

Module #2: Classic Blog Post Structure: How to Get it Right

In today's module, we're looking at classic or essay-style blog post structure. This structure can be used over and over again, on almost any type of blog – and it's the foundation of the more complex structures we'll come onto in future modules.

By the end of today's module, you should feel confident that you know *how* to craft a great title, beginning, middle and end for a post. We'll be going through plenty of examples where we dig into existing blog posts so you can see exactly how they work ... and what you can learn from them.

If you get stuck at any time or if you have questions, just pop on over to our Facebook group (which is the best option as then other course members can chime in!) or drop me an email to ali@aliventures.com.

The Facebook group is here: [facebook.com/groups/blogonspring2018](https://www.facebook.com/groups/blogonspring2018)

The Underlying Structure of a Blog Post: Title, Introduction, Main Body and Conclusion

If you've ever studied story writing or literature, you'll know that stories are supposed to have a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Blog posts are the same – though we tend to call these three elements the introduction, main body and conclusion. If any of these is missed out or falls flat, your post won't be as good as it should be.

Before we take a close look at how to get these right, I want to show you what I mean by the introduction, main body and conclusion.

Here's a fairly short post I wrote for Daily Blog Tips, back in 2013. I've marked the title, the introduction, the main body and the conclusion in different colours:

The Pomodoro Technique: How a Tomato Could Make You MUCH More Productive

By Ali Luke

If you read any productivity or time management blogs, you might have come across the Pomodoro technique before. It's a great way to focus your attention and get more done.

Here's how it works in its most basic form:

1. Decide what you're going to do (e.g. "draft my blog post").
2. Set a timer for 25 minutes.
3. Work until the time is up: this is one "pomodoro".
4. Take a 5 minute break, then start your next pomodoro
5. Every 4 "pomodori", take a longer break.

(There are plenty of online timers like [Tomato Timer](#) that are designed for this.)

Most people adjust the technique slightly to suit them: for instance, you might choose to take a longer break after two "pomodori" not every four, especially when you're starting out.

Why This Method Works

Have you ever sat down to work on a blog post for two hours ... only to find yourself tidying your desk, chatting on Twitter, getting distracted by interesting links, or generally wasting time?

Working for timed periods helps keep you on track. When a stray thought comes up – like "I need to send an email" or "I should check whether I had any replies on Twitter" – you can tell yourself that you'll do it once the timer goes off.

You might find this is an especially useful technique if you're trying to [separate writing from editing](#): you could write for one pomodoro and see how far you get.

Where the Name Comes From

If this is the first time you've come across the pomodoro technique, you might wonder why it's called that. Pomodoro is Italian for "tomato" and Francesco Cirillo, the inventor of the pomodoro technique, used a tomato-shaped kitchen timer.

There's a lot of information about the pomodoro technique out there, particularly on dealing with interruptions: if you try the technique out and find it makes you more productive, do a bit of research into ways to take it even further.

Your challenge: Try the pomodoro technique today – or next time you blog – and see how you get on. Drop a comment below to tell us how it went.

The Title (Green)

The title is crucial, because some readers will only see the title (e.g. in a feed reader, in their inbox, on Twitter) before deciding whether or not to read your post.

If I'd titled this post "The Pomodoro Technique", that would have been accurate but rather boring! Here, I've tried to make the benefits of the post clear while adding an element of intrigue with "How a Tomato Could Make You MUCH More Productive"

The Introduction (Orange)

This is a short post, so it has a short introduction – just one paragraph. This sets the scene for the post (it’s going to be about the Pomodoro technique, and the reader may already have heard of it). There’s an implicit promise here about the *benefits* of reading the post: the Pomodoro technique is “a great way to focus your attention and get more done”.

Many blog posts will include an image at the start, related to the post topic, which you might want to consider as part of the introduction.

The Main Body (Blue)

The main body of the post is the detailed section. It’s invariably the longest bit of the post (if your introduction is longer than your main body, something’s gone wrong)!

Here, the main body *briefly* explains the Pomodoro technique (which is pretty straightforward), before going on to explain why it works.

The information about where the name comes from could potentially have gone in the introduction: I put it in the main body to avoid bogging down the start of the post, though.

