Blogging 201 -
A Voices of Youth Guide to Advanced Blogging

VOICES
OF YOUTH
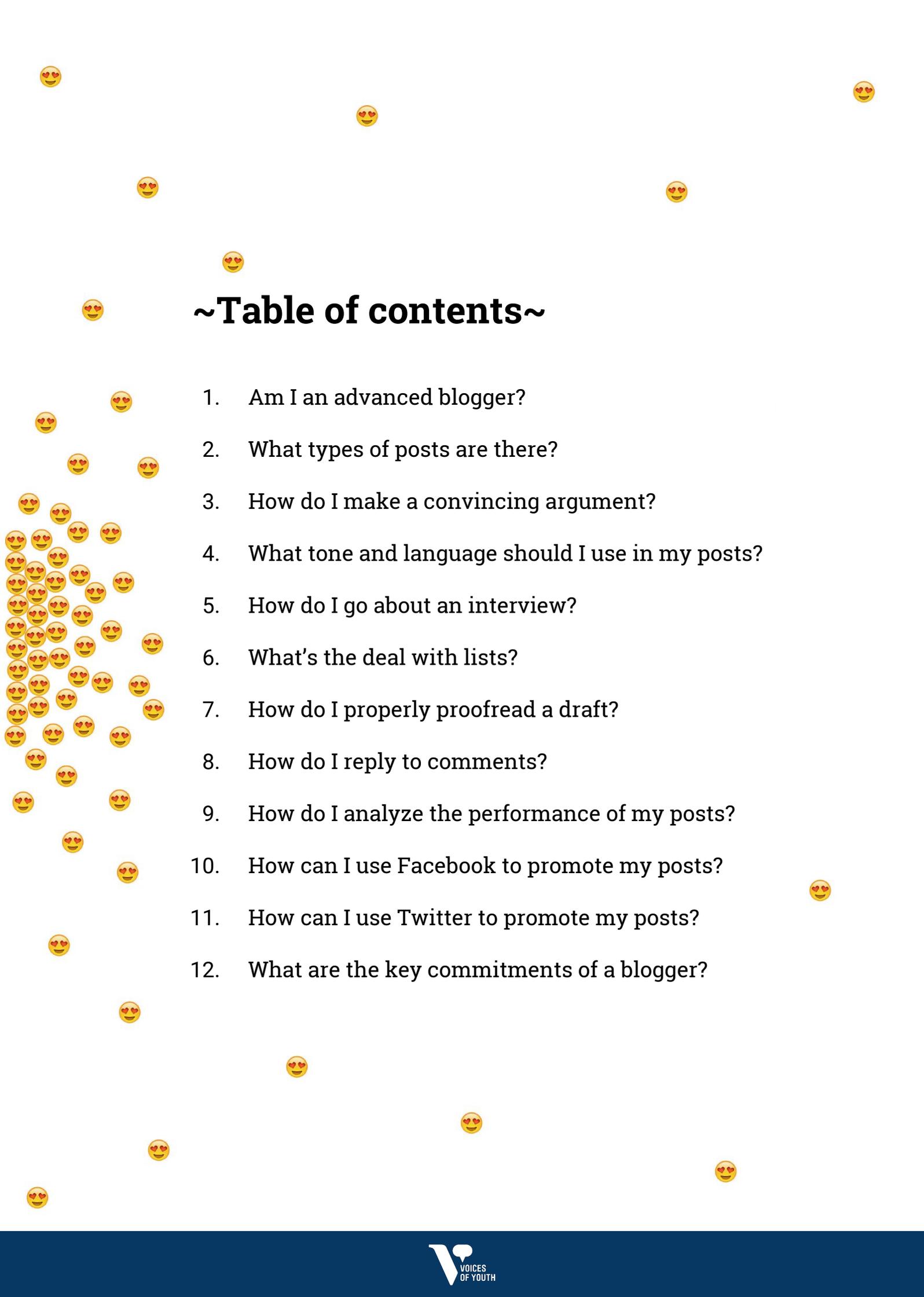
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1 Am I an advanced blogger?

Are you an advanced blogger? If you don't know how to answer this question, don't worry! Try to reflect on the following points to figure it out:

- Have you acquired basics blogging skills through **Blogging 101 - A Voices of Youth Beginners Guide to Blogging**?

