

A close-up, slightly angled photograph of a computer monitor displaying a Firefox browser window. The browser's navigation toolbar is visible, featuring buttons for Back, Forward, Reload, Stop, and Home. The address bar shows a partial URL starting with 'http://www.'. The text 'Aspiring Author Websites' is overlaid on the lower portion of the browser window.

Aspiring Author Websites

Creating your web presence

Articles by Jordan McCollum

Advice by Kathleen MacIver and Jordan McCollum

From <http://JordanMcCollum.com>

A solid web presence is an asset to any aspiring author. So how can you create a website to appeal to other writers, potential readers, agents and editors alike?

[Jordan McCollum](#), editor of the Internet marketing news website [Marketing Pilgrim](#) (and aspiring author), wrote a series of articles to help you understand just that from an experienced Internet marketing perspective.

Jordan and [Kathleen MacIver](#), website designer and owner of [KatieDid Design](#) (and aspiring author), collaborated to offer eleven volunteers website reviews.

We hope that these articles and advice will help guide you as you establish and enhance your web presence. We're planning to do more website reviews in the future—so [subscribe to JordanMcCollum.com](#) so you don't miss the next call for volunteers!

Cover image by [Ben Lancaster](#)

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Website Articles

[Four things an aspiring author's website must do](#)

Guest blogging for literary agent Nathan Bransford a few weeks ago, I wrote about the [seven things an aspiring author's website must have](#). But in addition to having convenient features and good appearance, **an aspiring author's website must do certain things to fulfill its purpose**, depending on what phase your career is in.

(Side note: I have a blog where I talk a lot about blogging, I reference some posts on my other blog here.)

The *get ready* phase: networking with other writers

When you're in the "get ready" phase, you're actively writing and seeking out other writers, but at present you're not ready to submit to agents or editors. Since your career is just starting out, your website may just be starting out, too, though it won't hurt if you already have a fairly well-developed site.

Before you're ready for publication, your website can help you find critique partners, talk with other writers about writing, explore your genre with other writers, and make the connections that help smooth the path for your career—or at least make a solitary profession a lot less lonely. **This is your time to start building a community of writers.**

How can I do this? The easiest way to make your website into a networking tool is to make sure there are **plenty of ways other writers can connect with you**—and often the easiest way to do that is through engaging blog content and comments.

The *get ready* phase: find your niche

While you're preparing for publication, it's also a good time to get your web presence ready—especially to find the niche where you'll fit in the blogging and publishing (and publogging?) worlds.

How do I do this? To [find your blog/site niche](#), ask yourself why you're blogging and what you'll be blogging about. It needs to be more than just blogging about your book and your career—and at some point, it will probably need to transition to be more than just appealing to other writers, too.

This is almost like a market analysis—using a search engine, look for other sites of authors with similar books/niches. See what they’re blogging about (if anything). See what angle you can add to the discussion, especially if it relates to your books. If you can **use your website to show how you and your books will fit on a bookshelf**, your site is ready for the next phase.

The *get set* phase: show you’re professional and marketable

In the “get set” phase, you’re in the process of searching for an agent or editor. (You may also fall in the “get set” phase if you have an agent who’s currently shopping your manuscript.) In this phase, one of your big goals will be to show your target audience (agents and editors) that you’re serious about your writing and your career.

How can I do this? Professional appearance—which we’ll get to hear a lot about in our website critique series, with professional website designer Kathleen MacIver of [KatieDid Design](#) giving feedback on our volunteers’ sites.



Also important in professional appearance is the “demeanor” on your website. It’s fine to use casual, laid back text and images—but a website for your career might not be the best place to air out your dirty socks (or any of the rest of your dirty laundry!). Also, be sure to read over (and have others read over) your site for typos, misused words, broken links and images, or anything else that would detract from your appearance.

In this phase, you can still rely heavily on a blog, but it’s a **good idea to at least set up a few pages** (about, contact, works) with links in the sidebar or create a menu bar **to help visitors learn more about you and your writing, and navigate your site.**

The *get set* phase: show off your storytelling

Also in the “get set” phase, and more important in the long run, your website is a place to show off your storytelling abilities. In the end, that’s what’s going to get you an agent, get you sold to a publishing company, and get you sold on the bookshelves.



