



WRITE A COMPELLING BLOG

LEVEL 4 PROJECT



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INTRODUCTION



Blogging is an efficient, effective form of communication that can reach people around the globe. Creating content for a blog builds skills to help you become a stronger writer and communicator.

Publishing a blog also gives you the satisfaction of ownership over content, a place for you to share your interests, and the opportunity to gain the support of an online community.

In this project, you will learn the basic structure of developing and writing a compelling blog, how to properly engage your readership, and the importance of privacy and security online.

YOUR ASSIGNMENT

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to review or introduce the skills needed to write and maintain a blog.

Overview: Post a minimum of eight blog posts in one month. Your blog may be new or one you have already established. You must receive approval from the vice president education to blog on behalf of your club. Deliver a 2- to 3-minute speech at a club meeting about the impact of your blogging experience. You may choose to have your blog evaluated by members of the club. Submit your signed Project Completion Form on page 21 to the vice president education to receive credit for this project.

For all assignment details and requirements, review the Project Checklist on page 13.



Throughout this project you will see icons in the margins next to the text. These icons indicate additional resources available online.



Video: Sign in to Base Camp to watch a video that supports this project.



Interactive Activity: Sign in to Base Camp to complete an interactive activity.



Resource: Sign in to Base Camp to view this resource online.

ASSESS YOUR SKILLS

Evaluate your current skill level by rating each statement.



Select the appropriate number based on your skills today:

5
EXEMPLARY

4
EXCEL

3
ACCOMPLISHED

2
EMERGING

1
DEVELOPING

Pre-Project					Statement	Post-Project				
5	4	3	2	1	I am confident that I can write compelling, appropriate material.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I understand what type of information is appropriate to share online.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I understand how to use the tools necessary to start a blog.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I understand how to engage with blog readers online.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I recognize how this project applies to my life outside of Toastmasters.	5	4	3	2	1

COMPETENCIES

The following is a list of competencies that you will learn and practice in this project.

- Demonstrate an understanding of the basic writing structure for blog posts.
- Develop well-written material for posting on your personal blog.
- Identify and manage information appropriate to share online.
- Display an understanding of how to properly engage and communicate with readers online.



STARTING A BLOG

CHOOSING A TOPIC

The first step in creating a blog is to choose a topic that matters to you. Choosing a broad topic can help you begin to define your content. For instance, you may choose to create a blog that focuses primarily on public speaking. With this broad topic in mind, you can write about Toastmasters, books related to public speaking, and your personal experiences.

When identifying your topic, consider your passions. The more you care about your subject matter, the easier it will be for you to create varied content and maintain your enthusiasm over time. Your topic can be anything—a hobby, a skill, an opinion, or a collection.

Choosing a topic with fewer bloggers contributing to the blogosphere will help you gain a unique following, though it is more important that you choose based on your interests.

CREATING A TITLE

Topic

Once you have identified your primary topic, a strong title can act as a selling tool for your blog. For many bloggers, their name is their brand. It is their unique perspective on a single topic or multiple topics that draws people to their site.

Keywords

Consider how your audience will locate your blog among the vast content available on the web. If the primary topic of your blog is a specific issue or subject, selecting a title that is reflective of your topic may bring people to your site. Use keywords that mirror your main topic or themes.

Your Brand

For example, you may choose to use your name and your topic. A title such as Siobhan Willett on Public Speaking can draw web searches for Siobhan Willett and public speaking. A title such as Public Speaking for Young Professionals can draw searches for public speaking, young, professionals, and young professionals.

Research Use

It is a good idea to search your chosen title on the internet before you make a final decision. Your title may be brilliant, but if it is already in use by one or more blog sites, it is not a good choice.

Title Individual Posts

Making the most of the titles of your individual posts may also help to draw people to your blog. As with the overall title, make sure you are including enough information that connects to the topic when it is searched.

Consider Searchability

For example, if your blog post is a book review, list the name of the book and the author in the title of your post. When people search the author, title of the book, or reviews of the book, your site is more likely to appear near the top of an internet search.