- Have you already written a few blog posts?

- Has blogging become a passion of yours and now you would like to further develop your skills, taking your blogging game to the next level?

If your answer to these questions is yes, yes and YES then you're an advanced blogger - this means you're at the right place!

It's fantastic that you're passionate about blogging - so are we! Blogging is a powerful tool to express your thoughts and make your voice heard. Properly shared and promoted, a blog post can potentially reach hundreds, even thousands of people and touch their hearts and minds. As positive change makers, this is exactly what we want - to transfer our ideas and ignite a spark.

This guide will help you further channel your passion for blogging and show you some concrete tips and tricks on how to strengthen the impact of your posts.
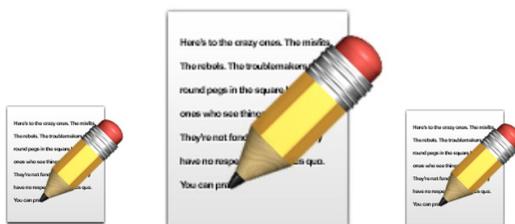
2 **What types of posts are there?**

There are various types of blog posts. Which type to pick depends on the message you want to convey and the impact you want to create. When writing a blog post consider the following four types of posts.

Informational

Informational pieces strive to inform the reader about a certain topic. It's mostly about being objective and less about the author's personal opinion. Informational pieces highlight facts, which should always be backed by sources - the best way to indicate sources is via hyperlinks. The key is to explain a given topic in an understandable but engaging way, striking a balance between not being too descriptive or too vague. Of course, the author is allowed to state her/his own opinion on the topic at the end - but make sure to keep the main focus on the facts and try to be as objective as possible. For some inspiration, check out this blog post.

Call to action

A call to action aims to urge the reader to take action on a certain topic. It highlights facts (backed by sources), but compared to informational pieces, a call to action is more subjective. It only highlights selected facts, which support an argument that one tries to make. Usually, the main body of text features selected facts, while in the conclusion, the author voices her/his personal opinion on the facts, making an argument. Finally, the author asks for concrete action to be taken to change or challenge the status quo. For some inspiration, check out this blog post.

Opinion

An opinion piece aims to convey an author's personal view on a topic and shake the reader up. It touches on facts (backed by sources), but the main part of the piece is about the author's viewpoint - it's about expressing one's personal opinion on these facts and making an argument. Compared to the call to action, the focus of an opinion piece is mostly on pointing out *how* and *why* one feels strongly about a given topic, rather than suggesting concrete ways forward. Even though it's encouraged to express emotions, make sure to always stay respectful! For some inspiration, check out this blog post.

First-person narrative

A first-person narrative piece aims to convey a message by telling a story from the viewpoint of the author. The story can be true, fictional or a mix. Facts don't play an important role in a first-person narrative piece - rather, the focus is on conveying a message through the art of storytelling. Storytelling is a powerful tool for triggering emotions with the reader. Once the author manages to touch the reader's heart, the reader's mind opens to receive a message. If executed properly, a story can be at least as powerful as any of the three types mentioned above, as it's less preachy and highly engaging. For some inspiration, check out this blog post.

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To me words are magic. Words have the power to teach someone with a broken heart to smile again. They can move nations and change destinies.

- Bhavana, 24, India

3 How do I make a convincing argument?

In some blog posts you'll try to convince the reader of something, meaning you want to make an argument. Looking at the types of posts from the previous section, this will mostly be the case with opinion pieces and calls to action. Consider the following few tips that will help you be as convincing as possible.

1. Show your true colors
Readers appreciate honesty. Try to be as open and honest as possible about your views. In the title or the beginning of the post, make clear what your views are and what the post will be about. Even if you try to convince people who have opposing views, there is no value in tricking them into reading your piece. If they don't want to read your piece, they won't. Deceiving them will only alienate them more.

2. Get everyone on the same page
The backbone of any argument are facts. If you want to convince readers of your argument, you'll have to provide them with airtight evidence. Support your viewpoint with existing information, examples, statistics and quotes. Always make sure that you can back your facts with a source and don't forget to indicate the source by hyperlinking a keyword or part of a sentence.

