

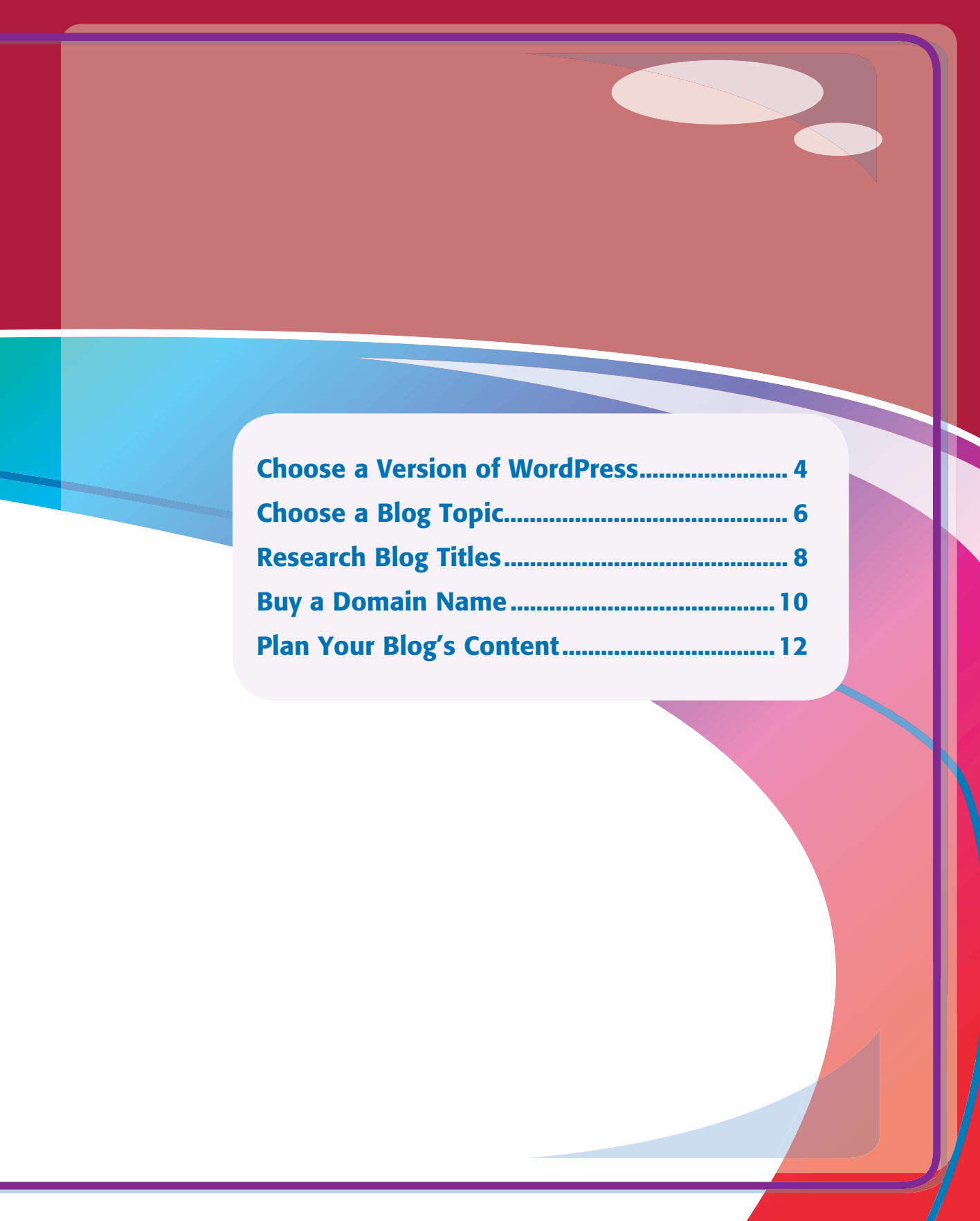
# CHAPTER

# 1

## Introducing Blogging and WordPress



Creating a blog is a great way to get your message across once you have decided you have something to share with the world. WordPress blogging software lets you deliver that message for free even while giving you complete control over your site.



