

SELF-MADE

BLOG CRITIQUE

A 15-POINT GUIDE TO CRAZILY
IMPROVE YOUR BLOG



“YOUR SITE LOOKS GREAT AND YOU’RE DOING AN AMAZING JOB”

I’ve been told that several times and I’m sure you (blogger) have too but the inner critique in me just wants to go on about how I can be doing so much better.

Every time I ask for a feedback from someone it’s the same generic reply I get. So since no one wants to help critique my blog constructively, I went ahead to teach myself how to from various online sources and eBooks (the internet is truly a gold mine) and I thought it would be great to share all that I’ve learnt with you.

Plus, there’s a **gift** waiting for you somewhere in between the lines so you do have to read it all. Haha

Good luck and here we go..

HI! I’M LADE



Medical student by day, fashion model by night. Chocolate and Ice-cream lover.

On my site Toyinwithfashion, I share easy tips and tricks that will help you to up your style game in no time. I also share my personal life struggles as they come and how I survive through it all. Sounds like fun right?

Thank you for getting this ebook, I’m sure you’ll love it.

LET’S CONNECT!!

Follow me on Instagram and Twitter - [@muuchinto](#)

You can also like my [Facebook Page](#)

Prep work

1. WHAT'S YOUR BLOG ABOUT?

To begin with this personal blog critique, you have to be able to say what your blog or business is about without going into a five-minute ramble like “well it’s sort of about this but sometimes I write about this and then other times I like this.”)

This isn’t just for you, either. It’s for your readers too. Once you can define this (and it can totally change over time), it’ll make finding your voice easier. It’ll make figuring out your design easier. It’ll make just about everything easier.

Knowing what you blog about isn’t about creating a tagline (we get to that later).

It’s about stating the purpose of your blog. Why does it exist? If you’re unclear about what your blog is about, it’s unlikely anyone else will have a better idea or any at all.

Have a niche (yes you need one). What do people connect you to? What do they see your blog as the go-to-spot for? If you aren’t quite sure then ASK, after which you make that the pillar for your blog. For example, I’ve gotten to understand that most people read my blog more for the fashion/style posts rather than the lifestyle posts so no I wouldn’t quit on my lifestyle posts but I’ll be making sure to hit more on this area frequently.

Define your voice and tone. You wanted to share your voice that’s why you started blogging right? So you have to define it and it all boils down to your personality. When [Fola](#) made a post on her [current favorite bloggers](#), she described my style as ‘*Modern, effortless and Playful*’. This is a very apt definition of my style and I was excited someone could see that just from reading my posts. One word on my list is **PLAYFUL**. My personality is very playful so I always want this to shine through when I write my posts or take pictures for the blog. So now onto you, jot down 5-7 words that define you and your personality and also words that describe your writing. Break it down to just 5 words and these are the words your blog design and posts should feel like. Keep these words at the back of your mind as you go through this critique.

2. WHO'S YOUR AUDIENCE

Knowing who your audiences are is very important. Without this, you’re just talking to yourself and your mom (cheers to my mom though, she’s the real mvp! She even replies my newsletters haha).

Check your sites demographics (I know wordpress offers this). Basic data like age, gender and then move on to what’s their personality like? What are their struggles? These are things that you need to know to build an active audience and to remain relevant to them.

Example- My audiences are majorly 16-40yr old women residing in Nigeria, Philippines and the US. They are currently in college or recently graduated hence still trying to adapt to the adult life. They take their fashion life seriously and are firm believers that ‘looking good is good business’

That is a short description of my audience and I also have an expanded description. Note that while defining your audience, you should also include who you want your audience to be – I’m not sure my audience believe looking good is good business but I want them to be people who think that way. With this, I can direct my posts to speak specifically to them and this is what pulls them to always check out my blog because they can see some part of themselves in there and probably more.

3. WHAT ARE YOUR BLOG GOALS?

Setting goals is a must. Think of them as the skeleton of your blog. Every decision you make should move you toward putting some meat on those bones. In doing this, you need to make SMART goals- Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic, Timely.

Specific

Say exactly what you're looking to achieve. "I want to be a better blogger" isn't specific enough. "I want to gain 1000 new email subscribers in three months" is specific.

Measurable

Quantify your goal with numbers. Say you gained 1000 email subscribers last year. That's less than 100 a month. So shoot for 150 new subscribers a month but try not to obsess about hitting numbers. Other numbers you could strive for: publish three times per week, increase traffic by 40%, earn \$200/month from blogging, etc

Actionable

Stick with action words- Verbs. Start your goals with words like increase, create, grow.