You can see that there are two subheadings within the main body, helping to break it up into sections and “signpost” what’s coming. This makes it easy for readers to skim read – e.g. perhaps they don’t care where the name comes from, so they’ll skip that section.

The Conclusion (Purple)

Since this is a short, straightforward post, the conclusion doesn’t sum up the post itself but instead encourages readers to find out more about the technique if they want to.

The “Your challenge” section is a call to action (*we’ll be talking about those later in this module*) that encourages the reader to DO something.

Examples of Classic Blog Posts

Blog posts on all sorts of subjects, and of very different lengths, can be divided into these four parts (title, introduction, main body, conclusion).

Here are some more examples to take a look at – we’re going to look at some excerpts from them during the rest of this module, but as you read through them, you might like to think about:

- Does the title interest you – enough that you’d want to take a look at the post itself?
- Where would you place lines to divide them into introduction, main body, and conclusion?
- Does the introduction make you want to read on – and if so, why?
- How is the main body structured?
- Is there a “call to action” at the end of the post – a suggestion that you *do* something, whether implicit or explicit?

Make Your Writing Anxiety Disappear By Thinking Small, Jane Anne Staw,
JaneFriedman.com

GDPR and the marketer’s dilemma, Seth Godin, Seth’s Blog

What You Can Learn From Writers You Hate, Erika Rasso, Craft Your Content

You might want to print out one or more of these posts so you can mark it up on paper, perhaps drawing coloured boxes around the introduction, main body and conclusion.

You’re also very welcome to discuss any or all of these in the Facebook group:

[facebook.com/groups/blogonspring2018](https://www.facebook.com/groups/blogonspring2018)

Examining Each Part of the Blog Post in Detail

In the rest of this module, we'll be taking a detailed look at the four key parts of each blog post: the title, the introduction, main body and conclusion, and how to get these right.

Creating a Great Title

Titles can be tricky, and you may want to give your post a “working title” before you decide on the exact title you’re going to use.

Your title needs to catch a reader’s interest and make them want to read on. That’s not always easy to do, but I find that looking at examples of other people’s titles (especially ones that captured *my* attention!) helps me figure out how to write better ones.

Let’s take a closer look at the titles of the posts we’re using as examples.

Example #1: Jane Anne Staw’s Post

Make Your Writing Anxiety Disappear By Thinking Small, Jane Anne Staw, JaneFriedman.com

The title of this post carries an implicit promise: *if you read this post, you won’t feel anxious about your writing any more*. There’s also an indication of *how* the post is going to help – by teaching the reader how to “think small”.

Compare this title with other possibilities that would also fit the topic of the post:

Make Your Writing Anxiety Disappear – not a terrible title, but it gives the reader little to go on, and that may make us feel sceptical about how the post is going to achieve this promise.

The Importance of Thinking Small – again, not a terrible title, but now there’s no clear benefit to reading the post.

Writers’ Block – a much too general (and too short!) title – it doesn’t tell us anything about the post

By looking at these not-quite-there-yet titles, it's clearer why Jane's title works: it tells us what the post is going to help us do and, crucially, it hints at how.

Example #2: Erika Rasso's Post

What You Can Learn From Writers You Hate, Erika Rasso, Craft Your Content

Erika's title sets up a sense of opposition – she's suggesting that you can learn from “writers you hate”, and this is an intriguing idea ... and possibly one we immediately have a reaction to. A post title “What You Can Learn From Writers You Love” might be just as valuable, but wouldn't seem at all surprising or controversial.

There's a promise implied here, too: we can reasonably assume that the post is going to show us what we can learn and how.

The word “hate” is a powerful one (Erika could have put “dislike”) and that creates an additional pull.

The title addresses the reader as “you” twice, making a personal connection, and possibly even issuing a bit of a challenge. If Erika had instead put, “**What Aspiring Writers Can Learn From the Authors They Hate**”, the title would be more distancing and less engaging.

Example #3: Seth Godin's Post

GDPR and the marketer's dilemma, Seth Godin, Seth's Blog

This is an interesting title, because it assumes that the reader is already familiar with GDPR and that they identify as a marketer. This is no bad thing, because Seth knows exactly what target audience he's aiming at. If you've never heard of GDPR or if the word “marketer” makes you think of sleazebags you don't want to associate with, this probably isn't the blog for you!