How can I do this? Showing off your storytelling doesn’t mean that every page and every blog post has to be written as if it were flash fiction. (Unless you want to . . . but that’d probably be weird.) It *does* mean making sure that you have at least an **excerpt of your writing on your site**—especially if you’re submitting to agents that don’t ask for or allow sample pages with their queries.

However, do **not** use your website as the only medium an agent can see your query or sample pages, especially not if they ask for any writing from you. An agent or editor will expect you to email them words (either in the body of the email or as an attachment)—*not* a link to their website. **Never make an agent do more work for your writing when they're interested.** Odds are good that they won't follow links.

(Side note: if you're sitting their thinking, "But it's just one click. Why can't they do that?", **stop**. It's not just one click. It's one click per person per item submitted. It's dozens of clicks per day, minimum, if agents/editors are even interested enough to click on the link anyway. Also some email programs also strip out links.)

Photo credits: bookshelf by [Josh](#); handshake by [ThinkPanama](#); click by Jordan McCollum

Five more things an author's website must do

Now, we have a few things that all authors— aspiring or not—should be doing with their websites, as well as just a little advice for soon-to-be published authors. There are volumes more to say on what an author's website should do and have and be, but we'll stick to these few today.

The 1-2-3 phase: attract interest for your book

After your book has been accepted for publication, your website is an even more powerful tool. If you're still solely on a blog on a free domain (i.e., ilurviewritin.blogspot.com), it's time to **buy your own domain**, preferably [YOURNAME.com](#). And along with a new domain, this is a good time to upgrade to a "real" website—keeping your blog, of course, but also hosting a stable website. Ideally, the blog and the website design will be integrated seamlessly.



In this phase, it's time to focus on that book to attract as much prelaunch interest as you can.

How can you do this? There are a few things you'll want on your site before the book launches to help drum up interest:

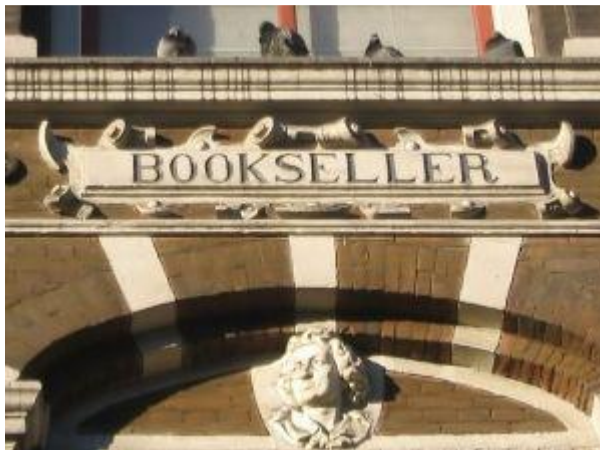
- An awesome, engaging description of the book
- The cover (so people will recognize it in a bookstore)
- An excerpt, preferably from that incredibly intriguing beginning (with permission from your publisher)

- A link to your book on Amazon—hello, pre-order! (Also, you can use an affiliate link to make a few extra pennies off any sales).
- Your book trailer, if you're doing one.
- Anything else that will make people want to *run* to the bookstore on launch day!
- Send author friends (especially ones with newsletters) a short paragraph about your book, with links.

You can also look at the terms people are advertising and searching on in search engines, to see if any of those people might be interested in your site—then use those terms (“keywords”) on your site, in page titles and content, in natural language. (You're a writer, right? So write!)

The *Go!* phase: sell your book

As with the 1-2-3 phase, your website can be a major vehicle for selling your book (and your backlist, if you have one). [Candace E. Salima gave a great presentation](#) on this subject at a conference I attended in April.



How can I do this? Well, along with the above ideas, it's also a good idea to spread the word on other websites through advertisements, reviews, releases, contests, and other publicity.