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# Choose a Version of WordPress

WordPress is available in three different varieties. WordPress.com provides hosting service for blogs and standard configurations. WordPress.org offers blogging software for self-hosted blogs plus WordPress MU (multi-user), a relatively complex program that allows you to run thousands of blogs.

**This book does not teach how to set up a WordPress MU blogging network, although if you are a blogger on a WordPress MU blog network, such as through a school system or a local newspaper, your experience is similar to that of people with WordPress.com blogs. Whichever WordPress software option you choose, you can change it later. If you choose WordPress.com now and want to go to a WordPress.org blog, it is an easy transition. The reverse is also true.**

## About WordPress

WordPress is *open-source* software, meaning anyone can download it, use it, and change it for free. It has been around since 2003 as a program for self-hosted blogs, and this book uses versions 2.8.4-2.9.1. The organization that developed around it, WordPress.org, later started WordPress.com for people who did not want to host their own blogs.

## Hosted WordPress Blogs

WordPress.com is a blog host. Sign up with WordPress.com, and you can start blogging within minutes. The user interface is simple and similar to that of self-hosted WordPress blogs. WordPress.com blogs, however, limit your options in terms of your blog's template and performance.



## Why WordPress?

With other free blogging platforms available, you may wonder why you should choose WordPress. The answer largely comes down to control. With WordPress you own your content, and you can customize to your heart's content. Also, WordPress allows use of static *pages*, which look and act like ordinary Web pages instead of showing content in chronological order as is typical for most blogs.

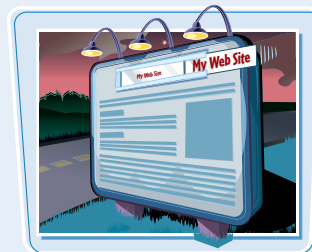
## Self-Hosted WordPress Blogs

Options for customizing your blog are nearly limitless when you have a self-hosted, or independent, WordPress.org blog. The tradeoff is that your independent blog takes a little more effort to get up and running, and keeping the software up-to-date is your job, not the host's.



### Key Differences: Appearance

WordPress.com offers more than 60 layout designs, called *themes*, but they are good ones. If you want to customize your theme by editing the *cascading style sheet*, or *CSS*, you must pay an annual fee. With a self-hosted WordPress blog, you can choose among countless free themes or purchased themes, or create your own.



### Key Differences: Plugins

*Plugins* are program-like extensions that work with WordPress to add functionality. You can have as many as you want on your independent WordPress blog. WordPress.com does not let you add plugins, although many of the WordPress.com widgets provide plugin functions. A *widget* allows you to arrange sidebar information without writing code.



### Key Differences: Ads

With a self-hosted WordPress blog, you can have zero to endless amounts of advertising. At WordPress.com, the blog host itself occasionally posts ads on your blog, unless you pay a no-ad fee. Also, WordPress.com does not allow certain types of ads.



### Key Differences: Cost

The blogging software is free, whether you host your own blog or put it on WordPress.com. If you self-host, you must pay for space on a Web server, although that can be as little as a few dollars a month. If you go with WordPress.com, you may wind up paying fees to edit the *CSS*, eliminate ads, or post videos, costs absent for independent blogs.



### Key Differences: Support

WordPress.com has a clearly written support section plus forums and a contact form for support. The support documentation for WordPress.org blogs is called the *codex*. It is written by WordPress volunteers, and its quality is inconsistent. There is no support contact except for the WordPress.org forums, but they are excellent.





# Choose a Blog Topic

You can choose anything as your blog topic, but doing a little research may help you identify the topic that you will love to write about and that readers will come looking for.

