first started your blog, you didn't have many posts to link to. Those early posts, though, might still get plenty of traffic. Go back to them, and see if you can insert some links to newer pieces that you've written. It'll only take a few minutes – but it can make

the difference between a new reader reading *one* post and reading several. **The more they read, the more likely they are to subscribe.**

You'll also want to think about linking to posts on other blogs. This used to happen a bit more in the blogosphere (now, bloggers often link to the posts they've enjoyed via Facebook or Twitter) – but it's still a great way to build up strong relationship with other bloggers, and to encourage readers to see your blog as a repository of useful information.

Great Anchor Text

Whether you're linking to one of your own posts or to someone else's, think hard about the anchor text that you use. (That's the words which have the hyperlink attached.) You can improve your search engine rankings for particular phrases by using those phrases as anchor text.

On the other hand, the words "click here", while pretty useless for SEO purposes, have been shown to increase the number of readers who click on the link.

Note: while you can use Wordpress plugins to automatically interlink posts, I still think it's worth adding in links manually. The plugins won't add links in the middle of posts, nor will they know what your strategic plan is!

Exercise #5:

Go back to an early, but strong, post on your blog. Find something more recent which you've written on a similar topic. Update the old post to link to the newer one. (And link back the other way, too, if you want.)

Further Reading

[Interlink Your Old Blog Posts](#) by Darren Rowse on ProBlogger

This post is part of Darren's excellent 31 Days to Build a Better Blog workbook (*if you're interested in getting it, [you can read my review here.](#)*) Darren explains why interlinking posts is important, and offers tips on how best to do it.

#6: Add a Great Quotation

We touched on quotations earlier, when we looked at good ways to open a post. Quotes from other people can be used at any stage of your post, though. They've got plenty of advantages:

- **Sometimes, someone else has found the perfect words** to make a point which you want to convey to your readers. Instead of struggling to reword it in your own way, why not just quote them?
- If you quote another blogger and link to the source of the quote (probably a post on their blog), they may well come over to leave a comment and thank you. They might even return the favour in future.
- If you were inspired by a post on another blog (whether you agreed with it or not!) **it can help to put the discussion in context if you include a quote**
- When you're recommending other posts (even your own), a short quote is often more enticing than a title alone.
- **Quotations can help add authority to your posts**, especially if you're quoting from books or other non-blog sources.
- Short, pithy quotations can make a great starting point for discussion

It's also worth remembering that posts *of* quotations (perhaps with images or extra explanation) are often very popular. Charlie Gilkey's [How to Flourish: 17 Quotes on Living, Being and Doing](#) is one of the most popular posts on his blog – with an incredible 416,000 “thumbs up” on StumbleUpon.

How to Format Quotations

Whatever blog software you're using, there'll be a way to format text as a blockquote, which makes it clear to readers that you're quoting. This normally indents the text, and

may add a quotation marks graphic, italicise the text or change the font colour, depending on your blog theme's settings.

In Wordpress, you can highlight the quote and click on the quotation marks button to format it as a blockquote. (In the html view, you can wrap the tags <blockquote> and </blockquote> around the text.)

You'll need to cite the source of the quote. If you're quoting from a blog post or website, you can link directly to it – I usually give the name of the writer and of the blog as well. If you're using a famous quote, it's fine to just give the name of the person.

In this case, I gave the title of the book that I'm quoting from, plus links to buy it:

Resistance Isn't So Futile After All

In my experience, there's always a sense of reluctant and resistance before getting going on almost any task or venture. I used to get this when starting on essays at university: it was until I read Mark Forster's book *Get Everything Done* that I realised there was a name for it:

Resistance happens when one activity is harder for us than another one. By this I mean subjectively rather than objectively harder. ... Resisitance is the reason that our lives tend to fill up with trivia. ... Dealing with trivia is *easier* than dealing with important issues.

(Get Everything Done – [Amazon.com](#) / [Amazon.co.uk](#), Mark Forster, pg 71)

From [How to Get Started on Things You Keep Putting Off](#)

Exercise 6

Find a recent post – perhaps one which feels a little thin. See if you can add in a quotation (from another blog, or from a book) that helps strengthen your own words.

Further Reading

[Elevate Your Writing By Using Well-Positioned Quotes](#) by Bamboo on Write to Done

This post points out that bloggers don't often use quotes (so it's a great way to stand out) and gives plenty of suggestions on how to find strong quotations.

#7: Remove Unnecessary Words

Most of us over-write, often because we're a bit nervous about saying what we think. For instance:

It's my opinion that some bloggers probably won't ever make good money.

