How-To Guide for Blog Writers and Editors
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This guide is used by the San José State University Writing Center; though intended for our SJSU tutors specifically, this guide serves a practical document sample that could be created in-house for those creating a writing center blog (or streamlining an existing blog).

As the blog editors we surveyed told us, it is helpful to create a blog guide so peer tutors have clear expectations for content and support for their creative expression as they begin on the editorial staff. Blog guides also help maintain the strong continuity of posts from year to year and offer a larger plan for the center as they think ahead on ways to expand their blog offerings.

While implementing this guide, Judnick also considered the three most important characteristics for writing center blogs as identified in this study: strong content, creative design, and integration (in this case, through SJSU's ongoing blog series). While we could not entirely move away from the use of photos, memes, and gifs towards a more sophisticated multimodality, the guide reminds tutors that other technology is available. Note that this blog guide reiterates the suggestions offered by our respondents to rely on Wordpress and short posts (around 800 words).

Following the research of Hewerdine (2018), this guide also asks the tutor bloggers to consider audience and who they want to read their posts. Who is their "realized public audience" is recognized by studying the current popular posts to see what their readers enjoy most.

While tech support is not offered explicitly in this guide, it is clear that the writers can rely on a few key staffers (e.g., a faculty/staff editor and or a student associate editor) to curate the posts for them as several of the interviews with the best writing center bloggers suggested.

Welcome to the Blog Team!

The Overview:

Working on the blog team involves collaboration with our Assistant Editor ("AE") and Editor (the Coordinator of Digital Initiatives).

Blog Post Requirements:

- Word Count: around 800 words (<u>absolute</u> <u>maximum</u>: 1,000).
- Include gifs or other fun visuals with the posts
- Stick to the deadline (we post three days a week so our editing turnaround is quick!)
- Be creative! We have a podcast mic, a camera, and other tools for you to use if you love tech!

Types of Posts:

Student writers have three options:

- A standalone post (ex. "How to Use Apostrophes Correctly in Holiday Greetings")
- A short standalone series (ex. "What is a Peer-Reviewed Source? A Three-Part Series")
- A post that fits one of ongoing feature series (see the list below)

Ongoing Series:

Look at the recent offerings on "The Write Attitude" https://sjsuwritingcenter.wordpress.com/ by searching the categories on the right menu.

While some of these series described below are quite well-established, we are also open to new ideas or series:

- **Meme of the Week**: A collection of humorous materials about writing from around the internet
- **Quick Tip**: approximately 250 words on a short topic that can help writers (for example: three ways to start a paper)
- **Talk me through it**: tutors offer their insights to how they'd self-edit various types of projects
- **Write that Genre**: these would be specific tips about writing different styles of assignments.

- **Did You Know That?**: trivia or other tips / tricks that helps writers look at their work differently
- **Better Know a Department**: tutors interview their professors to learn more about the writing expectations for their department/field (We have pre-set questions you can use!)
- **"The Fix-it Police: Tutors Clean up the Internet"**: Find a typo or grammar error in an online article, meme, or post? Explain and fix the error in a short post!

At each Writing Center meeting you'll also have a chance to participate in **Ask the Specialists** posts -- we post tutor answers to a question/prompt (for example: What happens when you face a difficult writing project? How do you survive?).

Submission Process:

1. Send all drafts in **Google Docs** to the faculty editor. Include direct links to the gifs / images you use.
2. The editor will comment directly on the form and email you a new deadline.

3. Once the editor has approved the post to run, you'll be working with the Assistant Editor. The A.E. will format the post and can give you a timeline for when the post will run.

Scheduling your post:
We post on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.
Typically, the schedule follows a pattern so you can offer some suggestions for which day of the week you imagine best matches your post(s):

Mondays: Interview series (Better Know a Department/Ask the Specialists) or Writing Center announcements
Wednesdays: Academic ongoing series (Quick Tip, Talk Me Through It, Write that Genre, etc) or standalone posts
Fridays: Informal series (Meme of the Week / Fix-It Police) or other humorous pieces

Writing an Effective Blog Post: Quick Tips

Step One: Checking out our popular topics...

Once you ask the faculty editor for the most recent list of the top 25 posts from "The Write Attitude," you'll notice a few themes emerging. Our readers particularly like information on:
- timed writing
- procrastination
- and editing/grammar.

In other words, the more **practical/single concept** posts are gaining attention. We want to maintain our readership, so let's give our audience what interests them!