3. Be confident, stay humble
It's good to have an opinion and it's fantastic if you want to share it. As a blogger, you're encouraged to maintain an opinion and to defend it, even if a majority of people don't agree with you. However, even if it's an emotional topic, always stay respectful - there is no value in offending opponents. Also, it's OK not to know everything. In fact, it's even encouraged to admit when you're not familiar with a certain component of the debate - it only makes you more credible as a writer.

4. Acknowledge controversy
Of course, in your post you will want to focus on your personal viewpoint. However, avoid to entirely excluding opposing views from your post. Acknowledging opposing views makes you more credible as a blogger. Even more so, you can use opposing views to your own advantage: after mentioning an opposing argument, you can try to dismantle it - this will support your argument and strengthen your case.

4 What tone and language should I use in my posts?

A blog post is neither a news article nor an academic paper. Therefore, it can do very well without long and overly complicated lines. Long sentences are not engaging and have a tendency to put readers off. Short, simple and succinct sentences are much more appropriate for a blog post.

In fact, short and succinct lines can help making the text not only clearer, but also more powerful. If you are writing in a language that is not your mother tongue we encourage you to stick to simple language - it's more professional to publish a post with simple and correct phrases than complex and incorrect phrases. Native speakers are equally encouraged to simplify their language, as it usually increases the engagement factor of posts and helps you reach a broader audience.

However, "simple language" doesn't equate to "no structure". When writing posts, make sure to collect your thoughts and structure them well - preparing an outline for your posts before you start writing usually helps.

In general, try to make your posts understandable to anyone. As bloggers, sometimes things make absolute sense in our heads, but if we don't choose the right language, clarify details and express ourselves properly, they don't become clear to readers. Furthermore, try to avoid jargon or complex academic terms and if you do have to use them, add an explanation in brackets or via hyperlinks. Remember, the goal of any blog post is to engage your audience and achieve impact, not to impress!
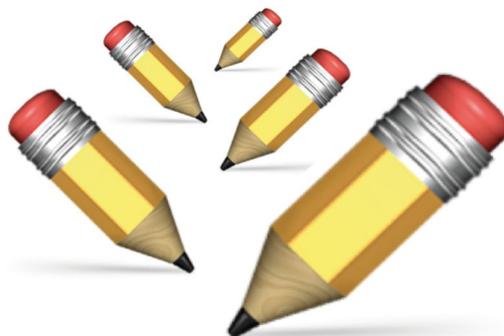
5 How do I go about an interview?

Interviews can serve as powerful blog posts, especially when the interviewee has something interesting to say. For some great interview posts, check out the Voices of Youth Inspire! Profiles. Many bloggers struggle with preparing, conducting and writing proper interview posts. When approaching such a post, consider the following steps.

Step 1: Identify the interviewee
Suitable interviewees are usually people in your community or country who inspire you. They can be somebody you know personally or somebody you only know through the media. A good interview post profiles a person who is doing or has achieved something exceptional, be it in the field of music, human rights, food, business, social media, cinema, politics, or whatever else comes to mind.

Step 2: Establish contact
If you know the interviewees personally, just approach them and ask if you could interview them. If you don't know the desired interviewees, contact them either via email or social media - this is the best way to establish first contact. Present yourself and explain for what purpose you would like to conduct the interview.

Step 3: Schedule the interview
Agree on a desired place and time for the interview. For safety reasons, arrange to meet in a public place and always tell someone where you're going and who you're meeting. If a physical interview isn't feasible, try to arrange a video chat or phone interview - they're usually just as good as physical interviews. If neither is possible, arrange an email interview - this means you will send the interviewee questions and she/he will send you answers.

Step 4: Prepare your questions

Think carefully about your questions! It's important that you frame your questions in a way that will help you extract the desired information from the interviewee. Do research about the person before the interview - this will help you design better questions. Try not to overburden the interviewee with too many questions - usually, an interview should not take longer than 15-20 minutes. Some interviewees will require you to share your questions with them in advance of the interview - that's perfectly fine and very common.

Step 5: Conduct the interview

In case you conduct the interview in person or via video chat/phone, make sure that you have the necessary equipment ready to record the interview and that it works properly. Always ask interviewees for their permission to record them and do a test recording at the beginning to make sure the quality is good. Always remain polite during the interview. In case that the interviewee doesn't directly answer a question, you can follow up once to clarify what you're asking them but don't push interviewees to answer questions they don't want to answer - you risk that they will abort the interview.