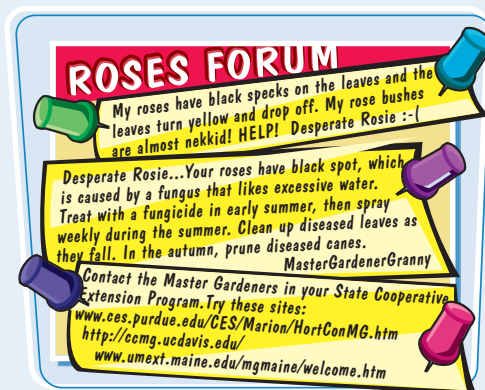
## Expertise

If you are an expert in some field, your knowledge could make an excellent blog topic. By writing about your area of experience you will have plenty of content and confidence, and you may be able to use your blog to attract business and advertising.



## Hobby

Perhaps you have a hobby that you avidly pursue and continue to learn more about. This, too, is a good subject for a blog. Fellow hobbyists may look to you for ideas and advice, and they can offer ideas and advice in return.



## Business

A blog is a great way to keep in touch with your customers and to attract more customers. It is like a newsletter, only easier. Again, you surely have plenty of content to offer readers, whether it is news about products, special offers, or holiday hours.



## Scattershot

One option is not to choose a topic at all and simply to write your blog as you might write a diary. This is a fine approach as long as you are content to attract a small audience. Only a few people, by virtue of their fascinating lives or captivating writing styles, can write a scattershot blog and attract a large number of readers.



### Focused

The more focused your topic, the easier it will be for search engines to find it. A focused blog also has greater potential to generate advertising revenues later, if that is one of your goals.



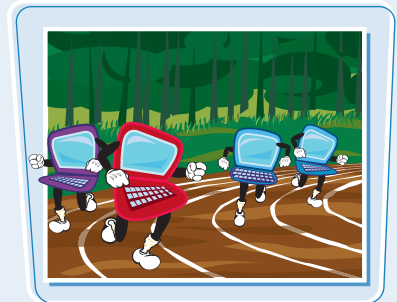
### Useful and Entertaining

Whatever topic you choose, you will get more readers if your blog is useful or entertaining — or both. As you narrow your list of possible topics, think about which ones give you the greatest opportunity to be helpful or engaging. Those may be your best bets.



### Competition

If you are unconcerned about developing an audience or if you want your blog to focus on your personal life, you need not worry about competition. For other subjects, however, check out the competition before you settle on a blog topic.



### Research the Competition

You can get clues as to what is being written about and what is popular at these Web sites:

- <http://wordpress.com>: See the most popular recent *tags*, which are like keywords, on WordPress.com blogs.
- [www.alexa.com](http://www.alexa.com): Search for blogs on your topic, and Alexa lists them and their traffic ratings.
- [www.technorati.com/pop](http://www.technorati.com/pop): This page lists the 100 most popular blogs among Technorati users.
- [www.stumbleupon.com](http://www.stumbleupon.com): Sign up with this service, select your topic of interest, and then *stumble*, which takes you to blog post after blog post on that subject.
- <http://blogsearch.google.com>: Search on a topic to find existing blogs and blog posts on the topic.



# Research Blog Titles

If you do not take care in naming your blog, you may find down the road that your choice does not serve you well. It may duplicate the name of an existing blog, or you may decide you want to get a domain name but a Web site with your blog's desired domain name already exists.

## Blog Title versus Domain

Your *blog title* generally appears across the top of your blog's front page. A *domain name* is the part of a Web address that includes *.com* or *.net* or one of the other domain name extensions. You can read about buying a domain name in the next section, "Buy a Domain Name."



## Self-Hosted Blog Names

On a self-hosted blog, it is helpful for the blog title and domain name to match, or at least to correspond, so that people can find you more easily. If you want to name your blog *In My Opinion*, it would be wise to see whether a domain such as *inmyopinion.net* or *imo.com* is available.