Take the post "Seize the They" post as a good example - it's focused on the news that the American Dialect Society named the singular "they" as the 2015 word of the year. The post then offers examples of how to use the singular "they" in a sentence. Keep in mind that this post is a bit longer than a typical post that aims for 800 words -- or shorter!

After all, research has shown that most people skim what they read online... if they finish at all.

Does that give you some ideas? (If not, you can always write a new entry for a popular series…)

Step 1.5: The New Ideas

So, you decided to do something original! But, now you're stuck.

Great - how do you know what topics to propose? Here are some tips:

→ Start by listening to what comes up naturally in conversations about writing or reading. For example, did three professors mention in your classes this week that they wish more students would try [x] in their writing? That would make a great post!
→ Did you have a revelation as you were working on your own project? Share what you learned!
→ Have you always wanted to know more about how a writer does [x]? Show us some research!
→ Do you love spending your free time writing [y] - tell us about it!

As I come up with our weekly memes and last semester's quick tips, for example, I **keep a list of topics** on my Google Drive. When I read an insightful comment from a student in a workshop about how they wished they knew more about [y], I add it to the list. When I overheard some students stressing in a coffee shop about finals, I figured I'd write about the memes they were showing each other to laugh away their worries.

I also read some of the **other writing center blogs** for inspiration. Just as you do research for your papers, so, too, can you see what ideas are out there already on writing blogs.

Step Two: Writing that successful blog post

According to the book *Blogging for Creatives: How designers, artists, crafters and writers can blog to make contacts, win business and build success* by Robin Houghton (2012), the most important question bloggers should ask themselves as they begin writing is:

"Do I really care about this [topic]?"

She notes, "Great blog posts inspire others not just because they are **entertaining** or **informative**, but because the blogger is sharing something he or she **cares about** in their **unique style**" (83). [emphasis mine]

Look at Houghton's key words:	**Thus:** good posts incorporate the following:
❖ Entertaining ❖ Informative ❖ Cares about ❖ Unique style	❖ A compelling topic and headline ❖ Active, personable writing that gives a sense of "voice" ❖ Images, video, audio that draw the reader to consider the text ➢ You may also want to consider links to help the reader feel like you're engaged with a larger community discussing this topic.

In other words, if you wouldn't read your own post if you saw it on the internet, why would you write it? **Think of your audience**: the vast majority of our readers are students or educators (and we're hoping that these academics have a sense of humor!)

Also: do you have to write on a topic similar to what is already found on our blog? No! Feel free to come up with **new ideas.**

Step Three: Choosing a Format

You've got some great ideas and a strong voice. Now, how do you present this information to your advantage? You want to consider a format different than most academic writing. Here are some popular examples:

1. **The List -** This form is helpful if you want to give advice -- "Five things to not worry about in a timed write"
2. **"How To" -** Remember, even in this format when you're sharing your expertise, it might be useful to tell a story about how might have struggled with this concept / task / etc. at first.
3. **Interview / Profile -** Could you get creative and pretend to interview a writing topic for ideas on what would be best for this writing style?
4. **Review -** Maybe you want to comment on the best guides available on your discipline-specific topic. Maybe you want to review the best writing advice you've ever received about writing. In other words, the quick tips are conducive to trying all sorts of new formats!

Additionally, think about ways you can break down your content for longer posts:
- Can you use subheadings?
- Use block quotations for key points?
- Create bullet points to review?
- Include an illustration that reflects the point you're trying to make in a visual way? Etc. etc. etc.

Step Four: Selecting Appropriate Media

This step is an enjoyable one - after all, you're getting paid to look for memes! There's not much to suggest here other than to follow common sense:

1. Pick images that are easy to read if they have text. (They should also be grammatically correct!)
2. Select images that directly relate to the topic you're discussing and place them throughout your post in an appropriate location. Remember: you're writing for the web so

we have to think more about the aesthetics of each page. Break up those large blocks of text!

3. Label each of your images with the original website (unless the image itself includes the creator's name / page)
4. Choose images that would interest your audience. Should you pick standard clip art or a funny meme? Nine times out of ten, you should choose the meme (unless, of course, you are talking about the art of boring writing and then you choose the clip art).

A Final Note:
Don't forget to have **fun** with your post!

This material will be read for years and years to come so make it something you would love to see promoted -- or help promote yourself -- on social media.