Step 6: Write your post

You're not supposed to publish the fully transcribed interview that you conducted - transcribed interviews are usually too lengthy and don't make very engaging blog posts. After you're done transcribing, try to select the most crucial information from the interview and craft an interesting and engaging post. Your final post should consist of selected questions and the corresponding answers. Often you'll have to shorten/paraphrase the answers - without changing their meaning - to make your post digestible and not too long.

Step 7: Get feedback before you publish

Before publishing the post, it's good practice to send the final post to the interviewee so that she/he can proofread it. If you publish your post without the consent of the interviewee, you run into the risk of the interviewee disputing the validity of the post, which might negatively affect your credibility as a blogger.

6 What's the deal with lists?

You might have seen that blog posts in the form of lists have taken the internet by storm - "4 Types of People Who Need to Shut Up Now" or "The 10 Most Inspiring Moments of the SDG Summit" are just two examples. These posts are called listicles - a listicle uses a list as its thematic structure. The author chooses a theme and lists a number of points that help to support her/his case. Usually, each of these points has a header and features a short and succinct paragraph.

There are plenty of reasons why listicles are very popular nowadays. First, having to make sense out of a sea of competing information on the Internet, our brains look for ways to quickly organize information - listicles (and mostly their titles) help us to label quickly what we're about to read. Second, as it spatially arranges the information, a listicle is visually enticing for readers, allowing our brains to better digest the content. Finally, as more and more articles are consumed "on the go" via mobile devices, a listicle promises the reader a quick and light read.

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Thus, listicles can be an engaging way to package almost any kind of information - be it about politics, pop culture, history, food, or whatever else comes to mind. For some inspiration visit Buzzfeed, a website that became famous through its listicles.

But be aware that not every topic is listicle material! Complex topics might be trivialized by a listicle. This means that if your aim is to develop a solid argument around a topic, we advise you to go with a regularly structured blog post.

> " Aspiring young writer: why don't you start making your dreams come true? Remember, all big writers began where we begin today.

— Jose Francisco, 14, Colombia

7 How do I properly proofread a draft?

Depending on the blogging platform you're using, it can be tedious to write an entire post in the text editing box of the platform. Some platforms don't allow you to save drafts of your post and some platforms are visually impractical when it comes to proofreading a post. This is why we recommended that you always draft your posts in a word processor where you can easily edit and save the text (such as MS Word, Pages, Google Docs etc).

Once you finished your draft it's absolutely crucial that you proofread it. Bloggers are often the authors and, at the same time, proofreaders of their texts. This is why it's important to proofread a draft as objectively as possible. Having spent a lot of time drafting a text, bloggers usually run the risk of losing the ability to identify inconsistencies in their drafts or to catch typos.

One way to restore objectivity (at least partially) is to put some time between writing and proofreading a draft. Thus, you're encouraged to wait at least 24 hours until you proofread a draft. Another way is to ask a friend, family member or teacher to proofread the draft. If the language you're writing in isn't your first language, you're encouraged to share your posts with somebody who has an advanced understanding of the language.

Once you proofread and finalized your draft, you can copy-paste the final text from the word processor document into the text editing box of the blogging platform and publish the post.

8 How do I reply to comments?
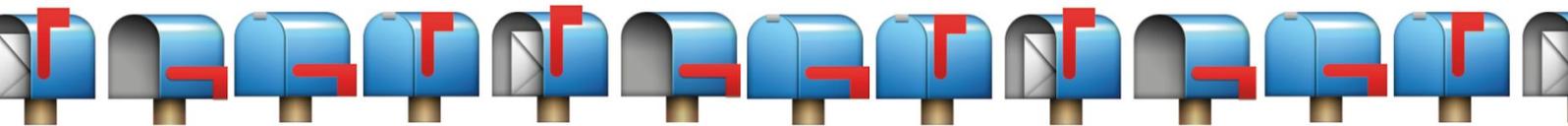
It's good practice to regularly check your published blog posts for new comments. When readers comment on a post it's usually a sign of success - it means you were able to write an engaging piece that made the reader not only think, but also react. Take the time to read new comments, reply to them and thank readers for their engagement. Interacting with readers in the comment section shows that you appreciate and value them - it's an important component of building a loyal core readership.