OPENING AN ACCOUNT

There are many decisions to make before you begin posting to your blog. The first is selecting a blog publishing tool. A blog publishing tool is a website through which you write and publish your blog. There are many tools available that offer varying levels of service and variety of content. The sites range in expense from no cost to a substantial fee.

Due to the rapidly changing pace of technology, blogging sites are not listed here. Use the Blogging Basics resource on page 18 to help you research the tools available in your geographic area that best meet your needs.



CONSIDER OPTIONS

Be sure to check for user reviews of any tool you consider. You will need information about site functionality, user-friendliness, and general reputation. User-friendly sites are easy to navigate and intuitive. Locate blogs that are designed and run with the publishing tool you are considering to make sure you find them easy to use. Design elements such as font, images, and animation are specific to each site and can inspire you, but should not impact your decision.

As you become more skilled at running your blog, you will find that you can have a broad scope of control over its appearance and functionality. From changing images and fonts, to adjusting the size and functionality of site elements, most blogging sites allow access to the programming code that controls the design of your site. Your only limitation is your interest in learning how to make changes and your willingness to do so.

CHOOSE A TEMPLATE

When setting up your account, you may have the opportunity to select a template. A blog template provides you with a general design layout for your blog.

The templates available can range from simple frames for posting images, designs with large areas for displaying text, or complex designs with areas that can be used for multiple elements. Choose a template that best aligns with your intended content.

REFLECT YOUR CONTENT

A design blog might use a sleek, modern template with multiple areas for posting images and small areas for text. A blog about literature could include more space for text and a smaller area for links to other websites, such as the sites of the authors or publishers discussed in each post. Look for a visually interesting template that allows your content to be the center of attention.

RESEARCH PROVIDERS

Begin by searching the templates available on your blog publishing site. These templates are often free or low in cost. If you are unable to find a template that works for you and your intended content, you can extend your search beyond what is available from your selected blog publisher.

Before you purchase any template from a source other than your publisher, be sure it is compatible. You will need to research what is available in your geographic area and chosen language to make an informed decision.

PRIVACY AND SENSITIVITY

THE POWER OF THE INTERNET

The internet provides users with a distinct benefit that other forms of communication do not—a method for reaching a large number of people within seconds. This is ideal for anyone trying to make an impact, but be mindful of the possible consequences.

THE VIRAL POST

The success of a blog can be founded in a single post that is referenced by an extended group of people around the country or world. This is often referred to as a “viral” post. The term describes the speed at which information spreads. When the reaction to a post or comment is generally positive, this can launch a career, but if the content is ill-conceived or misinterpreted, it can be devastating to the blog and the blog owner.

CHECK YOUR RESPONSE

Though no blogger can anticipate a post or posts that will receive this type of response, it is worth taking a moment to review your comments or blog entries. Before you post, make sure you are comfortable enough with the content to support it and respond to feedback or criticism in a very public forum.

KNOW YOUR OBJECTIVE

Regardless of the topic of your blog, there is potential for many people to read your opinions. If the desired objective of your blog is to incite conversation, then you may choose to write about issues that affect many people on a personal level.

BE PREPARED FOR DISAGREEMENT

When readers converse about your blog, it is a sign that you are producing engaging content. No matter what your opinion, be prepared for readers who disagree. You can respond to readers' comments, rebut on-topic arguments, or simply thank the commenter for reading your blog.

IGNORE DISRUPTERS

Unfortunately, some people hide behind anonymity online, using comment sections of websites to unfairly attack others. Internet "trolls" are those who intend to disrupt a forum by evoking an emotional response from participants. The most effective way to handle an internet troll is by ignoring him.

Personal Data

Maintain a degree of sensitivity when blogging about your personal life. Once material reaches the web, it is archived and searchable to anyone with a computer. Never include full names, phone numbers, addresses, or specific site details, unless you are promoting a specific event or business.

Discretion

For example, instead of saying you go to a specific coffee shop every day at 11 a.m., write that you are having your daily coffee at a local café. You may blog about what you feel, what you're doing, or what you care about, but always keep privacy and safety in mind.