If it *is* the blog for you, then the title of this post is intriguing (mainly because of the word “dilemma”). The reader might be wondering what the dilemma is, and particularly what Seth has to say about it.

This isn't the sort of title I'd normally advise writing, but it suits Seth's audience and style – and sometimes that's what's most important.

Titles can be tricky to get right, so don't spend ages agonising over yours: come up with the best title you can manage for now, then carry on with the rest of your post. You may find that a different title (or a twist on your original one) comes to you as you write.

Crafting a Compelling Introduction

Your introduction is almost as important as your blog post's title. It needs to set the scene for your post, letting readers know what to expect – giving them not just an introduction to your post's subject matter, but also a flavour of its style (serious, light-hearted, ranty..?) and an indication of who it's aimed at (beginners, experts, hobbyists, professionals..?)

When you're crafting your introduction, try to avoid:

- **Giving lots of information about *why* you're writing this post.** Sometimes it makes sense to acknowledge a particular source of inspiration (e.g. if you read someone else's post and it sparked off an idea) ... but generally, it's best to get straight into things.
- **Talking about things unrelated to the post.** If you do need to update readers on, say, the birth of your new baby or the successful launch of your new book, either write a whole separate post (if you feel your news warrants it), or have a section at the start of your post that's separated from the rest by a horizontal line or other divider.
- **Going on for too long.** Once you've set the scene for your post and got your reader interested, get into the actual content – don't waffle!

It can be tough, though, to write a good introduction when you're "warming up" into writing a post. Some bloggers leave the introduction until last, or perhaps write a few rough bullet points to come back to – others draft the introduction first, but are prepared to do some thorough editing.

I often find that the very first paragraph of my introduction (or of the introduction I'm editing for someone else) can be cut completely. See if that applies for your writing too – would the post still work if the reader started with the second paragraph and never saw the first? Would it work *better*?

Good Ways to Begin Your Post

If you're struggling for an opening sentence or two, I've found that these usually make good ways to begin:

1. **Pose a question** (particularly one that has "yes" as the likely answer) – e.g. *"Do you struggle with procrastination?"* This gets the reader mentally responding to your post right from the start.
2. **Make a strong statement** – e.g. *"All writers procrastinate more than they realise."* Your reader may or may not agree; either way, they're likely to read on to see how you back this up!
3. **Tell the reader a short story (anecdote) about your life** – e.g. *"A year ago, I had to finally admit to my chronic procrastination problem when..."* If you're going for this approach, make your story (a) interesting and (b) short! You can also use it to "bookend" your post by coming back to it and resolving it during the conclusion.
4. **State the main premise of your post or the core of the topic** – e.g. *"You can procrastinate far less by making a few simple changes to your workspace."* This can work well for short posts, or for news-type posts where you're following the "inverted pyramid" structure (give the core of the story first, then progressively add details).

Of course, these aren't the only options ... but they can be very useful ones to fall back on if you're feeling stuck.

Here are the very first paragraphs from each of the posts we're looking at, with my thoughts on them:

Example #1: Jane Anne Staw's Post

From [**Make Your Writing Anxiety Disappear By Thinking Small**](#), Jane Anne Staw, JaneFriedman.com

In college, I struggled mightily with writer's block, although I didn't know it at the time. I thought I was just a lousy writer. All my professors told me so: "Too bad you're such a poor writer," one professor wrote on a term paper. "You have a fine mind."

Jane gets us straight into her post by sharing an anecdote about her struggles with writer's block. She keeps it short – this paragraph and the next – and then explains how it turned out that she wasn't a poor writer at all, she was an anxious writer who obsessively over-edited.

Example #2: Erika Rasso's Post

From [What You Can Learn From Writers You Hate](#), Erika Rasso, Craft Your Content

It's an absolute necessity that anyone who wishes to write must read, and read a lot.

This is a great example of a “strong statement”. Erika is going to tell us how important reading is – including reading things you DON'T like – so she starts off by being very clear about just how important reading is to writers: it's an “absolute necessity” for “anyone” who wants to write.

Example #3: Seth Godin's Post

From [GDPR and the marketer's dilemma](#), Seth Godin, Seth's Blog

On the twentieth anniversary of Permission Marketing, the EU has decided to write the basic principles of that [book](#) into law.