Not every comment will be an appreciative comment though. Some comments will be critical, others may even be offensive. If a comment expresses valid criticism of your text or argument, it's crucial that you reply to it in a calm and factual manner - try to use facts to support your point. There is nothing wrong about a debate emerging below your post - it shows that your post is interesting and that you and your readers can engage in respectful dialogue.

If a comment expresses criticism at your persona (instead of your text) or is offensive in any way, you can dismiss it as invalid criticism. In this case it's best not to reply to the comment. Other readers will also notice that the comment is invalid and will understand why you didn't reply. Comments that are racist, xenophobic or sexist don't have to be tolerated - you can go ahead and report or delete them.

9 How do I analyze the performance of my posts?

If you wrote a blog post you may want to know how many people have read it. You can do this by taking a look at the analytics. The analytics will vary depending on what kind of platform you're publishing your posts on.

Some platforms will have an automatic counter which shows how many times a post has been read. Many, however, will only show how many times your post has been liked on the platform or shared on social media. This is not the same as how many people have read it, but it will give you a basic idea of whether or not your post is popular.

If you have your own blog on WordPress you will automatically have access to some basic analytics, such as how many people have visited your blog, which posts are most popular, and the countries where your readers come from. On Blogger you can see page views, traffic sources, and the countries of your readers. On Tumblr you can see the number of your followers and notes. Basic analytics might help you decide what content works well with your readers and what you should write about more often.

If you've created your own blogging platform and you're into more technical stuff you can set up a Google Analytics account for your site. This will allow you to have access to more complex analytics and therefore to a wealth of information about your posts and readers.

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Becoming a blogger – it means commitment, choosing your voice, breaking the silence.

**- Fidèle, 25,
Democratic Republic
of Congo**

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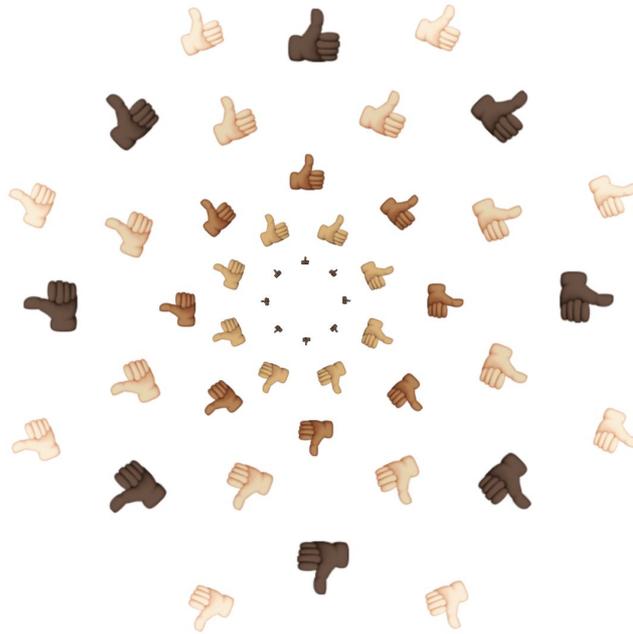
10 **How can I use Facebook to promote my posts?**

On Facebook you're probably already friends with plenty of people who are interested in what you have to say and do. This makes Facebook a great place to promote your blog posts! Generally, when you want to share a link (or URL) to your blog posts on Facebook, we recommend you to go with one of the following two types of Facebook posts.

Facebook post where image and URL are separated
Your Facebook post can be a regular photo with a copy that features the URL. This means that users can access the blog post by clicking on the URL in the copy. To give you an idea of how that looks, check out the following Facebook post. To create this type of Facebook post, follow the steps below.

1.   Upload a compelling photo to the status box.

2.   Write an engaging copy, which features the URL of your blog post. If desired, you can shorten the URL using a URL shortening service, such as bitly for example. You can then publish the Facebook post.

Facebook post where image and URL are integrated

Your Facebook post can be an image with an integrated URL. This means, users can access the blog post by clicking on the image. To give you an idea of how that looks, check out the following Facebook post. To create this type of Facebook post, follow the steps below.