But that's not on *your* website. On your website, always, *always*, **ALWAYS** have a **purchase link**. Have “bonus features” to your books on the website—recipes, play lists, deleted scenes—anything you think will interest your readers.

Also, **make your website somewhere that people will want to come back to**—do something for them, reach out to them (see building a community), be accessible. Even if they've already bought your book, they're still your customers, your readers, your fans, and striving to build a relationship with them (individually and collectively) can help sustain you, both emotionally and financially.

Always: sell YOU

Your website is also a great way to sell *you*—and I don't mean prostitution. I mean **building a brand** that will lead to agents, editors, fans, loyal readers, subscribers, fame* and glory* (*results not typical). If you have something to *say*, some kind of

message, that's part of your brand. If you write in a specific genre, that's part of your brand.

How can I do this? Make your site professional and consistent—use the same layout, color scheme, graphics, etc. on each page. If you have a theme running in your published books (especially their covers or color schemes), go with it on your website.

On your site (perhaps the about page), talk about what draws you to your genre or your message. Encourage your visitors to share their stories of why they're interested in the same topics.

Also, talk about or at least hint at future projects to keep your readers—your potential customers—interested. If it's feasible, think about running a regular newsletter (monthly, bimonthly, quarterly). You can keep your most loyal, interested fans updated on your progress, offer special contests, and interact with them.

Have photographs of yourself (for visitors and high quality ones for media contacts). Feature other peoples' interviews with you (or interview yourself). **Allow people to get to know you** (somewhat—we all need our privacy, and we don't all need to know if you're wearing clean underwear right now!). This goes hand in hand with the next point, something you should always strive for with your author website:

Always: build a community

A community based around a blog, forum or website means that people feel welcome. People can participate and interact with you. **People come back.**

How can I do this? [Building a community around your blog](#) or website can be as simple as encouraging discussion, responding to comments and writing on requested topics. **Whatever you do with your website, interact with your visitors.** Even if you don't have a blog, you can interact with your website visitors—host a forum or weekly chats to connect personally with them. Use your email newsletter to appeal to them.



Always: build your platform

If you're lucky enough to **have a unique selling proposition** just by virtue of who you are and/or what you do, bank on that. If you're a computer engineer writing about high-tech computer hacking, tout those qualifications on your site. Once you're published, you can also use that platform to launch yourself into public speaking

opportunities on related topics—building your brand and your platform in the real world.

How can I do this? **Feature your qualifications on your about page**—maybe even write a “sub” page to your about page, just devoted to that. Include it in your FAQ (if you have one). Create an FAQ around that industry. List your speaking engagements on related topics, and make it clear you’re available for such gigs. (What would you speak on? Something related to your platform and your writing or research—if you’re writing fiction on high-tech computer hacking, you could speak about how to protect yourself from hackers, for example.)

Always remember: your website will be the major way you’ll interact with most of your readers and potential business associates. Use it wisely!

Photo credits: excited reader—[Chris Johnson](#); bookseller—[Herman Brinkman](#); bricklayer—[Jovike](#)

[How to set up an aspiring author website](#)

Maybe you’re ready for a “real” website, but not sure how to get it. It’s okay; I’ve worked with websites and Internet marketing for the better part of my life and I still didn’t know exactly how to set up a website until I did my own. And **it’s easy**.

There are three basic things you need for a functioning website:

1. **a domain** (you get this from a domain registrar, like GoDaddy)
2. **a host** to store your website’s pages and files (from a hosting company)
3. (technically, you don’t *need* this, but unless you’re going to be doing all your coding by hand, you’ll want it) **software** to work the back end—and hopefully generate the HTML code (usually provided by the hosting company, too)

Sometimes you can get these things together. Blogger, for example, will give you everything—your domain is whatever.blogspot.com, Blogger stores your pages and files, and Blogger software generates your HTML code and provides the software that lets you maintain your site.



In fact, **you can make Blogger into your “real” website**, which can be especially useful if you’re going to be the one maintaining it. You can also use Blogger Custom Domain to put your Blogger blog at YourDomain.com, and Camy Tang has a useful guide on [how to make a a basic free blog more like a website](#).