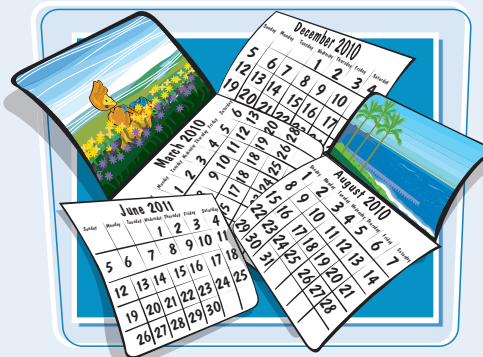
## WordPress.com Names

At WordPress.com, the username you choose when you sign up becomes part of your blog's Internet address. If your username is *example*, your blog's Web address will be *example.wordpress.com* unless you buy a domain name. The Web address is separate from the blog's title, but it is good for the two to correspond.



## Consider the Long Term

If you are going to keep your blog private or are certain that you do not want to develop a significant audience, the blog title makes no difference. Most people start blogs, though, because they want to be heard. If you are one of those people, then consider the steps on these pages.



## Brainstorm Names

Your blog topic is the place to start your search for blog titles. Write as many words and phrases as you can think of associated with your topic. If it is a personal blog, you may simply want to use your real name. Even your real name may not be as unique as you think, however, so write down many options.



## Narrow the Options

Settle on a handful of blog titles, and then find out whether another site has that name. You may have to try lots of options before you find one not in use. See “Try for a Unique Name” on this page to find out how to check what is being used.



## All the Good Names Are Taken!

So many sites are on the Web these days that it may seem that all the good names are taken, but forge onward. You can try alternate spellings, whimsical expressions, or combinations of your name and your interest. If you can make the title memorable and easy to spell, all the better.

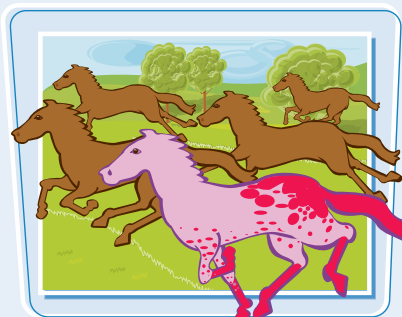
If someone else has a Web site or blog with your preferred title, you can still use that title, but it is a bad idea. Besides the potential for legal conflict if someone decides to trademark the title, the bigger issue is that readers may get your blog and the other site confused.



## Try for a Unique Name

Take these steps to increase your odds of having a unique blog title:

- Type your proposed blog title into a Google search box along with the word *blog*. Review the search results to see blogs that use your title in full or in part.
- Type your proposed blog title in your browser's address box followed by `wordpress.com`. For example, you could type **mythoughts.wordpress.com**, and any WordPress.com blogs by that name will pop up in your browser.
- Type the proposed title in the address box followed by `blogspot.com`, as in **mythoughts.blogspot.com**.
- Do the same thing but use the domain `typepad.com`.



# Buy a Domain Name

If you are self-hosting your blog, you likely will want to buy a domain name to make it easier for readers to find you. You may want to buy one for a WordPress.com blog too.

You can buy a domain name from any number of *registrars*. Web hosts often give their customers a price break on domain registrations, so if you are planning an independent blog, you may want to choose a Web host before registering your domain.