1. Copy-paste the URL into the status box. Check the preview below which will show how your final post will look like. Make sure your post looks visually appealing - this increases the chances that people will click on it. Thus, be sure to amend the preview in a way that it features a compelling image, a captivating title and a catchy blurb.

2. If the image of your blog post doesn't show in the preview, you can optimize your post by running the URL through the Facebook Object Debugger and copy-paste the URL once more into the status box.

3. If you're not happy with the image from your blog post and you want to feature a more suitable image in your Facebook post, you can upload a new image to the preview. Delete the images that you don't need in the preview.

4. In the preview, you can also amend the title and the blurb of the Facebook post. The title should be the same as the title of your blog post. The blurb can either be a quick description of your blog post or feature a catchy line from your post.

5. Finally, delete the URL in the status box (the preview will stay!). If desired, you can add a short copy in the status box. You can then publish the Facebook post.

11 How can I use Twitter to promote my posts?
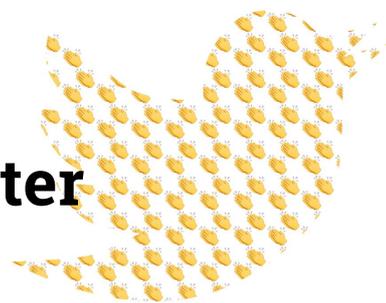
Twitter is another great way to reach people with your writing, especially people you don't necessarily know. Because building up a following on Twitter can take quite a long time, you may not be reaching many people with your tweets in the beginning. Here a few tips how you can gain more followers on Twitter.

1.   Follow other people or profiles.

2.   Engage with what others are tweeting about.

3.   Tweet your thoughts on trending topics/hashtags.

4.   Share your Twitter handle with others when you attend events.

On Twitter, the options of how to share a link are more limited than on Facebook. Generally, on Twitter when you want to share a link (or URL) to your blog posts, we recommend you consider the following points.

1.   Tweets are short, so use your characters wisely.

2.   Don't just share a link with no explanation. You can either make people aware that this is a new article, feature the title or a quote from your blog post in your tweet, or capture the essence of what your article is about in a question that you pose to your followers.

3.   Use 1-3 relevant hashtags. This will allow people who don't follow you, but who are interested in the same topics, to see your tweets.

4.   You can add a relevant photo to your tweet - tweets with photos usually perform better. However, be aware that adding a picture to a tweet takes up characters.

5.   Because Twitter feeds update at a very fast rate, it's okay to tweet the URL to your post more than once at different times/days. Try to craft a different tweet each time to keep your followers engaged and interested.

12 What are the key commitments of a blogger?

Blogging can be a time-consuming passion - as an advanced blogger, you probably know that already. Since only a few of us are professional bloggers, most of us have to juggle between school, work, family and friends, sometimes finding only a little bit of time for our passion. However, if you're serious about blogging, try to make enough time available to honor the three key commitments of any blogger.

1. Blog regularly

Generally, it's advisable to publish at least one blog post per week. Blogging regularly will allow you to develop your skills and at the same time satisfy your core readership. Writing more than one post is encouraged, but make sure that you don't compromise quality for quantity. The time one needs to properly prepare, draft and proofread a post varies from blogger to blogger. However, we advise you to set aside at least 3-5 hours to finalize a blog post from A-Z.

2. Review frequently

It's advisable to check your posts for comments frequently and to take your time to reply. The time bloggers invest in skimming through their posts and replying to comments varies tremendously. Additionally, some posts will attract more comments and are therefore more time intensive than others. However, you should set aside 15-30 minutes a day to review posts and reply to potential comments.

3. Promote widely

It's advisable to dedicate enough time to the promotion of your posts. There is no limit to the amount of time one can spend promoting blog posts via social media, but depending on how many social media platforms you're active on, this could easily be a full-time job! It's recommended to set aside at least 30-60 minutes per blog post to craft engaging and impactful social media messages and post them on your channels.

That's it. Now all there's left to do is to go back to that keyboard and type away!

As an advanced blogger, you should definitely check out Voices of Youth!
Go to voicesofyouth.org, create a profile and become an active member of our growing community of young change makers.

The world is waiting for you!

unicef

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www.voicesofyouth.org