

Blogging and Blooks

An 800 word article

by

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Do you have a blog yet? There are currently more than 60 million blogs in existence, and switched-on writers are using them as a tool to get published. So what exactly is a blog, who is blogging and how do you do it?

A blog – or web-log – can be anything from a simple online diary to a sophisticated website. Ordinary (and not so ordinary) people from all over the world are using blogs to share their thoughts and experiences with others.

Quality blogs – updated regularly and with interesting content – have a wide and loyal following. For a writer, this offers an unparalleled forum for showcasing your work.

Writing every day, on any subject, is good discipline. Writers of non-fiction can connect with other bloggers in their field, commenting on each other's blogs and sharing ideas. If you are planning a non-fiction book or series of articles, blogging gives you the opportunity to edit and update your work as you go, using the research and information provided by your readers – who will be only too happy to tell you if you've got it wrong.

For fiction writers, a blog is an ideal way to gain devoted fans and essential feedback. Many up-and-coming writers are serialising their work on blogs, going on to publish in book form once they have readers hooked and eager for more.

In 2005, Tom Evslin did just this when he published his novel *hackoff.com*. A thriller set in the dot.com world, the story was posted on the blog in episodes and gained an enthusiastic following. When the novel was released in book form, Tom already had thousands of advance orders.

This is not as new as you might think: In the 19th century, Charles Dickens often chose to serialise his stories, publishing each instalment in a magazine and then putting it back together to sell as a book.

For a work in progress, this gives the writer the opportunity to tailor their writing to fit what the reader wants. The benefit of the blog over a traditional website is its ability to allow comments and feedback; a totally interactive approach. You can't get that kind of 'direct from the horse's mouth' critique anywhere else.

How can a blog help you to get published? Always on the lookout for new talent, publishers are increasingly looking to the blogosphere in their search, and this has seen the advent of a new phenomenon – the **blook**. A blook can be either an online book (or e-book) published in the form of a blog, or a printed book made up of content which started life as a blog.

Last year, the blog of an anonymous Iraqi woman was published in book form – *Baghdad Burning* – and nominated for the Samuel Johnson prize for non-fiction. Many online diaries are finding their way into print, and the content is varied; travelogues, cookery books, and journalistic commentary are just a few of the topics covered by blooks.

There is even a Blooker Prize, held for the first time in 2006 by the print-on-demand publisher Lulu.com. With a £10,000 first prize, last year's winner – *Julie and Julia: 365 days, 524 recipes, 1 Tiny Apartment Kitchen* by Julie Powell – has sold over 100,000 copies. Julie's blog catalogued her experiences as she tried to cook all

the recipes in Julia Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. There are categories for fiction and non-fiction, and all the blooks are available on Amazon, as well as Lulu.com.

If you're planning on becoming the next Booker winner, just how do you go about setting up your own blog? It's easier than you might think – remembering to post something on it every day will be a lot harder.

There are lots of free blog providers out there; blogger.com is straightforward and easy to use. Visit the website and follow the simple instructions to be up and running in minutes. Now all you have to do is write some content, post it on your blog, and you'll be a fully-fledged member of the blogosphere.

What should you write about? Anything that excites you or fires you up – you want people to read it, and to come back for more. One way to make your blog more interesting is to provide links to other blogs and websites that you, and your readers, will find useful.

Maybe you want to improve your style and refine your technique. Try posting a short story or opinion piece and invite readers to comment on it. Tip: make your content controversial or provocative and give it a noticeable heading to encourage more visitors to your blog. And don't forget; it's all good practice. Who knows, your blog might just be a blook in the making.

Useful websites:

www.blogger.com Free blog hosting service.

www.lulu.com Print-on-demand publisher and host of the Booker Prize.

www.blogbasedbooks.com Online bookstore for bloggers and blog readers.