This is a “main premise” introduction: Seth states the most important thing first, but also does so by giving the gist of his argument – that GDPR is a way to force companies to engage in “permission marketing”, which is the title of his book from 20 years ago.

In a single neat sentence, he makes it sound like his book has influenced the EU lawmakers, and also makes it clear where he stands on GDPR. It's also obvious from this one sentence that Seth's blog is aimed at people who are familiar with his work and who have already heard of GDPR – essentially, internet marketers.

The purpose of your introduction is to draw the reader into your post, by setting the scene and “hooking” them with some point of interest. This “hook” doesn’t need to be excessive or heavily hyped (“*after you read this post, you’ll never procrastinate again!*”) – but there should be a clear reason for the reader to carry on.

Now that we’ve had a look at introductions and how they work, we’ll turn to the biggest part of your post: the main body.

Putting Together the Main Body of Your Post

The main body of your post is everything between the introduction and the conclusion. When you came up with the idea or title of your post, the main body was probably what you were thinking about: the actual *content* of the piece.

In an essay-style post, the main body isn’t split into completely separate sections (in the way that a list post might be). Each section should be placed to build on the previous one and to link to the next one. They might or might not have subheadings.

Common Mistakes Bloggers Make with the Main Body of Posts

Some easy ways to go wrong with your post’s main body are:

- **Writing without having any plan in mind.** You might *think* you know what you’re going to say, or you might be confident you can figure it out as you go along ... but unless you’re working on a very short post on a familiar topic, it’s easy to lose your way.
- **Going off on a tangent.** Depending on the type of blogging you do, an occasional digression from your main point might be appropriate (or even expected!) – for instance, if your blog is a series of light-hearted posts about your travels, you might not always stick to the point. Be careful that your post doesn’t end up as a meandering mess, though.
- **Ordering information badly.** There’s rarely a single “right” way to present different points or information in your post, but you definitely want to avoid confusing the reader at the start, only to backtrack and

explain things later on. You may find it's easiest to draft the post in whatever way seems to make sense, before going back to see whether any of the paragraphs might work better if they were rearranged.

Useful Tips to Get You Through the Main Body of Your Post

As you plan and write the main body of your post, it often helps to:

1. **Tie each point to the next.** You don't need to do this in an artificial way (avoid phrases like "in the next section, I will...") – but do make sure that your post avoids abrupt changes in topic, and that you move on logically from paragraph to paragraph.
2. **"Signpost" the reader, using subheadings or bold text.** Not all bloggers use these, but they can be very helpful for breaking your post into different sections (subheadings) and for highlighting key pieces of information (bold text).
3. **Link to other posts where appropriate.** Often, a link can be a great way to offer extra information for your readers. We'll be looking at this when we come to Module #6 in a few weeks' time.
4. **Consider using quotes from other people or other bloggers.** Someone else's words may help you to make a point succinctly, or they may offer a different perspective. They can also help back up your own argument. We'll be going into more detail about this in Module #6.

Here are some great main body techniques in action:

Example #1: Jane Anne Staw's Post

From [**Make Your Writing Anxiety Disappear By Thinking Small**](#), Jane Anne Staw, JaneFriedman.com

It wasn't until years later, a long time after I had overcome my block, that I understood that behind all that hand wringing and rewriting, a pretty fine writer waited in the wings to emerge. She simply needed to be given a chance.

Poetry is what gave me that chance. I began writing poetry and found that I was able to create entire poems, with verses and stanzas, metaphors and similes. At the time, I had no idea why I was able to do this, but I remember feeling such great relief. Maybe I could write after all.

These two paragraphs are tied neatly together, with “She simply needed to be given a chance” ending one paragraph and “Poetry is what gave me that chance”. The link between them is very clear, and one flows naturally into the next.