Consent

Avoid sharing identifying information about another person or business without consent. Err on the side of caution when dealing with the privacy of others. Be sure to secure permission before naming a person, business, or group in a blog post or posting any image.

CREATING COMPELLING CONTENT



The content of your blog is a reflection of your goals, interests, and personality. Your followers will visit your blog because they want to read or see your posts. The topics and content can change, but the tone and point of view will most often be consistent.

Your posts can be inspiring, instructive, entertaining, humorous, or informative.

Readers are more likely to stay engaged when your writing is clear and well-edited. Before you post, look at the appearance of your blog. Be sure it is visually appealing and easy to read. For a blog post that is primarily text, check the paragraph lengths. Most often, shorter paragraphs are best, especially for readers who access your blog from mobile devices.

TYPES OF POSTS

Each type of post has a specific goal and most bloggers use a variety depending on the topic.

Instructional

Instructional posts are written with the goal of teaching the reader how to complete a task or understand a concept.

Informative

The intent of an informative post is to share knowledge with the reader.

Lists

There are many blogging sites that use lists as a means of communicating. A list post can be informative, inspirational, or humorous. This type of post is flexible and can be useful for any blogger wanting to vary his content.

Interviews

An interview post can be an exciting and interesting departure from the regular content on your blog. Interviews can be posted as audio, video, or transcribed and posted as text.

Reviews

Many bloggers review cultural content. A review is an expression of your opinion on a topic or media. You may choose to review books, movies, magazine articles, music, or other blogs.

POSTING TIPS

Determine how you intend to maintain and post new content to your blog.

Set readers' expectations. Some bloggers post every day. Others post once a week. Determine the frequency and let your audience know how often they can expect an update.

Post regularly. Most successful bloggers set a schedule and adhere to it.

Keep your content original. If you choose to post any content created by another person, cite your sources.

Respond to your readers. People who leave comments on your blog appreciate acknowledgement.

Be succinct. Shorter posts will often receive a better response. To enhance more complex or lengthy content, build on ideas across numerous posts.

ENGAGE WITH YOUR READERS

Building a strong readership is the goal of most bloggers. To accomplish that goal, you need to gain new followers while maintaining your existing audience. Regardless of the size of your readership, the rules of success are the same: Compose interesting posts and engage with your followers.

Engaging with your readership is as simple as responding to positive or constructive comments. Take time to read comments and address them. Sometimes, a simple "thank you" will suffice. Other times, comments might indicate a desire to engage you in a confrontation. In these cases, use your best discretion.

PROMOTE YOUR BLOG

Becoming a part of the larger blogging community can help you network and build support for your blog. Use social media to promote your site by sharing your posts. Read other blogs and comment on their posts. Share your thoughts, feelings, and a link to your own blog in the comments section of blogs that appeal to you or draw a similar audience.

Chances are, if you have a favorite blog, others like it too. Identify the content choices made by the blogger that draw people to her site and look for actions or choices you can emulate. Seek out experts in your area or within your internet community. There is a wealth of information and resources available.

REVIEW AND APPLY

Before you complete the assignment, take a moment to read through the questions you see here. If you are not able to answer them comfortably, review the project.

- What are the most important steps to take to compose a well-written blog post?
- What steps will you take to ensure your privacy and the privacy of any person or organization you may mention on your blog?
- What are some strategies for engaging readers in your online community?
- What is the best or most effective way to handle feedback on a blog post, both positive and negative?

COMPLETE YOUR ASSIGNMENT

Now that you have read through the project, plan and prepare your speech or report.

Review: Return to page 3 to review your assignment.



Organize: Use the Project Checklist on page 13 to review the steps and add your own. This will help you organize and prepare your assignment.

Schedule: Work with the vice president education to schedule your speech.



Prepare: Prepare for your evaluation. Review the evaluation resources on pages 15–17 and share all resources with your evaluator before your speech. You may choose to share your evaluation resources online.

PROJECT CHECKLIST

Write a Compelling Blog

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to review or introduce the skills needed to write and maintain a blog.