Getting more advanced

If you feel like you're ready for a more "real" website, but still apprehensive about setting one up, here's my advice: **use WordPress**. This is especially great if you're already comfortable with blogging software, because you get the **ease of blogging software and the features of a "real" website**.

You can use WordPress.com (and you can get a WordPress.com blog to show up at YourDomain.com, too, but it's not free like it is on Blogger)—or you can use WordPress.org. It's the same software, but with WordPress.org you can customize your blog however you want.



However, for WordPress.org, you also have to get hosting—space on a server to store your website's files for others to access them. I've been with [BlueHost](#) for over two years, and they've done really well for me. I chose them because they were inexpensive (\$7/month), and one of WordPress's recommended hosts.

WordPress has some advantages over Blogger that make it more like a "real" website. Camy Tang's guide above will help you create static pages like an about page or a contact page on Blogger. That's great—but they're still going to look and act like posts on your blog.

With WordPress, however, **you can keep blog posts and pages separate**. *Don't* want a blog? That's okay—you can do that with WordPress, too, and just use the page features to easily create a static website instead. Check out the menu bar at the top of my site. See how it says "About" and "Projects," etc.? Those link to WordPress *pages*—timeless, static webpages that aren't posts on the blog.

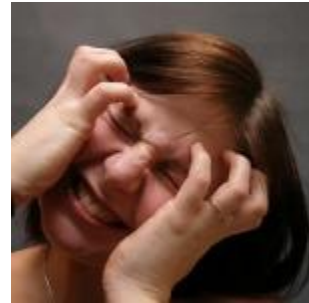


Also neat: **WordPress made that menu bar all by itself**. I didn't have to do a thing. It updates the menu bar whenever I update a page. WordPress is highly customizable, in both the site design and software—and for free.

If you want to create a WordPress website on BlueHost, [sign up for BlueHost using my affiliate link](#) and I'll send you a free PDF guide to setting up WordPress with **BlueHost***—with info on installation, set up, importing blogs, add-ons and more! (If you're planning to import another blog, also check out my [search-engine friendly guide to migrating from Blogger to WordPress](#) to make your switch safe and easy.)

* To get the guide, be sure to email me at guide@jordanmccollum.com once you've completed the sign up.

How many websites do you need?



A writing blog. An in-world children's picture book website. A website for your steamy romance ebooks. A site for your nonfiction aspirations. A personal blog. How many websites can one person have?

The answer, of course, is as personal as your websites should be—you can have as many websites as you can handle (and *please*, no more! A neglected website is sometimes worse than no site at all.). **But how many do you really need?**

I'm of the opinion that you should try for as few sites as possible. At its simplest, this would be one website, with a blog as part of that website (if you truly feel you can maintain a blog).

However, **in some situations, you will need separate or nearly separate sites.** These situations might include:

- Genres that are completely incompatible—where writing in one genre could permanently alienate readers in another genre (like the above example of picture books and hot romance).
- Writing under different names—especially in conjunction with the above example.

Note that I also said “nearly separate” sites—rather than completely separate sites, you could try doing “minisites.” For example, if you're writing in very different genres but under the same name, you could have [Mystery.YourDomain.com](#) and [UrbanFantasy.YourDomain.com](#) . The sites would have at least one or two links to one another, and to your main site, but would remain mostly separate.

And then there's the question of personal stuff: **does it have a place on your professional site(s)?** That also depends on your genre, the tone of your personal stuff, and your audience. If you have a “lifestyle” blog before you get published, then it's fine to keep that and maintain the personal tone and the insights into your personal life.



However, if that's not the kind of site and community you've already built, **be cautious about sharing personal stuff**. Introducing too much information, unprofessional presentation, or flat-out boring content can hurt your brand.

On the other hand, sharing some information about yourself—on a limited, interesting, professional basis—can help to make your website more personable and appealing. It's a fine balance—and sometimes it takes some practice.