Example #2: Erika Rasso’s Post

From [What You Can Learn From Writers You Hate](#), Erika Rasso, Craft Your Content

Erika uses subheadings to split up this post – which is a wise move, as it’s a long post that could end up losing the reader partway otherwise. The subheadings are:

- **Disliked and Discarded** (*this section details Erika’s initial distaste for reading in general, which then evolved into her strong opinions about writers who she did NOT want anything to do with*)
- **Swallow Your Pride** (*this section deals with the issue of feeling that you’re “better than” the writers who you disliked – and explains that whether you like them or not, they can “teach us a little something about excellence”*)
- **The Greats and the Not-So-Greats** (*this section takes a look at Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* and Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight**)
- **Do it Differently** (*this section is a look at how you can learn from the things you disliked by avoiding their mistakes, and also by looking at the techniques that helped that writing succeed*)

Example #3: Seth Godin's Post

From [GDPR and the marketer's dilemma](#), Seth Godin, Seth's Blog

There are two ways to look at this.

1. Lawyers and yield-maximizers can find ways to use fine print and digital maneuvers to get the same sort of low-grade tolerance and low-impact marketing they've always gotten. Industrialise interactions! The marketing machine at their organization has an insatiable appetite for attention, for data and for clicks, and they will skirt the edges to get more than their fair share.
2. Realize that the [GDPR](#) is a net positive for people with something to say, something to sell or something to change. Because the noise will go down and trust will go up. Embrace this insight and you can avoid the hit and run low-yield spam that marketers have backed themselves into.

Seth takes a look at two possible sides of an argument here, explaining there are two ways to see the GDPR: the more negative (“use fine print and digital maneuvers”) to keep doing the same old thing ... or the more positive (“noise will go down and trust will go up”).

It's pretty obvious from the language used – and the way that the second is placed as a rebuttal of the first – which of these options Seth favours! He can then carry on with his post by looking in more detail at the positive side of things, having demonstrated why it's the best attitude to take.

Once you've written the main body of your post, you've got one crucial task left: to end it well – because the conclusion is what readers will remember, and because this is a golden opportunity to get them to *do* something.

Concluding Your Post – Effectively

The conclusion to your post might be a single sentence or it might be a longer summary – but what matters is that it exists!

Some bloggers will simply stop a post after the main body (particularly in list posts, but it can happen with essay-style posts too). Just adding an extra sentence can make all the difference.

When you end a post, it's normally a good idea to:

1. **Sum up what's been said.** You may not need to do this in a short post, but if you've written a really long post, it's helpful to briefly summarise things for the reader.
2. **Give the reader an action to take** – e.g. you could prompt them to leave a comment, to check out your book, or to make a change in their life based on the post they've just read.
3. **Keep it fairly short.** As with introductions, you don't want to end up rambling on at the end of the post ... or the reader will simply click away.

This is how the posts we've been looking at end:

Example #1: Jane Anne Staw's Post

From [Make Your Writing Anxiety Disappear By Thinking Small](#), Jane Anne Staw, JaneFriedman.com

I work with each writer as an individual, but at some point in our work together, and to varying degrees, I suggest they *think small*. To focus on the moment they are writing about—the current word, scene, or paragraph—and not the entire writing project. To have at the most one ideal reader in mind when they write. To concentrate on the process, not the product. To stay with the writing and not the publication of their project. And whenever my clients do this, many of their writing inhibitions disappear.

This final paragraph of Jane’s post is a continuation of the previous four paragraphs – a section of the post in which she talks about her work with fellow writers, encouraging them to think small.

I’m not 100% convinced with it as an conclusion, as I feel it stops a bit abruptly, without opening out to the reader and without directly encouraging the reader to take action – though there is a call to action in the “bio” line at the end of the post: “If you enjoyed this post, be sure to check out Jane Anne Staw’s [Small](#).”

If I’d written or edited Jane’s conclusion, I’d have suggested adding a question to the reader as the final paragraph: this could be something very simple, like, “How could you ‘think small’ in your own writing this week?”

Alternatively, the last paragraph could be tweaked a little to open it out to the reader by rephrasing it to use “you” rather than “they” with something like, “I’d encourage you, like them, to focus on the moment you’re writing about – the current word, scene, or paragraph – and not the entire writing project.” – and so on.

Example #2: Erika Rasso’s Post

From [What You Can Learn From Writers You Hate](#), Erika Rasso, Craft Your Content

So here’s my challenge to you.

Hate things. Despise them. Burn an effigy of a writer who has done you wrong.

But then sit down and analyze exactly what made you hate that thing.

Was it the writer’s tone, their style; was it the story itself?

What about the story made you hate it? Its predictability? The themes it presented?

