

Advice for bloggers who want to write well from smart people who know more than I do about these things.

Paul Brady, deputy consumer news editor at Condé Nast Traveler.

Write well: There are a lot of websites. And yet many of them are filled with nonsense because, for many years, people thought that was a good way to make money. I think the pendulum is swinging back the other way, toward smart readers who can discern quality, an audience that lots of people have realized is more important than a rabble of dum dums who just click on stuff.

Own your beat: What is your website about? "Travel" is not a good enough answer, when that term returns 3.2 BILLION Google results. Are you running the best website about gap year kids? Are you the authority on jet engines? Maybe your site is all about the rental home industry? Whatever it is, own it, and people will find you.

Consider your audience: Who are they, what do they want, why are they coming to your site? Once you figure that out—from their comments, from their notes, from analytics, from reactions across the web—keep giving it to them. Iterate success.

Foster a community: This is more than asking "What do YOU think?!" at the bottom of every post. (People on the internet already know what "the comments" are.) Conceive posts, contests, themes, conversations or ideas around which your audience can gather. Write stories that make people feel things and give them a reason to share their own experiences. You're not building a blog, you're creating a travel brand.

Don't be shady: It's up to you to decide what that means, but nothing will chase people away faster than duplicity. You can be both authentic and successful, honest.

Eileen Smith, Bear Shaped Sphere, freelance writer, essayist, blogger

Be circumspect. Be the full-strength version of yourself, and be conscious of it, without being a jerk. When writing (and being), think about the fact that there are no objective opinions, no absolutes. A place isn't a certain way. It is that way to you, the jumbled, flawed, multi-faceted protagonist. Don't tell me what it's like in hackneyed platitudes (which itself is a cliché), tell me what you experienced, with the understanding that what you saw/felt is a direct consequence of who you are in relation to where you are. For example, in Chile, I'm a long-term expat. In Nicaragua, I'm the seemingly native Spanish speaker of unspecified origin. In the U.S., I'm (sometimes) a pop-culture ignoramus. And that affects every interaction I have.

What do you know about, and what are you good at? Write about that. I was years before I realized that my language observations and thoughts appear repeatedly in my blog. "You write about language," a friend said. And she's right. So I write about that, and it's some of my best work, but most importantly, it's some of the most fulfilling work. You speak best when you are in your milieu, which goes back to the first point, knowing who you are.

Kill your words. If you sound like some other, more inane, not-quite-you, if it's coming out clunky, or it sounds like something you wouldn't want to read in a week, delete, delete, delete. Here, I'm doing it

now. If I say the same thing over and over repeat myself or write something screwy that wasn't quite right, or put something in the wrong place, I kill it.

If it's text that took some time to craft, and needs to go somewhere, but not here, not now, it goes into a parallel file called (in this case) "writing advice cuts." No mourning over dead words. They're in a better place, which is not in this piece, not today. At least not until they recombine and do a dance and find a good home where they belong. Or maybe they'll just gather dust. That's ok, too. Even the most reverent language-lovers have to kill some words sometimes.

Jason Clampet. Co-founder & Head of Content, Editor, and "noted a-hole*", Skift

**Jason's words, not mine*

Know who your are writing for. At my last company there were difficulties at one point because our B2B business had demands that didn't match with our consumer product. So while it was helpful to tell readers one thing about a destination, businesses that licensed the same content didn't always agree and there was conflict.

For many travel bloggers the challenge is this: You don't make much money so you need sponsors/freebies. Your pageviews are so bad Quantcast doesn't even estimate them. Since you can't offer the trip provider visibility, you can help some poor soul at the CVB show his/her boss enough blog posts, tweets, or photos that the boss (who is likely a very out of touch political appointee who just heard about "the blogs" from his niece) will be impressed. Everyone wins. Except readers, who don't even know you exist.

The question boils down to this: On your blog are you writing for a consumer or acting as a marketer? One isn't better than the other, but if you can't tell the difference between the two you are making a mistake.

Develop expertise and skills. This goes beyond, "I'm a foodie" or "I like budget backpacking." Everybody has opinions, but few people have something original and informed to offer. Travel writing was historically been "soft" news written by non-journalists -- the stuff just needed look good next to travel ads in newspapers.