## Buy a Domain Name

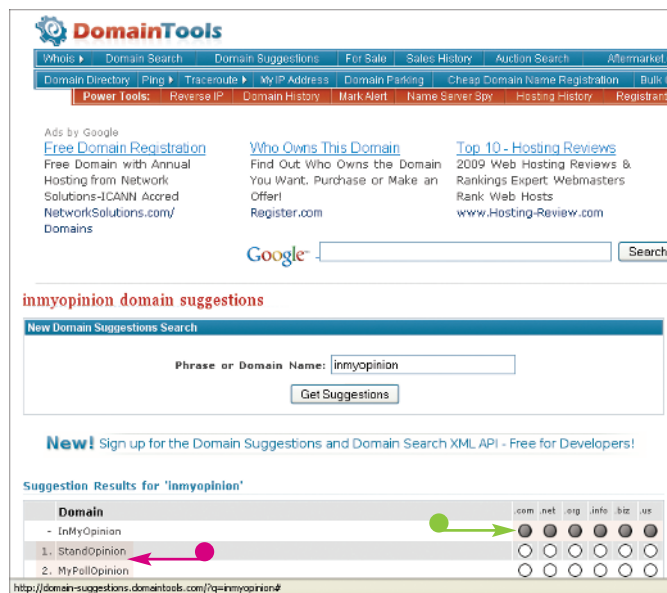
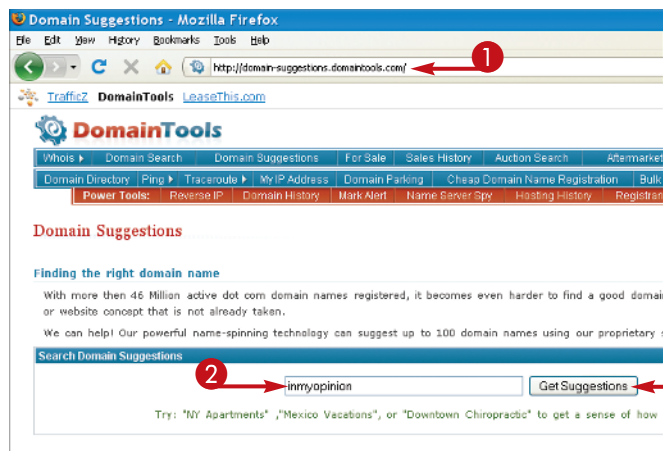
- 1 Go to <http://domain-suggestions.domaintools.com/> in your Web browser.

**Note:** This site is one of many where you can search for domains. Your Web host may give you a discounted price.

- 2 Type the name of your proposed domain in the box.
- 3 Click **Get Suggestions** or press **Enter**.

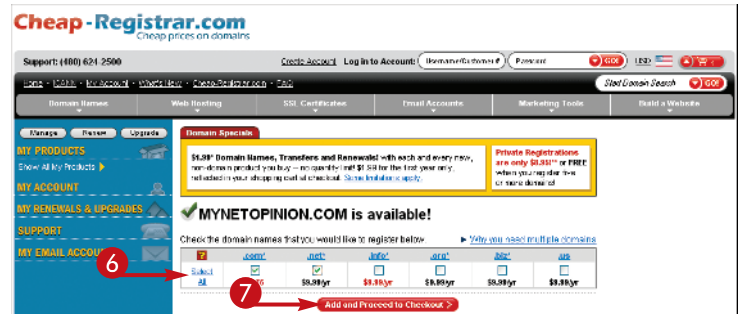
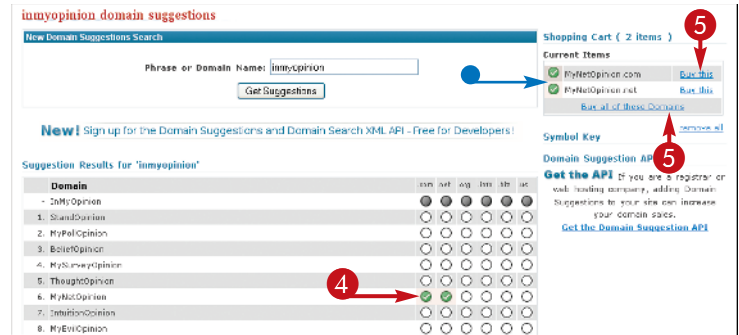
- Domains with the name you searched appear on the top line of the results. Those already registered appear with gray dots under the domain extensions.
- Suggested alternative domain names appear on the successive lines.

If none of the available or suggested domain names satisfies you, repeat steps 2 and 3 until you find one that will work.





