How to Start a Blog

A primer.

Illustration by Caitlin (http://rookiemag.com/author/caitlin/)

I'm a blogger (http://bonjourgirl.blogspot.com), and my friends are always asking me how to start one. I usually tell them that I was blessed with mine via immaculate conception, but they never believe me. When I first started my blog in 2008, I didn't have a lot of friends who were interested in talking about runway shows or the music that I really liked, but I knew I wanted to talk about those things somewhere.

If you're a writer—or what I call a "sharer"—you'll no doubt love blogging. I like to write, but more important, I like to *share*. I like to share things that I've discovered, I like to share my opinions on a movie that I'm really into at the moment, or a book I just read. Luckily, right at the time I began blogging, a bunch of other young girls across the country were doing the same thing. I was able to interact with an awesome community, one that in part evolved into what you know as Rookie today.

So if you're thinking about starting a blog, but aren't completely sure how to go about it, welcome to Madame Cills's Blogging Institute for Girls.*

Decide what your blog is going to be about.

First things first! Your blog can be about anything you want, like politics or romantic comedies or every little thing your next-door neighbor does as you watch them creepily from your window. It's a common misconception that blogs are just online diaries, or that every blogger is an aspiring Carrie Bradshaw. Untrue! Blogs *can* be a place where you write about what happened during the day, or what's going on in your life, but the topics and themes are endless. Your blog can consist of funny pictures of your cat (http://rookiemag.com/2012/10/dogs-are-the-best/). If you feel passionate about *Downton Abbey*, you can dedicate your blog to Lady Grantham's zingers (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVMtffzbAwk). Or maybe you just want to write about music? So post your own reviews. One time, I started a blog consisting of screencaps of conversations between myself and my fellow Rookie Gabby (http://gabbyonichat.tumblr.com/). (It's a really good blog—probably the best one out there.) The point is: the possibilities are endless!

Pick a platform.

Not all blogging platforms are the same. There are a lot of platforms out there right now, but these are some of my favorites:

Blogger (http://www.blogger.com/)
This completely free blogging site is home to the blogs of a lot of Rookie writers, including Arabelle (http://www.fashionpirate.net/) and Laia (http://www.geometricsleep.com/). And, of course, I'm sure we're all familiar with Style Rookie (http://www.thestylerookie.com/), Tavi's infamous tribute to Shawn from *Boy Meets World*. And that's only a few of them!

Blogger is extremely user-friendly, and if you don't know much about HTML and coding, it's easily customizable. I would recommend Blogger to those who tend to write lengthier posts, often with several different components, like images and video. While most blogging platforms are becoming more minimalist and image-driven—Tumblr and Pinterest don't tend to feature much text—Blogger stands out as a solid platform for writers. You create an account, pick a template, and compose an entry by writing directly in the text box, no coding necessary. Most templates follow a basic format: title at the top, a large section for your post, and a sidebar for links and pictures. Hit the little picture icon to insert a picture, hit the little link icon to insert a link—it's easy.

Tumblr (https://www.tumblr.com/)
I love Tumblr. It's equally easy to use, and you can upload video, MP3s, and photos to the site in seconds. I wouldn't recommend Tumblr if you want to write long posts that incorporate a lot of different forms of media, because most Tumblr posts are really short. It's also more difficult to mix media in one post, like including an MP3 AND video. But if you mainly want to post pictures, Tumblr might be the best platform for you. Many long-form blogs and websites have Tumblrs as their simple sidekicks. (For example, if you read Rookie, you'll no doubt want to follow our Tumblr (http://rookiemag.tumblr.com/) for extra content.) In the Tumblr feed, all of your posts and the posts of others that you follow are listed in chronological order in one continuous stream. You can re-blog other people's posts or "heart" them, which allows for a lot of interaction among bloggers.