That would have a lot more power as:

Some bloggers won't ever make good money.

Unnecessary words draw power away from the words which *are* necessary. They weaken your sentences and get in the way of your meaning.

Words to Cut Out

You can safely cut phrases like “in my opinion” or “I think” or “I believe”. This is *your* blog – readers will realise that it's your opinion.

You can often cut out qualifiers, like:

- Quite
- Really
- Some
- Very
- Just

(Note: these words aren't “forbidden”. They might be necessary, depending on the context.)

Instead of writing *very big*, write *enormous*. Instead of writing *some people* write *people* or (often better) *you*.

This doesn't mean that every sentence and paragraph needs to be short. Sometimes, you'll want to explain complex ideas, or take time over a particularly important point. Make sure, though, that every word counts.

Editing Your Post

Don't worry about making every sentence perfect as you're writing your post: leave a few minutes for editing at the end, and go back through to cut out any unnecessary words.

Try cutting 10% of the words from your post when you edit. (So, 70 words from a 700 word post.) This will force you to take out words and phrases which aren't needed – so that what's left gets the attention that it deserves.

When *Not* to Cut

Almost every post *could* be shorter. You only want to cut words, though, if you can still maintain the same effect.

Sometimes, you'll want to make a point twice in different ways – to ensure that it sticks.

Other times, you'll have a phrase like “free gift” where one word is redundant (all gifts are free) – but where it will get a more positive reader response. Copyblogger has a great post on this as [“Here's How Brevity Can Crush Your Copy”](#).

Exercise #7:

Choose a recent post on your blog. Copy the first 200 words into a separate document, and see how many you can cut out. Does the writing seem stronger as a result?

Further Reading

[How to Lose 30 Pounds of Word Flab Overnight](#) by Sonia Simone on Copyblogger

A great post by Sonia where she explains how to shape up your work – fast.

#8: Give Clear Action Points

Readers come to your blog for all sorts of reasons. Perhaps they're looking for information, entertainment, a distraction from work, or a solution to a particular problem.

Why Action Points Help

In most cases, readers will love content which directly *helps* them. Motivational posts can be encouraging to read – but they don't really have much practical benefit, beyond giving the reader a temporary warm fuzzy glow.

Action points give readers something solid to *do* – increasing their engagement with you and your blog, and increasing the chance of them coming back. They also make your posts look more interesting and valuable.

What to Call Your Action Points

It's helpful to label your action points. If you have several points within one post, use the same label for each:

- Action Point
- Over to You
- Your Turn
- Try This
- Homework
- Exercise

You might want to tie your action points into the title. For instance, in my post [7 Habits of Serious Writers](#), I used “Get Serious” for each action point.

Think carefully about using words like “homework” or “assignment” – these won’t necessarily fit well on a blog which is primarily about entertaining, rather than educating, your readers.

How to Write an Action Point

Keep your action points fairly short. Make them clear and specific, and use the word “you” to encourage the reader to take action.

Usually, you’ll want to give actions that won’t take very long, and which don’t require previous experience. For more complex posts, you could give alternatives – offering readers a basic action plus a “bonus” or “extra credit” suggestion.

Where appropriate, you can give a link to extra resources that can help.

Exercise #8

Choose an existing post and add an action point for each major section (that might mean one action point at the end, or several points throughout).

Further Reading

[How to Create Compelling Content by Inspiring Action](#) by Darren Rowse on ProBlogger

Darren’s great at encouraging action by giving readers specific things to do – and in this post he shares plenty of tips on that.

#9: Format Your Post for Easy Reading

How often do you look at a post of grey, blocky paragraphs and think *too much effort*?

I *love* reading and I still do this a lot. I want blog posts which I can take in easily – ones which use formatting to help me grasp important points.

Good formatting doesn't just make a post easy to read – it also indicates that the author has put some thought into the structure of the piece.

How to Tweak Your Posts for Readability

It takes minutes – perhaps just seconds – to make a post *far* more attractive to readers. Here's how:

- **Break up any long paragraphs.** In blogging, it's fine to have single-sentence – even single-word – paragraphs.
- **Add in subheadings** if the post makes several distinct points – these help the reader take in the message of your post more easily.
- **Use different levels of headings.** You're not limited to just a title and a couple of first-level subheadings – you can have smaller headings too. For instance, you might break a post into two halves, but have two sections within each part.
- **Consider putting a couple of key sentences or phrases in bold.** This can get annoying for the reader if you do it too much – but it can be very effective in small doses.
- **See whether any sentences would work better as a list.** If you've written a list in a paragraph, try breaking it up.
- **Add images.** This takes a little longer, but can be very effective. See section #2 for more on this.