Realistic

Being realistic means setting goals that are challenging but doable. Avoid claiming you want to be the best, funniest, etc. I'm not saying you can't ever be THE best but you have plenty of steps to take to get there—make those your goals. Try not to make your goals too difficult or too easy either. If you aren't sure if your goal is realistic, you can always adjust it later.

Timely

I don't know about you, but my inner procrastinator doesn't work without a deadline. Why? There's no urgency to light my fire. Same thing happens when I read for exams, I find myself ingesting more a few days to the exam because the urgency to read up everything before the exam is there to fuel me up. Add timeframes to your goals to keep that fire lit.

Examples: within three months, every two weeks.

WRITE YOUR GOALS

With all of this in mind, it's time to get to writing out your goals! Brainstorm everything, select the most burning ideas and then start adding measurements and timeframes. Yep, it's work but also it's motivation! How many goals do you need? That's really up to you. Too many can overwhelm you, but too few can make it too easy. Try 2-5 goals to start, and then adjust as needed.

EVALUATE AND READJUST

Set reminders to review your goals at regular intervals. If a goal was met, reward yourself. Then take it up a notch!

Design

4. DESIGNING YOUR HEADER

Your header area is the most important branding element on your blog. Why? It's a powerhouse that holds your blog name, visual identity, and possibly a tagline all in one spot. It's the first thing someone sees when they land on your site. Lots of sites are shifting away from a large header area and opting for only a logo. It's a really clean and modern look like you can see from my site here



Toyin' With Fashion

Fashion|Lifestyle|Health

YOUR BLOG NAME

If you already have a blog, then you're stuck with your name (unless you do a total change like when I switched from "officialfantasy" to "toyinwithfashion"). Your blog name is a BIG part of your branding. Just two things- make sure your blog name matches your URL as closely as possible. If it doesn't, buy a domain name and redirect it to your current blog name. Two: Use a tagline that helps define your brand.

VISUAL IDENTITY

Does your blog match what you want your brand to be? For example, if you blog about simple home-cooked meals, your blog's design should be simple and clean, not cluttered with ads or excessive buttons. Think simple.

TRY THIS LITTLE EXERCISE

First, describe your website with no more than five characteristics...preferably a list of words. What do you want readers to subconsciously think about when if someone were to say your blog name to them? Think colors, tone, emotions, design, and function.

Ex. yellow, organic, clean, inspirational, educational, eclectic, hysterical, bold, insightful, informational, stylish, colorful, photography, crafty, empowering, bright

Now take a look at your header. Does it convey some or all of these words? If not, you may have work to do.

5. YOUR TAGLINE x BRANDING

Taglines can either support your website's name or elaborate on it if your name isn't descriptive. It is part of what the reader sees in the first few seconds of landing on your blog. Do you need a tagline? Not necessarily, especially if your blog name really describes your blog.

Eg: My blogs name 'Toyin with Fashion' can already tell you that I'm mostly blogging on how I toy (play around with) fashion and style.

Ask yourself "if someone were visiting for the first time, would they know what my blog is about in 5 seconds?" If someone lands on your blog from a search engine, or somewhere similar, 3-5 seconds is about as long as you have to make your mark. If they're coming to read a blog post, they'll stay longer. But will they get what your blog is about from one post? Maybe.

Taglines give YOU the opportunity to tell your story instead of the reader having to guess. You put them in the right frame of mind for reading your content. That's why I do have the 'Fashion | Lifestyle | Health' on my header. In case a new reader thinks it's all fashion, now they know there's some lifestyle and health (this has been slacking though) posts too.

6. IMAGE QUALITY

Even the best header design in the world can look like crap if the quality is poor.

So what defines bad quality?

FUZZY GRAPHICS- A professional site has clear, crisp images whether they are illustrations or photographs. Make sure your images aren't fuzzy or out of focus (unless it's an artistic out-of-focus). Sometimes it's as simple as uploading a PNG image (larger file, but better for graphics) instead of a JPG (smaller file size, better for photos).

PIXILATED GRAPHICS- It's when you see all the dots that make up an image, which look like squares when seen up close. This usually occurs when you try to increase an image to a size bigger than the original.

If your design elements have any of these issues, fit it ASAP!

While only a few people can argue with what constitutes good or bad design, everyone can agree that image quality is a must for a professional-looking blog. This is why I'm slacking on blog posts because I don't want to have to put up pictures taken with my phone when I can get better. This is also why I shoot in bulk.

Don't forget to fill in your images name and alternate tags. The alt tag lets you title an image so that it makes sense for search engines.