Overview: Post a minimum of eight blog posts in one month. Your blog may be new or one you have already established. You must receive approval from the vice president education to blog on behalf of your club. Deliver a 2- to 3-minute speech at a club meeting about the impact of your blogging experience. You may choose to have your blog evaluated by members of the club. Submit your signed Project Completion Form on page 21 to the vice president education to receive credit for this project.

This project includes:

- Maintaining a blog and posting at least eight times in one month
- The Blog Evaluation Form
- The Project Completion Form
- A 2- to 3-minute speech

Below are tasks you will need to complete for this project. Please remember, your project is unique to you. You may alter the following list to incorporate any other tasks necessary for your project.

Start your own blog. Use the resources available to you online to find the information you need for your geographic area. (If you already have an established blog, you may use it for this assignment.)

Make eight posts on your blog over the course of one month.

Schedule your speech with the vice president education. If you need longer to complete your speech, you may give a 5- to 7-minute speech with the vice president education's approval.

Write your speech to share your experience setting up your blog and posting on the site.

Rehearse your speech.

Share the link to your blog site. You may choose to share with your entire club, your vice president education, or your evaluator.

You may choose to have your blog evaluated by your club members. Distribute the Blog Evaluation Form to members so they may give you feedback about your blog.

Following the delivery of your speech, submit your Project Completion Form to the vice president education to verify you completed the assignment.

After you have completed all components of the assignment, including your speech, return to page 4 to rate your skills in the post-project section.

Additional Notes

EVALUATION FORM

Write a Compelling Blog

Member Name _____ Date _____

Evaluator _____ Speech Length: 2 – 3 minutes

Speech Title _____

Purpose Statements

- The purpose of this project is for the member to review or introduce the skills needed to write and maintain a blog.
- The purpose of this speech is for the member to share some aspect of his or her experience maintaining a blog.

Notes for the Evaluator

The member completing this project has spent time writing blog posts and posting them to a new or established blog. The blog may have been personal or for a specific organization.

About this speech:

- The member will deliver a well-organized speech about some aspect of his or her experience writing, building, or posting to a blog.
- The speech may be humorous, informational, or any style the member chooses.
- The speech should not be a report on the content of the “Write a Compelling Blog” project.
- The member may also ask you and other club members to evaluate his or her blog. If the member wants feedback on his or her blog, complete the Blog Evaluation Form.

General Comments

You excelled at:

You may want to work on:

To challenge yourself:

EVALUATION FORM – Write a Compelling Blog

For the evaluator: In addition to your verbal evaluation, please complete this form.

5 EXEMPLARY	4 EXCELS	3 ACCOMPLISHED	2 EMERGING	1 DEVELOPING	
Clarity: Spoken language is clear and is easily understood					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Vocal Variety: Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Eye Contact: Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Gestures: Uses physical gestures effectively					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Audience Awareness: Demonstrates awareness of audience engagement and needs					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Comfort Level: Appears comfortable with the audience					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Interest: Engages audience with interesting, well-constructed content					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
Topic: Shares some aspect of experience creating, writing, or posting to his or her blog					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Write a Compelling Blog

This criteria lists the specific goals and expectations for the speech. Please review each level to help you complete the evaluation.

Clarity

- 5 – Is an exemplary public speaker who is always understood
- 4 – Excels at communicating using the spoken word
- 3 – Spoken language is clear and is easily understood
- 2 – Spoken language is somewhat unclear or challenging to understand
- 1 – Spoken language is unclear or not easily understood

Vocal Variety

- 5 – Uses the tools of tone, speed, and volume to perfection
- 4 – Excels at using tone, speed, and volume as tools
- 3 – Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools
- 2 – Use of tone, speed, and volume requires further practice
- 1 – Ineffective use of tone, speed, and volume

Eye Contact

- 5 – Uses eye contact to convey emotion and elicit response
- 4 – Uses eye contact to gauge audience reaction and response
- 3 – Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience
- 2 – Eye contact with audience needs improvement
- 1 – Makes little or no eye contact with audience