Was there a trope utilized that you’re tired of seeing?

Did it perpetuate a societal norm that you'd like to see challenged instead?

Also think about what that hateful piece of writing did right, especially if it's achieved some form of success.

Besides what you don't like and don't want to do in your own writing, what are some techniques the writer used that contributed to the work's success? How can you utilize that to your advantage?

By all means hate things, but don't let the time you spent on them be in vain.

This is a longish conclusion, befitting a long post. It offers a clear “challenge” to the reader, and suggests questions they can ask themselves when analysing a particular piece of writing. It's a practical way to end, and a good “call to action” because it encourages and helps the reader to put into practice what they've just been reading.

Example #3: Seth Godin's Post

From [GDPR and the marketer's dilemma](#), Seth Godin, Seth's Blog

The EU is responding to consumers who feel ripped off. They're tired of having their data stripmined and their attention stolen. (Here's an episode of my [podcast](#) I did on this issue).

Marketers don't have to race to the bottom. It's better at the top.

This is a short conclusion to Seth's post – because it's a short post. He sums up his key point (that the EU law is a response to consumers feeling “ripped off”) and includes a link to his podcast – a call to action to encourage the reader to check out more of his material.

He also has a pithy ending line – “*Marketers don't have to race to the bottom. It's better at the top*” – which neatly rounds off his post and his argument that good marketers will see the new GDPR regulations as a positive thing.

Module #2: Recap

Here's a summary of what we've covered in this week's module:

- **The “essay-style” post could be seen as a “classic” blog post:** they have an introduction and conclusion, with one or more key points covered in between. The title should be specific and interesting.
- **The introduction should set the scene and intrigue the reader** – you might open with a question, a provocative statement, an anecdote, or a high-level summary of your main point.
- **The main body should explore your topic** – without wandering too far from it. Each section (whether it has a subheading or not) should be tied to the next section: they should be ordered in a logical way.
- **The conclusion should round off your post** – normally by summing up (even if that only takes a sentence). Often, it's appropriate to include a call to action, perhaps by encouraging readers to leave a comment, check out your new book, or put something into practice.

Module #2 Assignment and Check In

This week, your assignment is to write an essay-style post for your own blog.

It can be as short or as long as you like, but it should include all three elements (introduction, main body and conclusion). Once you've written your post, or once you've got as far as you can with it, come over to the Facebook group and “check in” for this week so that you can get your reward card stamped:

[facebook.com/groups/blogon.spring2018/permalink/222958685149651](https://www.facebook.com/groups/blogon.spring2018/permalink/222958685149651)

If possible, please do share the link to your post with us so we can check it out.

If you don't want to publish it yet, you're welcome to share a link to it in Google docs, or you can upload it as document or .pdf to the Facebook group.

If you prefer not to use Facebook, you can simply email me with “check in” in the subject line.

Don't forget, you need to check in by the end of Sunday 10th. It's fine to check in even if you haven't finished your post – just let us know where you got to.

Module #2: Recommended Further Reading

All of the further reading is optional, but if you want to find out more about something we've covered in the module, it's highly recommended! If you find other useful resources, you're very welcome to share them in our Facebook group.

Inverted Pyramid Style, Jasmine Roberts, PressBooks

This article gives a quick explanation of how the "inverted pyramid style" works for news stories, covering its advantages and limitations.

Anatomy of an Effective Blog Post, Michael Hyatt, MichaelHyatt.com

In this post, Michael details his "blog post template" that includes all the elements that he feels make for an effective blog post. He emphasises the importance of making the main body of the post scannable, using bullets and numbered lists.

Writing an Effective Blog Post, The Writing Centre, University of Wisconsin-Madison

There's plenty of practical advice in this piece: while it's aimed at students, almost everything said could apply to any type of blog. There are some good suggestions about using images and quotes (both of which we'll cover in more detail during Module #6).

What's Coming Up Next Week:

Module #3: Your Contact Page: Clear, Concise... and Crucial

Next week, from Monday 11th June, we'll be creating contact pages. We'll go through everything you need to know: what to call your page, where to place it within your blog's navigation, what to include, and how to structure it.

I'll give you step-by-step instructions on how to create a contact form using the WordPress plugin Contact Form 7 (other platforms / plugins work in a similar way, too).