Image credits: frustrated—[John De Boer](#); character—[Svilen Mushkatov](#)

Website Advice

What follows is condensed advice from the full reviews, which are available at JordanMcCollum.com:

- [Get-ready phase blog review: LiviaBlackburne.blogspot.com](http://LiviaBlackburne.blogspot.com)
- [Get set phase website and blog review: EileenAstels.com](http://EileenAstels.com)
- [Optimizing a site for users and search engines: LoriTironPandit.com](http://LoriTironPandit.com)
- [Showing and telling: the rule for blogs, too! Trish-MollyGumnut.blogspot.com](http://Trish-MollyGumnut.blogspot.com)
- [Setting goals: TriciaJOBrien.blogspot.com](http://TriciaJOBrien.blogspot.com)
- [Integrating social media & sidebars: WordVessel.blogspot.com](http://WordVessel.blogspot.com)
- [Your blog's niche: careann.wordpress.com](http://careann.wordpress.com)
- [A blog with a niche: TheChocolateChipWaffle.blogspot.com](http://TheChocolateChipWaffle.blogspot.com)
- [Go! phase site review: HughHowey.com](http://HughHowey.com)
- [Minisites: a shared author site, ScorchedSheets.com](http://ScorchedSheets.com)
- [The challenge of a pseudonym, LaBeletteRouge.blogspot.com](http://LaBeletteRouge.blogspot.com)

Setting Goals

This is where every website should start . . . **with a careful assessment of what the goal of the website (or blog) is, what you hope it will achieve, and who you hope to reach with it**. Everything else needs to follow that.

Who visits your blog? Or rather, **who do you WANT to visit your blog?** Children? Their parents? Your friends? Publishing professionals?



Pretend you are that person, pretend you've never seen your blog before, and take a look at it with fresh eyes. **What do you find?**

In order for something to succeed in today's world—where the whole world is essentially connected and available to everyone—it has to fit a niche, a smaller target or focus. We can't "afford" to be interested in everything and involved in everything on the entire Internet, so we "weed out" what is slightly less important. We look for that thing that interests us 101%.

Your website/blog will be more likely to succeed if you find SOMETHING to center it around, something a little more specific than just "writing." Working to appeal to a specific, if narrow, audience can help to grow your blog more than trying to appeal to everyone. This is just like fiction—we don't expect that everyone will love everything we write (well, okay, we do, but we don't *reasonably* expect that 😊). We know that we have to write to our audience—our niche, our *genre*.

If you don't want to center it around a genre, then you can center it around your location and try to find writers near you, or who are interested in your location. Or you could target writers in your age group. Or you could center it around writers-who-live-in-the-country. You could even pick something quirky, like writers who love yellow or writers who love to go barefoot. Of course you'd welcome writers (and readers) who love pink a little more than yellow, or writers who really don't go barefoot all that often, but just the fact that it's got this "grabby" idea will make your visitors more interested, and also make your blog stick in their minds a little more.



[Finding your niche](#) and [expressing your niche](#) are important steps in building your site—or growing it.

Photo credits: yellow paint—[Tom](#); puzzle piece (get it—a niche?)—[Andronicus Riyono](#)

[Pages of a Website](#)

The pages of a website are the static, timeless pages that provide your visitors with information they need about you. To help your visitors, it's best to link to these from each page of your site using a menu bar or left-hand navigation.

Contact page

The contact page may be the most important page of your website. Having a dedicated, static contact page allows any website visitors, from readers to fellow writers, to agents and editors, to contact you without using a public (and sometimes awkward) format, such as blog comments or through social media.

On the contact page, use a web form.

About page

The about page has a lot of tasks:

- Introduce yourself (a picture is nice!)
- Explain what genre you write in
- Be personable and appealing
- Show off any credits or credentials in your author platform
- Tell your visitors about your website (especially if you have a blog designed to appeal to a specific niche)

Works page

The works page is where you highlight your projects, whether they're in progress or not. **Describe your WIPs in a brief "pitch" format**, like you would in a query letter or back cover copy. If you're so inclined, you may want to use graphics or even create a mock cover to increase visual interest.