Making these changes can dramatically improve the appearance of your post (and dramatically increase the chances that people will actually read it).

The short course strategy

The method

The short course method is pretty much what it sounds like: you set up a short course which your website visitor is enrolled in once they sign up to your mailing list. Over the next few days (usually seven, but the course duration can be more or less depending on what you have to offer), your subscribers will be sent a new part of the course. This is done automatically via your autoresponders, so you don't have to physically be around for your course to be delivered.

What it achieves

Depending on the niche I'm catering to, I often prefer this method to sending out a one-off ebook in exchange for an email address. This is because it achieves a few objectives:

- It helps build up a strong relationship with your customers in a short space of time. While it can take a while for subscribers to fully trust you, if you send them top-quality emails every day for a week, this trust is built up a lot faster.
- A short course can offer higher perceived value than a one-off ebook, meaning you'll get more subscribers.
- It'll get people used to opening and interacting with your emails. A subscriber who doesn't open your emails is pretty much useless, so sending them daily emails (initially) will help them to associate your emails with quality. This'll mean they're more likely to open future emails they receive from you.

From [Two Email Marketing Strategies That Work](#) by Shaun on ProBlogger

This example comes after the introduction to Shaun's post. He's included a large subheading (in black, here) and then several smaller subheadings beneath it ("The method" and "What it achieves").

You can also see that Shaun's used a list under "What it achieves".

Exercise #9:

Look for a recent post on your blog without subheadings, and add at least two. Pick one key sentence in each section and make it bold.

Further Reading

[16 Rules of Blog Writing and Layout. Which Ones Are You Breaking?](#) by Annabel Candy on Successful Blogging

Annabel explains the difference between print and online content, and gives a bunch of great tips for making your blog posts easier to read on the screen.

#10: Tell Readers What to Do Next

When readers get to the end of your post, what do you want them to do?

You might be hoping they'll:

- Subscribe to your blog
- Buy one of your products
- Join your newsletter list
- “Like” your post on Facebook
- Leave a comment

Readers can't read your mind. And even if you think that the next action is obvious – there's a comment box just below the post, after all – you still need to prompt them.

Ask Your Readers to Do Something

It's fine to *ask* readers to take action. This isn't pushy or rude – it's just a way to help them engage with you and your blog. Be totally clear about what you want them to do next:

- “Enjoyed this post? Make sure you don't miss out on future ones – subscribe to the blog today (it's free).”
- “If you found this how-to guide helpful, check out my ebook...”
- “Do you agree with me, or think that I'm crazy? Either way, I'd love to hear your thoughts. You can leave a comment below...”

Being Strategic About It

Blogging isn't just about writing great content. If you want to make money (or just gain more readers), you need to think strategically.

Maybe you want to build up your audience before launching a product: you could encourage readers to subscribe to your newsletter or blog.

Maybe you have an ebook that sold well when it launched, but doesn't make much money any more. How about prompting readers to check it out?

You can even chain actions together – for instance, on one post, you might say “If you enjoyed this, read the next post in this series...” Then, at the end of the series, you could encourage the reader to take a bigger step, like subscribing to your blog or buying a product.

Exercise #10:

Decide what you want readers to do after reading your most recent post. Add a sentence or two asking them to do this. For instance:

“Please tweet this post by clicking the green button below.”

“Get free updates straight to your inbox by entering your email address here:”

“Click here to find out all about my latest ebook.”

Further Reading

[Calls to Action – 12 Tips to SNAP Readers Out of Passivity](#) by Darren Rowse on Problogger

Darren explains that most readers are passive – they'll take in your content, but they won't do anything. He gives twelve simple tips which you can easily implement, like “one call to action per post”.

Where Next?

Congratulations on making it to the end of this ebook!

If you're looking to take your blogging or writing even further, check out my ecourses:

- On Track – www.aliventures.com/on-track
- Blog On – www.aliventures.com/blog-on

You can also hire me for one-to-one coaching: you can find out all about that on my coaching page at www.aliventures.com/coaching

And you'll want to check out my blog, www.aliventures.com, for regular writing-related articles. It's totally free – you can even opt to have my latest posts delivered straight to your inbox.

About Ali

I've been blogging for over three years, and I've written for many big sites – including writing/blogging sites like Copyblogger, ProBlogger, Daily Blog Tips and Men With Pens, and personal development sites like Dumb Little Man, Pick the Brain and FeelGooder.

I have a BA (Hons) in English from Cambridge University and an MA in Creative and Life Writing from Goldsmiths College, University of London.



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