Gestures

- 5 – Fully integrates physical gestures with content to deliver an exemplary speech
- 4 – Uses physical gestures as a tool to enhance speech
- 3 – Uses physical gestures effectively
- 2 – Uses somewhat distracting or limited gestures
- 1 – Uses very distracting gestures or no gestures

Audience Awareness

- 5 – Engages audience completely and anticipates audience needs
- 4 – Is fully aware of audience engagement/needs and responds effectively

- 3 – Demonstrates awareness of audience engagement and needs
- 2 – Audience engagement or awareness of audience requires further practice
- 1 – Makes little or no attempt to engage audience or meet audience needs

Comfort Level

- 5 – Appears completely self-assured with the audience
- 4 – Appears fully at ease with the audience
- 3 – Appears comfortable with the audience
- 2 – Appears uncomfortable with the audience
- 1 – Appears highly uncomfortable with the audience

Interest

- 5 – Fully engages audience with exemplary, well-constructed content
- 4 – Engages audience with highly compelling, well-constructed content
- 3 – Engages audience with interesting, well-constructed content
- 2 – Content is interesting but not well-constructed or is well-constructed but not interesting
- 1 – Content is neither interesting nor well-constructed

Topic

- 5 – Delivers an exemplary speech about some aspect of experience creating, writing, or posting to his or her blog
- 4 – Delivers an excellent speech about some aspect of experience creating, writing, or posting to his or her blog
- 3 – Shares some aspect of experience creating, writing, or posting to his or her blog
- 2 – Mentions some aspect of experience creating, writing, or posting to his or her blog, but does not fully address
- 1 – Delivers a speech on a topic other than some aspect of experience creating, writing, or posting to his or her blog

Choosing a Publishing Website

If you need further information on the blog publishing sites available in your region, begin by searching the following keywords on the internet:

- Free blog websites
- Free blog publishing websites
- Free blog hosting websites
- Creating a blog

Before you choose a blog publishing website, visit blogs to determine which you like best and why. You may find you like the layout and style of one blog over others. Search for and analyze the blogs of people you admire, blogs about topics that interest you, or blogs that have won awards.

As you visit blogs, try to answer the following questions to make an informed decision:

- Which blogs do you like best and why?
- Determine the publishing sites of the blogs you admire. Do you tend to prefer one publishing site more than others?
- Take note of the blog templates, or the way content is organized on the blog. What do you like about the design and layout? Does it fit the topic of your blog?

Creating Your Blog

After you choose a publishing site, you are ready to create your blog. Most publishing sites offer tutorials or instructions on how to create and design a blog. If this information is not readily available to you, search the following keywords on the internet:

- Creating a blog with [name of publishing site]
- Designing a blog on [name of publishing site]
- Blog templates for [name of publishing site]
- How to post to [name of publishing site]

BLOG EVALUATION FORM

Member Name _____

Blog Title _____

Please review the member's blog and evaluate it based on the criteria listed below. Take a moment to include examples wherever possible.

Using the scale provided below, please circle the number that best reflects your rating of the member's blog.

5 STRONGLY AGREE	4 AGREE	3 NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	2 DISAGREE	1 STRONGLY DISAGREE
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Topic: The topic of the blog is clear.	Comment:
5 4 3 2 1	

Design: The design and layout aligns well with the content of the blog.	Comment:
5 4 3 2 1	

Well Written: Posts are well-composed and contain few grammatical errors.	Comment:
5 4 3 2 1	

Varied Posts: Member varies the types of post to fit the content of the article. (E.g. informational, list, interview, review, etc.)	Comment:
5 4 3 2 1	

Post Frequency: The time gaps between posts are generally consistent.	Comment:
5 4 3 2 1	

Engagement: The member engages with readers by responding to or acknowledging their comments.	Comment:
5 4 3 2 1	

What do you like best about this blog?

How would you recommend the member improves the blog?

PROJECT COMPLETION FORM

I completed all components of my "Write a Compelling Blog" project. This includes creating a new blog or maintaining a current blog, as well as posting a minimum of eight times in one month.

Member Name _____

Member Signature _____ Date _____



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