Also, if you're ready, you may want to **share a short excerpt** (maybe up to a chapter) of your book on your site—though when you're submitting, this may be problematic, so you might take that down while your work is on submission.

Design

The two main goals of a website's design are:

1. **Instantly portray what your website is about, and what the visitor will receive if they hang around.** (In your case, interesting information that they're not likely to find anywhere else on the Internet.)
2. **Make the site stick in the visitor's mind**, thereby upping their chances of wanting to come back, coming back, and remembering why they bookmarked it when they do come back.

Basic layouts for blogs are often best, since people are there to read content (once they know they're interested, of course) and adhering to a basic layout makes it easy to find the content.

However, website made from a basic, generic design template (99% of the time) is **like finding a hardcover book that's missing its dust jacket** (the old kind that had nothing more than a solid color and gold lettering on the edge). There's nothing to turn you off to the book/site, but you really had to have a compelling reason from somewhere else in the universe to open up that book and start reading, because the book cover itself is offering you nothing.



Find a design that is the visual interpretation of your concept. A header image/text helps.

Photo of book by [Marcos Ojeda](#)

Typography

When setting the fonts for your site, stick to Arial, Courier, Georgia, Times, and Verdana. While the limited selection seems stifling, if you use other fonts, **you have absolutely no guarantee that your visitors have the same font installed on their computer that you do.** What does the browser do if you've told it to render "Viner ITC" and the visitor (like me) doesn't have it? The browser picks one at random and renders the text in it. So the visitor is totally stuck if the browser picks "Webdings" or some illustrative font that renders a picture for each letter.

The only way to avoid this is to stick to the very, very short list of fonts that are pre-installed on all versions of all operating systems. If you want to do something in a

font other than that, you have to use a graphics program to make an image of your text in that font. (And then make sure you use an alt tag for that image, so that blind Internet users' text-reading programs can still tell them what the text says—and also search engines.)

Also, making all of your text italicized is **harder on the eyes, and therefore makes it more likely that your readers will click away without reading it.** (You'd be surprised how little a website visitor needs to click away! And most of it is subconscious, too, so you can't argue with it.)

Search Engine Presence and Friendliness

Check your search engine presence by searching for your name on Google, Yahoo and Bing. To help improve your rank and/or get indexed, **look for opportunities for links with your name as the anchor text**, like guest blogging, your friends' blog rolls, etc.

If you have professional competition for your name, you can work to get links, or you can consider adopting a more unique pen name, using a middle initial, or creating a unique website name.

Search engines are kind of stupid. They can't really see what's in graphics or videos, or many other formats. You can use a [spider simulator](#) to see your site how a search engine sees it.

Also, you can sometimes have more control over the "snippet" that appears in search engine results (the description below the blue link) by using the meta description element. The format is:

```
<meta name="description" content="[description of your site, such as a tagline to go below your blog name]" />
```

The description you put there will show up as the snippet in search results (if there isn't a better match for the search terms elsewhere on the page).

Here are some more specific instructions on how to [insert header codes in Blogger](#).

Seek out opportunities to get your name out there more with links back to your site—like through group blogging, comments and guest blogging. (Be sure to [get the most out of guest blogging](#) if you do it.)

A few other tricks you could do to help:

- **Change the <title> element on your home page** to something that incorporates your name and a little about your site or genre (such as “Jimmy Pygg, zombie mantasy author”). This helps visitors who bookmark your home page or minimize the browser while viewing it—“Jimmy Pygg, zombie mantasy author” would show in the menu bar. Something default like “Home Page” easily gets lost in bookmarks. Plus, it’s helpful to have a descriptive title for search engines to understand what your homepage is about.
- **Use headers to organize and emphasize your text**, rather than just using size/styles. If you look at the source code here, you’ll see that “Jordan McCollum” is in a <h1> tag—a header (top level) tag. That indicates to search engines what the page is about. Use header tags (h1, h2, h3) to organize your text hierarchically. Test this to see what they look like, but in most designs the header tags are large and bold. (Technically, this technique seems to be losing a little power, but it can still help.)
- **Use meta descriptions to control the “snippet” in search engines.** Right now, search engines are showing “The Eileen Astels Official Website. Your Subtitle text ... Welcome to the web desk of Eileen Astels, an Inspirational Christian Romance Writer. ...” But if you have a meta description that matches a query, they’ll show that instead (i.e. without “Your Subtitle text”). You might have to insert them in HTML).

