

Blogging Essentials for Psychoanalysts

What is a Blog?

A blog is a portfolio of brief essays posted on the internet. A “blog post” is one essay in a blog. Blogs are organized as a “roll” with the most recent post at the top. Blog is also used as a verb, i.e. to write a blog post. Informally, “blog” is sometimes also used to refer to a post.

Where do blogs appear?

There are a variety of types of sites on the internet where a blog can appear. As a blogger, you need to decide which one or more of these is the best location for your blog. Additionally, you can, and should, repurpose blog posts. For example, a post that originally appears on *Psychology Today* can be reposted to your own website, or to LinkedIn, or both.

You do have to decide where your blog is going to appear and set up the basic structure that supports it.

What are the kinds of places blogs can inhabit?

- A dedicated website formatted just for that purpose.
- A personal page on a website that conglomerates blogs, such as *Psychology Today*.
- A component of a website (your own or your organization’s) that serves multiple functions.
- A part of your LinkedIn page.

What is the purpose of blogs and blog posts?

- To impart information to the public –the culture of the internet and blogging is generally to *give away* knowledge
- To establish your brand
- To give to prospective clients to demonstrate your expertise
- To demonstrate your writing ability (for other writing opportunities)
- To develop your ideas (write and then organize thirty-1000 word blogs and you’ve written a book!)

- To practice communicating to the public
- To promote yourself, as when you're running for an office
- To demonstrate your ability to be a thought leader or expert commentator
- Raise awareness of psychoanalysis as an explanatory tool and clinical treatment

Blogging Style

- Conversational—you are telling a story. Incorporate anecdotes.
- They do not have references (but they do have links)
- They often have an image associated with them
- Paragraphs are short
- Sentences are simple rather than compound.
- Blogs are easy to scan visually (use bullets, subheads, bold)
- Non-jargon. Try to limit psychoanalytic jargon to one or two concepts per post and explain the jargon term in non-technical language.
- Never assume knowledge of psychoanalytic terminology no matter how educated your audience.
- Headlines should capture attention. Aim is to get them to click on the title to read more. Consider incorporating key words and phrases people are likely to type into a Google search.
- Timely is good. (Peg to an event such as back to school, graduation, holidays eg "10 back to school tips for parents). When you write about a news event, try to get your post up as soon as possible.
- "Evergreen" is good too (an evergreen post is useful any time, eg. "How to increase your empathy")
- An occasional "listicle" is okay, but don't overuse them. (a listicle is a post organized around a list such as "5 reasons dogs help us feel better.")
- **Don't bury the lede.** The lede is your main point. Say it at the top! This is a change from academic/psychoanalytic style that takes some getting used to.

Examples:

- ◆ 10 Things Freud Got Right
- ◆ 5 Fears That Plague Children During A Divorce And What To Do About Them
- ◆ Is Psychoanalysis Right For Me?
- ◆ How To Manage A Narcissistic Employee

Blog content

Conceptually, blog content should:

- Solve your readers' problems; address their concerns
- Provide insight
- Give something away—news, information, tips, advice, perspective.

Concrete Issues

- Target word count—600 -1200 words
- Never use copyrighted images. If in doubt don't use it. Always credit images even if they are free.
- Where to get images: From your own camera roll. From free image sites like Wikimedia Commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page or www.unsplash.com.
- Always edit for conciseness, clarity and typos. Install the app Grammarly (www.grammarly.com) on your computer. It catches a lot of spelling and grammar mistakes. You can also write in Word and use the spelling and grammar check, then copy and paste into your blog. It doesn't hurt to use more than one checking apps.
- Add links!—this is a web-friendly thing to do and increases the odds that your blog will be seen. If you add links to others they may add links to you.
- If you want to blog for an organization such as a psychoanalytic association or university, you will have to observe their requirements for permission and content.
- Consider downloading the writing app Scrivener from Literature and Latte. It's an invaluable tool that allows you to collect reference documents and drafts and consult them seamlessly while writing.

Less Concrete but Important Issues

What about analytic neutrality?