But the reason travel sections have withered to virtually nothing is because travel writing never made itself indispensable. Why not re-run the same wire copy in papers across America/Canada when all you need is some crap from France every Spring? Anyone can write about what they did in Italy, but very, very few travel writers have the chops to break down the economics/business of it all.

If you want to be a journalist who specializes in travel it will be harder (yes, fewer free trips), but I can guarantee you'll get more respect (and page views) if you break a real story than if you Instagram a picture of yourself drinking rose using the hashtag the DMO gave you.

Get an editor if you need one. [REDACTED] I'm looking at you. Everybody makes grammatical mistakes, but bloggers like [REDACTED] seem to find purpose in terrible writing that's riddled with errors my kindergarten-age kid doesn't make. [REDACTED] used to be the worst offender, but after criticism he seems to have realized that his experiences were best shared with readers by taking a little extra time on his writing (or maybe he got help).

Lots of people who can't write have stories to tell, but don't let a horrendous grasp of the English language be a barrier your readers have to climb over. It's unprofessional, no matter how many tourism boards don't seem to care (as long as you're saying nice things, of course).

Have a purpose beyond just sharing your stories. A travel blog for the sake of sharing with your friends and loved ones while you're away is just fine. But if you want it to be something more you need to figure out who your audience is -- and that audience can't just be other travel bloggers. Is it aspiring RTW travelers? Families on extended leaves? Business travelers in unglamorous destinations? Figure it out.

Anyone with access to Hitwise or other proprietary analytics tools know that with few exceptions travel blogs get bad traffic. And all the SEO-juiced Alexa rankings, Klout scores and RTing your #THISTRIPISAWESOME isn't going to change that.

Travel blogs with a clear, purposeful voice do better. People still do the first-person experience thing that I don't always love (sorry guys), but they provide real insight into a destination. They clearly understand their readers' needs and they've made sure what they write is 1. good and 2. not just about themselves.

Short and neat version: It's easier than ever to start something on your own, so do it. Just check your spelling, know who you're really writing for, and stop asking for free stuff.

Mike Barish, Travel Contributor Manager, Thrillist

Identify your voice and then use that to connect with your audience. There are already too many guidebooks and travel sites out there for you to just run through a list of things to do in a city. *Why* do you think people should do them? *Why* did *you* do them? If you enjoyed them, who else might?

There's more to editing than proofreading. Even if you run your own site and pride yourself on being an independent blogger, partner with a friend who possesses some writing experience and ask them to look over your posts. You could do the same for them. Be each other's gatekeepers to ensure that you're publishing your best work possible. Challenge each other and your readers will benefit from the end results.

Kate Bailward, Blogger, Driving Like a Maniac

Don't be a Travel Blogger. Be a person who writes stories about travel - stories that they are proud of and believe in. I don't care about destinations: I care about the person visiting them and how they react to them. Your voice is the thing that keeps me coming back for more, so use it to its best advantage.

Oh, and for the love of god, use language properly.

Andy Murdock, US Digital Editor for Lonely Planet

Think of a photographer you like – Ansel Adams, Galen Rowell, anyone whose work you admire. Now think of all of the crappy shots they took that never saw the light of day: Ansel's thumb in the frame obscuring Half Dome, Galen tripping over a rock while trying to capture the Potala Palace. Their audience just gets to see the really good stuff. Make this true for your audience too.

Get yourself an editor. No, not that person you're thinking of right now – they like you too much. They speak your language so they know what you mean even if you're not being clear. Find another person that wants to write better and edit their work, and do it with the sole goal of making their writing as strong as possible. Maybe it's someone you only know online so you don't have to see their sad-puppy face when you point out all of the things wrong with their piece. Never let anything you write see the light of day without this person dissecting it and stitching it back together first.

Write because a story needs to be told, not because you feel the need to fill space with words. I could elaborate, but really everything is summed up in that first sentence. In fact, you should probably just ignore the last two sentences of this paragraph because they're just undermining the message.

Eva Holland, freelance writer, Senior Editor, World Hum, cofounder Vela Mag

Think beyond a straight chronology - from "The trip started on day one" to "And then I went home." I'd encourage them to zero in on the part of the trip that matters, the moment or conversation or afternoon or what-have-you that the story is really about, when the change happened. (Because something has to change, or it's not a story, right?)