LiveJournal (http://www.livejournal.com/)
LiveJournal is a website for, you guessed it, online journals. The great thing about it is that you can choose very specifically

(http://www.livejournal.com/support/faq/24.html) whom you do and don't want viewing your blog or even specific posts, whereas with other blogs you would have to make *all* posts private or password-protected. My favorite part about LiveJournal is the communities. A community (http://www.livejournal.com/support/faq/77.html) is "a journal where many users post entries about a similar topic." I live and die for online fashion content communities like Mixologies (http://mixologies.livejournal.com/) and Foto_decadent (which I'm not linking to because it has an adult content notice!) that allow me to look at editorials from magazines all over the world.

WordPress.com (http://wordpress.com/) and WordPress.org (http://wordpress.org/)

Wanna know a secret? Rookie is made using WordPress. IS YOUR MIND BLOWN!? Anyway, WordPress.com and WordPress.org are pretty different for a few reasons. WordPress.org isn't for novice bloggers. First of all, you need to find an internet-hosting service (http://ect.wp.com/hosting/) and then download the WordPress software to your computer. It's definitely difficult to customize and set up for someone who doesn't know anything about coding, blogging, or building a website. If you ARE familiar with these things and want more control of where and how your blog content is stored, then WordPress.org might be something to consider. The best thing about using WordPress.org is that you're in complete control of your site, so you can authenticate commenters and fully control spam. It's also an open-source (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_source) software, which means it;s free! It gives you a lot more freedom, but that freedom requires some experience.

If your head is throbbing with the thought of building something from scratch, there's WordPress.com, which is more like Blogger. It's free and easy to use, so there won't be any tears on your laptop as you try to figure out how to make all your links hot pink when you hover over them. Which brings me to my next piece of advice...

Make your blog look effing sweet.

Truth: people like good-looking websites. I'm a very visual person, so when I started my blog, personalizing its aesthetic was important to me. Being able to easily manipulate your layout is very useful. Don't be afraid to pick a standard layout, and then fool around with sizing and colors. One of my favorite music blogs, Fluxblog (http://www.fluxblog.org/), has a minimalist design and is easy to navigate. One of my favorite art and design blogs, Booooooom (http://www.booooooom.com/), features a changing header and multicolored links. And It's Nice That (http://www.itsnicethat.com/) breaks the usual format of posts on one side, sidebar on the other, by including tiny, square-shaped previews that you click on to access the full post.

This is why I strongly suggest learning a little bit of HTML (http://www.simplehtmlguide.com/cheatsheet.php). Most blogging services (such as the ones I've listed above) can be customized using HTML. People have made their Tumblrs look and feel like professional websites, but it's just coding that does the trick. If you're reading a blog and you like the way it looks, right-click (control-click on a Mac) and hit "View Page Source" or "View Source" and you'll get the HTML coding for the blog's layout. Don't steal it, but use it as a guideline.

Finally, my 10 commandments for blogging.

1. Thou shalt not spew anonymous hate in comment sections, because that's really immature and terrible.

2. Honor thy fellow bloggers and re-blog with proper credit! Whether you're re-blogging a work of art or a piece of text, always give credit to the original source.

3. Thou shalt not feature music that plays automatically, because that's just annoying. Sorry!

4. Make thy blog easy to read and use. No complicated Flash animation on thy blog!

5. Thou shalt not judge the success of one's blog by the number of comments or followers. It can take time to gain a readership.

6. Thou shalt not ask aggressively for link exchanges from other bloggers.

7. Title thy blog wisely. Snuffle Pug Fashion Kisses might get tiresome after a while.

8. Thou shalt not assume that everyone on the web is who he or she says they are. I don't want to sound like a mom, but seriously: trust your instincts, and beware of randos!

9. Thou shalt respect the privacy of other people! Blogs give you an outlet to write, but it doesn't make you a journalist. It can be unethical to share information about people who don't want that information given to the public.

10. Thou shalt exercise caution, for what's on the internet is there FOREVER AND EVER AND EVER.

Now join the party, and I wish ye good luck on your journey through the world wide web. ◆