You should always write under the assumption that your patients and colleagues will see your blog posts. So don't write anything you wouldn't want them to read. However, psychoanalysts who have been engaged in blogging and social media posting for years have found it doesn't interfere with their clinical work. Most commonly, patients don't pay attention. And when they occasionally do, it is usually not an issue or can be grist for the mill. Many of us think there's no such thing as neutrality anyway.

I wrote a blog post—now what?

Try to keep up a rhythm of writing so that eventually you have multiple posts (a blog roll). Professional bloggers post daily. Once a month is a good initial goal. Weekly is a great goal, but demanding.

Make use of your blog post. Blogs are meant to be promoted and repurposed. If you post something on your personal website, mention it on Twitter or Facebook, as in “check out my new blog post on vegetarianism.” You can post an excerpt on LinkedIn and link to the full post on your website. If you’re especially pleased about a post you can put it in your email signature. You can link to it in a newsletter or email blast.

Cautions

Some of the points below are have been mentioned above but they are things that bear repeating:

- Whose views are you giving? If you work for an institution such as a university, hospital or government agency, anything you say can reflect on it. Some institutions require vetting before you post your writing. Check with your organization’s press office for their policy.
- Your blog carries your professional (and possibly private) reputation. Remember: what you say lasts forever, can be read by anyone and can be quoted.
- Ensure you do not include any content which could be seen as defamatory. European defamatory laws are quite favorable to the people one is writing about. Truthfulness is a good protection.
- If you are writing in a way that might appear to be giving advice about psychological illness, you may want to include a disclaimer that this is general information and specific questions should be directed to a licensed practitioner.
- Double check to make sure you haven’t written anything that violates patient and clinical confidentiality.
- Consider carefully whether you want to reveal any personal beliefs, e.g. political, religious etc, that you hold. There is no prohibition against this but it should be a conscious decision.
- You are entirely responsible for the accuracy and appropriateness of your content. This is freeing, as you can experiment with ideas without the pressure of formal academic review. However, it is a responsibility to keep in mind. Some bloggers ask colleagues to review their content before posting.
- Do not use copyright images without permission and attribution.
- Blogs are designed to be interactive. Readers are usually invited to make comments, and the blogger can respond to these comments. You can decide whether or not to respond.
- Trolls are people who write negative, attacking or otherwise toxic comments.

Unfortunately, the anonymity of the internet can allow and even encourage irrationality, even viciousness. **All experts recommend ignoring comments from trolls. Do not answer them.** Even better, don't read negative comments. They will just upset and discourage you.

One approach to content

One way to apply psychoanalytic thinking is to consider what core psychoanalytic concept is the most useful for explaining a phenomenon you are interested in explaining. Usually, one of these core concepts is most apt:

- ◆ Transference (maternal, idealizing, etc.)
- ◆ Unconscious
- ◆ Defense mechanisms (in general: e.g., anxiety leads to avoidance)
- ◆ Specific Defense mechanisms (e.g. disavowal)
- ◆ Psychoanalytic large group psychology (scapegoating, xenophobia, racism)
- ◆ Narcissistic injury leading to narcissistic rage
- ◆ Empathy

Final Thoughts

Final thought #1: **Give yourself time.** Like anything else, getting comfortable with blogging and learning how to do it well take time and practice. It is a core technique for anyone interested in an applied psychoanalytic practice. But just as you didn't know how to make a good transference interpretation when you first wanted to, you won't be the best blogger you can be at the beginning. Don't give up! Blogging is a terrific way to refine your thinking and ideas and to improve your ability to communicate psychoanalytic thinking to non-analysts.

Final thought #2: **You are an expert.** Every psychoanalyst and psychoanalytic candidate is an expert in human behavior, human nature, human motivation, relationships, creativity, emotion etc etc. In a blog post you are just sharing one little bit of your expertise thereby demonstrating how psychoanalysis can help people understand everything better. You don't need any authority other than your own expertise and experience, which makes writing blogs fun. It's true because you say so, because you are an expert.

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