Doug Mack, Author, Europe on Five Bad Ideas a Day

Know who you are and what you have to say and how you want to say it. Don't try to be everything to everyone like some sort of writerly Skymall. Explore new territory (I mean that mostly figuratively, but literally, too) and new ways of expressing yourself. For sure. Don't pander; don't simply chase the page-views and ad dollars. Unlike Skymall, you are a person, not a company. As such, I want to be able to identify with you, to know you on some level, to have a sense of a tangible human being composed of endearingly weird tics and flaws to go along with the singularly excellent skills and traits and ideas.

The best writers have a strong, interesting voice. Good writing and good ideas are their own best SEO, especially if the stories hold together in some way, if they build a portrait of a specific individual. If you always write thoughtful essays about remote villages and then you suddenly have a debauchery-filled post about package tours in Mazatlan (or vice versa), in an entirely different voice and with no acknowledgment that you're out of your usual element--well, I'm going to be confused and, frankly, will wonder if you just copied a tourism bureau's press release. You can write about those two places, of course, but I want to be able to see the connective tissue of voice and personality and ideas that runs throughout each story.

If you ever--*ever*--write the words "I'm a traveler, not a tourist," or some variant of same (and without irony), I will personally hunt you down and whack you with a rolled-up copy of Evelyn Waugh's "The Tourist's Manual." Written in 1934 and still the best, funniest, sharpest take-down of that enduring and grating travel-boast.

Lavinia Spalding, Freelance writer, Author, Writing Away: A Creative Guide to Awakening the Journal-Writing Traveler, Editor, The Best Women's Travel Writing Volume 8 and 9

Rewrite. Then rewrite, and rewrite again, and keep rewriting. I usually do at least ten revisions of whatever I'm working on before I let anyone see it. Then I send it to a few respected friends or

colleagues, and when I get their comments back, I start the revision process again. I don't publish anything until I'm sure it's my best work.

Figure out WHY you want to tell *this* story. And I'm not talking about wanting to write it because it's a fascinating subject or a beautiful place. Why specifically do **YOU** want to write it? What is it about the subject that appeals to you, personally? If you can put your finger on that before you start writing, you'll end up with a more interesting story because you'll care more—which will make your reader care more.

NARROW YOUR FOCUS. I receive countless submissions for *The Best Women's Travel Writing* that, although interesting and beautifully written, suffer from having too many stories and ideas packed into one. The writer has tried to cram absolutely everything about an experience into one essay, instead of concentrating on one crucial element of it. Ask yourself what the heart of the story is, and then make sure your work is always in service of that.

Leif Pettersen, Freelance writer, Lonely Planet guidebook author, blogger, Killing Batteries

People are going to tell you, emphatically sometimes, that you must post frequently or you'll never build a loyal readership. I disagree completely. In fact, you'll be in danger of losing readers by rushing out poorly written, pointless posts four times a week instead of posting something smart and engaging 2-3 times a month.

Scan a handful of the best travel blogs (and by 'best', I don't mean 'most popular') and look at how often they post. With all the means we have today to push out new posts to readers, long periods of silence have ceased to be detrimental to maintaining a captive audience.

Also, all the work required to keep up a frantic posting schedule is time that you should be out on the streets of your destination, absorbing the nuances and organic (i.e. non-guidebook) experiences that will become your great posts. Organic experiences that will become great blog posts do not happen to people camped out in the hostel working on their blogs for six hours a day.

Lauren Quinn, Freelance writer, cofounder Vela Mag

The most important and precious thing a writer has is his or her own voice. The craft can be learned, and should be learned, must be learned---but the thing that makes great writers great (at least the ones I love) is the strength and conviction of their voice. No one wants to hear the same old stuff, the nicey-nice. Or maybe they do, but there isn't any longevity in that. When I read, I want to feel something. I don't even necessarily want to agree with the writer; sometimes it's better when I don't. But I want to *believe* them, if that makes sense.