A sitemap is a good way (albeit a last resort) to help users and especially search engines find the content on your site.

Blogs

If you decide to blog, **set up your blog to be hosted at <http://blog.YourName.com>**. If you already have a blog, especially you can do this through your blog host (Blogger or WordPress) and your domain registrar (GoDaddy, for example) without changing anything else, really. [Setting up Blogger Custom Domain](#) is a little bit technical, but not very hard.

Why do you want to do this? Because **every link to your blog is a “vote” for your site in search engines’ eyes**. The more votes you have, the more authority search engines think your site has. But if these links point to <http://YOURBLOG.blogspot.com>, it’s BlogSpot getting all that authority. If you move your blog to blog.YourName.com, the votes now all go toward your domain (which

many professionals believe will give your site an overall lift—and since Blogger will redirect your links, it can't hurt!).

Make sure your blog's overall feel reflects your site's overall feel. If there's a disconnect there, **it makes the reader do a double-take** and think, "Wait! Did I click on that right? Is this really the same person? It can't be! No . . . wait, (checking back and forth) that's the same name, so it must be. Okay. . . ."

You don't want that interruption. If someone visits one, and then later visits the other, you want them to think, "Hey, this looks familiar! I must have been on this woman's site before or something."

If you have trouble coming up with things to write about, you could break some of your very long blog posts into series of shorter posts. Series also helps to build a sense of anticipation among your blog readers—they're looking forward to your next post.

To make your blog posts a little more user friendly, you could **make your posts more scannable**. Few people sit and read online like they would read a book—but if we break up our text and highlight the main points, people can still "read" it and understand our points instead of glancing over the whole thing and reading nothing.

To do this, you can **use bold, white space, headings, bulleted or numbered lists, block quotes, pictures** (even stock images, such as from sxc.hu and Creative Commons–licensed ones from Flickr) and more. I see that you've done this in a few places, and that's a great start. ProBlogger has a great post on [making your content scannable](#) that goes into more depth on the topic.

Appeal directly to [encourage blog comments](#), such as asking discussion questions at the end of the post.

Similarly, you can appeal directly to your [readers to become Followers](#) and subscribers. Having the Followers widget high on the sidebar **encourages your visitors to become followers**—the prominent placement is visible on every page load, and it also promises 24 lucky readers their headshots on your front page. You can also directly mention the following option, explain it to your readers, or even run a contest for followers if that's your goal. You could also **use a subscribe widget in the sidebar to encourage your visitors to subscribe** via RSS or email.

After that, think about what you have in your sidebar—and what, of that, is most useful to your visitors. It's fine to have awards and accomplishments there—it's a

great place to display your “trophy.” But when you order the stuff in your sidebar, consider what will help your visitors find what they’re here for? What will keep them coming back (ie subscription links)? What do you want them to notice most (ie published works)?

Sidebars are also the traditional place for blog rolls, blog rings and other lists of links. But rather than helping your visitors (and your friends’ blogs), these links can detract. **When visitors come across a long list of links, their eyes are likely to gloss over—**they can’t focus on any single link, so they don’t bother looking at any of them. (A lot of links on a single page may also dilute the value you’re passing along to the sites you link to, in search engines’ eyes.)

If you want to make the links in your sidebar stand out more, you might consider having fewer of them. Don’t worry, I’m not saying you should just ditch links to your favorite blogs—but over 200 links on the main page is kind of a lot to handle. Instead, you could consider a single post, linked in your side bar or menu bar, for all your favorite links/blog roll. You can still use the same headings and divisions on the page, too.

We hope this guide and our advice will help you create a web presence that reflects you and your works well, helps you to reach out to other writers and readers, and takes your career to the next level!