7. SIDEBARS ARE IMPORTANT

Sidebars are meant to supply your reader with more information: about your blog, about you, about popular content or products you sell. Putting more than necessary will distract people.

Avoid distracting ads (the ones that play videos immediately or a song), blogrolls (you want to keep people on your site not drive them away) and unnecessary badges (keep only very relevant ones, too many makes it look like you have nothing better to put there)

What then should be in your sidebar?

AN INTRODUCTION- A sentence about you, your name, what you offer your readers, how will they benefit from your blog?, etc. Just remember to keep it short.

YOUR PICTURE- People need to place a face to a name.

LINKS TO SOCIAL MEDIA PAGES – Since most people are not ready for the full commitment of an email listing upon first visit, putting up links to your social media pages is very essential. Make sure they are visible too. Wordpress offers you widgets for most social media sites.

ADS- Ads are a great way to monetizing your blog but you should never have too many ads. Get rid of in-text ads- contextual ads that turn words in your content into hyperlinks, when you hover over them, they popup with an advertisement. They look unprofessional and most times send you to crappy sites.

FOOTER- If you have a footer (you should), use your footer to include relevant information like popular posts, an additional place to show your social media buttons, categories, a widget highlighting your presence on a fave social media platform (like showing your latest Instagrams), etc.

Functionality

8. ANYTHING JUST NOT RIGHT.

Take away anything that isn't looking right on your blog.

Broken links- If you're on WordPress, there's a great plugin called [Broken Link Checker](#). It'll alert you if any of your links break due to anything from someone shutting down their blog or someone mistyping their blog URL when they leave a comment.

Missing Images- Don't we all just hate that little broken image symbol? The broken link checker also catches these so get the plugin already?

9. OWN YOUR DOMAIN

If you're serious about blogging, owning your own domain shows just that! Its more professional and make you look more credible. It's easier to remember and most importantly, needs to be purchased before it's gone. Check into a domain name as soon as you can. And know that people will snatch up domain names of popular blogs in hopes of selling them at a higher cost (sad, but true). Linda Ikeji (Nigeria's top blogger) is a good example.

10. NAVIGATION MENU

Your menu is one of the most important elements on any page. It should tell your reader where to find all the key pieces of your blog. Having too few items makes your space look sparse and having too many makes it look cluttered.

Having trouble with too few items? What's your most popular category? You can actually add a page that's an archive of an entire category. If you offer product reviews and advertising opportunities, be sure that's in your menu too.

If your problem is too many, consider a drop down menu like mine. They help to include sub-categories in a clean way. Better still, create a secondary menu.

11. FINDING YOUR POSTS, COMMENT BOX & SHARING

I don't think I need to state the importance of these things. Your readers always want more so make it easier for them. Wordpress offers plugins like 'Wordpress Popular Posts' and 'Jetpack' that help with these.

Put your search box at a place that it can be easily found. Mine is right below my header image.

Show similar/related posts at the bottom of each post. If someone liked a current post, they would want to read more on that topic.

Have a category drop down or/and an archives list.

Create a smooth commenting process. I get really tired when I read an amazing post and want to comment but can't find the comment box or I have to sign up for something before I can comment. A new reader would most likely opt for not commenting in such cases.

Sharing buttons are also a must for a great blog. People like to share when they come across a great article (or well I do) so make sure they are legible enough. My share buttons are at the end of my posts and are also visible below each post excerpt on the home page.

Content

12. A CLEAR ABOUT PAGE & CONTACT PAGE

Your About page is the single most important page beside the home page. Why? It's the first place someone goes to find out more about you and your blog. *It's also one of the hardest pages you'll write.* Write a little about you (not your entire life story please), your expertise (this improves your credibility) and a little about your blog & what you have to offer your readers. Whether you choose to write in first person or third that's really up to you.

Your Contact page is as important as your About page. When people are ready to talk or brands are ready to connect, this is the first page they look for. So what goes into a good contact page? Make it easy to find- it should be included in your navigation menu. Always list your email address.

If you're interested in working with companies, don't be shy about making it obvious. Some people prefer to include this here and others create a PR/ADVERTISING page but it's all up to you.

Important things you need to tell them are-

About your blog- what's your blog about? What topics do you cover?

Your readers- are they mostly female?, age range, their values, attitudes, struggles, etc.

Who you've worked with- You could simply put up the different logos of companies you've worked with. If you've not, you can skip this part.

What opportunities interest you- Be explicit on what sorts of opportunities you're interested in or "services" you offer: reviews, giveaways, sponsored posts, advertising, ambassadorships, etc.