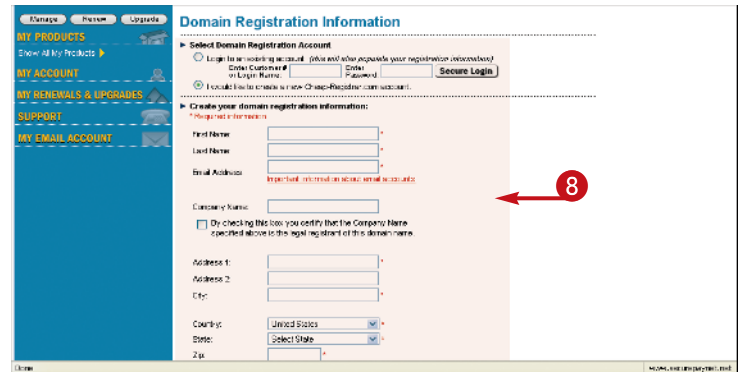
- 4 Click the domain name you want to register (○ changes to ✓).
- The domain also appears on the right side of the screen under Shopping Cart. You may select multiple domains.
- 5 When you have selected all the domains you want to register, click **Buy This** or **Buy All These Domains** if you selected several.
- 6 Review the information on the confirmation page.
- 7 When you are satisfied with your selection or selections, click **Add and Proceed to Checkout**.



Clicking takes you to a new, secure page at a different domain.

- 8 Provide the necessary information to complete your registration. Click **Continue**.

Proceed through the remaining screens until your registration purchase is complete.



## TIPS

### Do I have to buy a domain name?

No. If you do not, however, your URL will be your Web host's domain and directory listing, such as `www.webhost.com/myweblog` or it could be a subdomain such as `myweblog.wordpress.com`.



### Is the process the same for a WordPress.com blog?

It can be, or you can buy your domain name through WordPress.com. Doing so eliminates a few steps in setup.



# Plan Your Blog's Content

Your blog will be easier to create and maintain and easier for readers to follow if you plan your content before you start blogging. By planning ahead, you can give your blog a consistent approach that works for you, your content, and your readers.



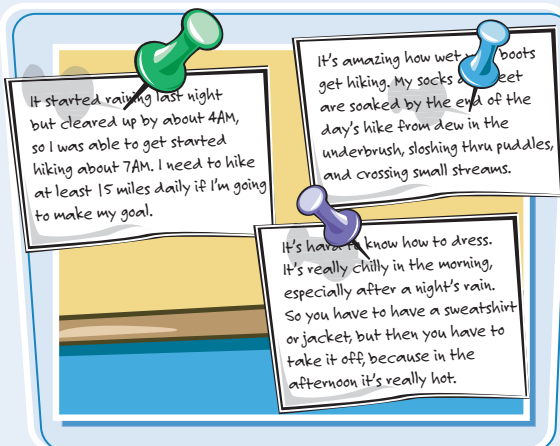
## Words, Pictures, or Both?

Your choice of having content that is word heavy, picture heavy, or an even balance of words and pictures affects not only the appearance of your blog, but how you spend your time preparing your posts. Give thought now as to what medium best expresses the ideas you want to share.



## Consider Post Length

Although there is no general ideal length, there may be an ideal length for you and your blog. Having a somewhat predictable post length enables you to know how long it may take to write a post, and lets regular readers know how much time to allow for reading. You can break up long subjects into a series of posts.



### Consider Post Frequency

Some bloggers post multiple times a day; others post once a week. Your blog's topic and your time constraints may dictate how often you can post, and that is fine. *More* is not necessarily better, but *predictable* is definitely better!



### Make Your Blog Stand Out

After you have studied other blogs in your subject area, ask what will make your blog unique, aside from its being written by you. If your topic is broad — cars, perhaps — yours will stand out better and be easier to plan if you narrow the subject to, say, restoring Chevrolets from the 1950s, or reviewing late-model two-seat sports cars.



### Make Your Blog Accurate

Even if you are an authority in your subject area, you need to check your facts and, where possible, link to your sources. Yes, you can find popular sites, particularly on politics, that use dubious information, but if you want credibility with most readers, you need to get your facts straight. Include fact-checking as part of your content plan.



### Suit the Content to the Subject

If your blog is about sculpture or carpentry or any other highly visual subject, you need to have pictures! Podcasts would be desirable on an interview blog. Make sure you have the equipment you need for the media you plan to use. If your blog is about grammar or creative writing, you can probably skip buying a top-flight digital camera.