It's easy to fall into a groove where all you get is "wow, that was great" feedback; where you're not getting any constructive criticism that pushes you further and deeper; where you become mad self-reflexive and exist inside your own little feel-good world. It's a fine line to walk, between using your blog as a platform for unrestrained self-expression, and using it as a masturbatory oversharing session. I think exactly where that line is different for all of us, but it's crucial that we each identify that line and stay mindful of that line, traverse it like tight-rope walkers and use that community we've built as our safety net.

Mike Sowden, Freelance writer, blogger, Fevered Mutterings

Brown shoes with white trousers - for the love of Bieber, NO NO NO. This works both as a metaphor for, well, anything you like, and as a specific fashion suggestion. Take your pick.

There is an enormous amount of pressure to do what huge amounts of other people are doing, especially at first when you're not sure what YOU are doing, and especially when what other people are doing is clearly getting them money, social media buzz, laid, etc. That pressure is everywhere, and we are all susceptible to it, as social animals and as pragmatic professionals. And yet the absolute worst way to stand out from the crowd is by doing what other people are doing. Want to write like Paul Theroux? ME TOO. But there's a difference between "being inspired by" and "Xeroxing", and it's the difference between having a distinctive voice/brand/persona and sounding like everyone else. Remember who you are, and filter all incoming advice through that concept. It's the best way to end up somewhere you're happy with.

Learn how apostrophe's work. (I never did, and its hurt my career no end.)

Stories happen when plans fall apart, when scripts start editing themselves and when things go to shit. Go find these places. (Carefully. Using insurance).

If you're not slightly nervous when you click "Publish" or "Send", you haven't written hard enough.

Andrew Evans, National Geographic's Digital Nomad

1) [REDACTED]

2) Learn new skills. These days, it's not enough to just be a writer/photographer/videographer/smiling host. Don't get too caught up in your public persona statement of, "I am X . . . I do X . . ." Just be you and let travel push you into new territories. Good travel lands you in unexpected places and forces you to try new things. Suddenly you'll become a spelunker or long - distance hiker or a camel whisperer or simply a better listener. Just don't get too preachy about these self - discoveries and start calling yourself an expert, because then you will be a **** .

3) Think about what you are offering readers online. If it's just travel tips, then yawn. They can get those off a cereal box or off the umpteen million travel tip websites already out there with severely - conflicting advice on how to backpack around Europe. Besides, no matter how well - traveled you may think you are, you will eventually run out of tips. Instead, tell stories -- good stories. Good stories win over packing advice every time.

4) Take notes people! Being a blogger does not grant you a more vivid memory or a free pass from basic journalistic practice. Carry paper and pen and take notes about what you see, the names and facial expressions of people you meet, the way everything looks and behaves. When you're eating a new food, write down the best adjective you can to describe the taste of that food while said food is still in your mouth. Take more notes early on in a trip, when you're reactions to a new place are keen and fresh. If you've taken lots of good notes, you should be able to blog about a place long after the fact.

5) There are no free lunches. I mean, some of you will be offered a lot of lunches (and flights, train trips, bungee jumping, etc.) for which you will not be charged and you will think this is awesome, because it is, BUT, in the long run, that relationship can go only one of two ways. The PR industry is still having its summer fling with bloggers - at - large, but only because we are the best show in a small town. PR is the opposite of No Strings Attached. Do not expect the love to last, i.e. the free lunches to go on forever, unless your life's ambition is to become a severely - underpaid ad copywriter for the travel industry. If it is, then please kills your blog and get a job on Madison Avenue -- you will be happier and so will we. Win, win.

6) Be positive. There is a whole hypercritical school of travel writing that goes back to the Victorian Age when British ex - patriots would compare every inch of the globe with the fair and drippy England of home. It is always very easy to rip a place to shreds, and while sometimes it is very amusing to mock a place, it is much more challenging (and rewarding) to find those redeemable nuggets in a destination and let them shine. If you're covering something devastating (a war - torn country), you still have to give the reader a little leaf of hope somewhere in the piece. If you write without hope, then you are just like Paul Theroux and deserve to be pummeled.

7) If the PR industry treats you like a rock star and you start to think you are a rock star, then be a real rock star: David Bowie, Elton John, Chuck Berry. Don't be the Katy Perry of travel blogging, ever.