How to learn more- Do they email you or request a media kit? Let them know!

Now here is where I have the *gift* for you. Hopefully you made it to this point.

I recently just realized the importance of a media kit hence leading me to make one. A media kit helps you to highlight all the things listed above in a more professional way and makes working with you easier and faster for companies. It helps reduce unnecessary emails because it breaks it all down for the company looking to work with you.

After the lengthy process of making mine, I realized not everybody might want to go through that whole process especially if your current budget is not allowing you to buy a media kit template like me, I made a [free template](#) for you.

It's a two page template. It explains everything you need and is editable with Microsoft Word which I believe is more accessible (most free templates I found need you to have adobe photoshop). After you're done editing it, you may want to convert it to pdf format. I feel that's much better.



MEDIA KIT
TEMPLATE.docx

13. IMPROVE YOUR WRITING

Not everyone is a born writer. But everyone can improve their writing. It just takes a little practice and knowing some of the elements of good writing.

KNOW YOUR POINT- What's the purpose of the post you're writing? Is it to entertain? To educate? To inspire? Figure this out before you write your post and it'll help you stay on track with what you're writing... then edit out the stuff that doesn't serve any purpose.

KEEP YOUR SENTENCES ACTIVE FOR TIGHTER WRITING

While you can't always do this, try to keep an active verb in your sentences rather than a passive one.

Passive: Coffee is enjoyed by many.

Active: Many people enjoy coffee.

DON'T GET TOO FANCY - You aren't writing a thesis paper. You're writing a blog. Simple words make your post easier to read. Writing like you speak is also always better.

IF YOU RAMBLE, DON'T STRAY-A lot of bloggers have a rambling style. It makes readers feel you're telling them a story over a cup of coffee. However, make sure you don't get TOO far away from your point before bringing them back (or take readers away from your point and back too many times).

USE PARAGRAPH BREAKS -Paragraphs can be a powerful way to add emotion to your words without even changing your writing, particularly when storytelling. Try splitting important parts of a story into new single-sentence paragraph to intensify the emotion. It pulls your eyes down to keep reading more.

CREATE SUB-HEADINGS FOR LONGER POSTS- Break up separate ideas using sub-headings to give your readers a mental pause. Sub-headings also help readers understand the main points of your post if they happen to just skim your post (which MANY of them will because they're in a time-crunch, looking for something in particular or just checking out the pictures). When you change your text to subheadings, make sure you select header sizes like h2 and h3 as opposed to just bolding the sub-headers.

EDIT, EDIT, EDIT- never ever hit publish without reviewing your post at least once. Even a quick read is better than nothing. Editing is as important, maybe even more important, than writing.

14. INCREASE YOUR ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is an important part of blogging or running an online business.

So how do we actually get people to do it? We've already walked through some things like writing relatable posts and having a simple comment process.

ASK A QUESTION- This is one supposedly tried-and-true way to encourage engagement with your readers. But it doesn't always work. Why? Ask yourself:

- Are you asking three or four questions at the end of a post hoping that people pick one to answer?
- Are your questions too open-ended?
- Do you ask questions at the end of EVERY post?

All of these may hurt rather than help. However, you have to know your audience and what they respond to. If the questions you're using aren't working, try being more specific, sticking with 1-2 questions, or asking a "this or that" type question.

DON'T ASK FOR TOO MUCH- Are you asking for a retweet at the end of each post, for people to subscribe to your email list, and to pin your post too? If you ask for too much, people may end up getting overwhelmed and not doing anything at all. Determine what you really want the most and ask for it (and it's okay to change it up each post too).

AVOID "CLOSING" GREETINGS

Do you end your posts with things like "Happy Friday!" or "Thanks for reading!"? While they are super nice, they also cut off the conversation. Leave the post open for conversation by watching how much you use these greetings.

15. GET TO WORK!



CONGRATS!! You made it through to the end. I do hope you learnt a thing or five?? It's not all about reading but more about putting in work so like the last point says, GET TO WORK!!! I can't wait to see all the amazing changes you make on your blog so cheers to a better and improved blog.

I'm sure you know one or two people that will find this resourceful so don't be a meanie . Do me a huge favor and share this with your twitter followers. I already created a tweet for you!

[CLICK HERE TO TWEET THIS!](#)

"This Self-Made Blog Critique ebook by @muuchinto is filled with amazingly useful advise! Get yours free here!"

I would also love to read your feedback so please do send them in, I'll greatly appreciate if you can [write your feedbacks here](#) that way new readers get to see them too.