

# HOW TO CREATE EFFECTIVE AND ENGAGING CONTENT

## COURSE NOTES + ACTION CHECKLIST

Learning to create effective and engaging content is one of the greatest skills you can bring to your business. Anyone can create content, but very few people can actually create effective content that creates true fans and customers.

In this master class with Leo Babauta of Zen Habits (one of the biggest single-author blogs in the world), you'll learn exactly how to make your content more effective, more engaging, more sharable and more valuable.

This document contains important lesson notes and action checklists for several lessons. **Please follow along with this document as you complete the lessons.**

### LESSON 2: GETTING INSIDE YOUR READERS' HEADS

UNDERSTANDING YOUR READERS AND WHAT THEY'RE INTERESTED IN IS THE FOUNDATION OF EFFECTIVE CONTENT. LEARN HOW TO GET INSIDE YOUR READERS' HEADS USING LEO'S SIMPLE STRATEGY IN THIS LESSON.

THE most important thing as a writer is your reader. Without the reader (or viewer), you're just talking to yourself. Without the reader (customer), you have no sales and no business.



Building an effective relationship with your readers all starts with understanding them. Your readership is constantly evolving. Understanding your readers is an ongoing process.

### **Getting inside your readers' heads:**

**Step 1** - start with yourself (think about how you read other sites)

**Step 2** - understand who is coming to your site

- Look at comments
- Look at which blog posts are shared
- Pay attention to emails from readers
- Run "ask the readers" posts and surveys
- Do one-on-one coaching (even free calls)

### **Putting the knowledge into action:**

- Match up what you can offer with what your audience needs
- Craft your blog content to deliver what the reader is interested in (from your research)
- Develop products to deliver what your readers want

### **ACTION CHECKLIST - LESSON 2**

- ☐ **Examine your own habits as a blog reader.** Take notes on how you read sites, what you look for, and what turns you off.
- ☐ **Make a reader profile.** Examine blog comments, note which posts are most shared, pay attention to reader emails. Run an “ask the readers” post or conduct a survey. Consider doing one-on-one consulting (for free if necessary) to get to know your readers better.

- ❑ **Give your site a reader-focused audit.** Eliminate any areas where you're putting your needs first over your readers' needs. Respect your readers, respect their needs, deliver what they want and get out of the way.

## LESSON 3: HOW TO WRITE AMAZING HEADLINES

THE HEADLINE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT SET OF WORDS IN YOUR POST BECAUSE IT IS THE FIRST THING READERS READ (ON YOUR SITE, ON OTHER SITES, IN SOCIAL MEDIA, ETC.).

There are **3 things a headline should do:**

- 1) Get the reader's attention
- 2) Convey a benefit
- 3) Make the reader curious

### **When should you write the headline?**

Start first with a draft headline. This will make you consider the specific problem you're solving for the reader.

### **How to get to a final headline?**

After you write the post, you'll have better ideas for the final headline. Write a few new drafts of the headline. Iterate and choose the best one.

### **For inspiration:**

- Look at other headlines doing well on social media
- Look at magazine headlines

### **What about headline formulas?**

- Formulas can be a good place to start.



- List headlines are one of the most effective formulas.
- Look for formula headlines that work on Digg, POPURLs, Twitter, etc.
- Be careful with formulas because they can lose effectiveness over time.
- Make sure your headlines are also different from what's typical in your industry.

### **When to break the rules?**

- When you're comfortable with formulas.
- When formulas don't work.
- When formulas aren't true to the post.

*Always remember:* the headline must be true to the post.

But, feel free to take risks... breakthroughs come from risk taking.

### **RESOURCES MENTIONED IN THIS LESSON:**

<http://popurls.com/> (for studying popular headlines)

<http://digg.com/>

### **ACTION CHECKLIST - LESSON 3**

- ☐ Start your next blog post by writing the headline first.
- ☐ Look to social media to observe how highly shared headlines are written.
- ☐ Spend as much time on your next headline as you spent on writing the content itself.  
Try to develop a highly sharable headline using Leo's formulas.

## LESSON 4: BLOG STEROIDS

SOME POSTS WILL GROW YOUR BLOG 100X FASTER THAN OTHERS. HOW DO YOU KNOW THE DIFFERENCE? HOW DO YOU CREATE MORE "POWERFUL POSTS" TO GROW YOUR BLOG FASTER? LEARN LEO'S SPECIAL POWERFUL POST FORMULA IN THIS LESSON.

### The Powerful Post:

- Attracts readers and links
- Does well on social media
- Gets people to forward and share it
- Gets people to subscribe
- Helps readers and changes lives

What is your blog's signal to noise ratio? How many of your posts are powerful? How many are fluff?

The next time you sit down to write, start with the goal of making an impact. If your post won't have impact, don't bother writing it.

If you wrote with the intention of having impact, but the impact wasn't delivered, ask yourself what you can do to improve next time.

### Leo's Powerful Post Formula:

- Outstanding headline (see lesson on headlines)
- Incredible benefit to the reader (solve an important problem)
- Post structure aims to change the readers' minds (see lesson on post structure)

### RESOURCES MENTIONED IN THIS LESSON:

<http://zenhabits.net/top-20-motivation-hacks-overview/> - leo's first "Powerful Post"

<http://sethgodin.typepad.com/> - short but powerful posts



**ACTION CHECKLIST - LESSON 4**

- ☐ Write your next blog post using Leo's "Powerful Post Formula."
- ☐ Examine your blog's signal to noise ratio. How much "fluff" are you publishing?  
Commit to only publishing content that will impact your reader.

**LESSON 5: HOW TO CHOOSE BLOG TOPICS THAT MATTER**

Choosing topics that matter for your content is essential to your success, but it's also a constant challenge. Learn a proven strategy for choosing powerful blog topics in this lesson.

**How to choose topics that matter:**

1) **Get inside your readers' minds** - identify the problems they're facing (look for biggest pain points and potential benefits)

- Places to look: comments, emails, tweets, etc.  
Common questions are great candidates for blog posts.
- Consider a question submission page on your website for readers to write in with questions.

2) **Ask yourself: is this topic (and your solution) different?** Does it stand out?

- Solutions/topics that don't stand out aren't worth writing about.
- Challenge conventional ideas (even your own ideas).

**ACTION CHECKLIST - LESSON 5**

- ☐ In your next blog post, attempt to solve a single problem that you've heard your readers ask for solutions to.

## LESSON 6: IDEAL POST STRUCTURE AND WORD COUNT

The reader is looking for something in your post. Use Leo's ideal post structure and word count to deliver what your readers are looking for.

### LEO'S IDEAL POST STRUCTURE

#### Intro

Start by giving them a reason to care. A good intro gets attention, then gives them a reason to care.

- Why does this matter to the reader?
- What problem will it solve? What benefit will the reader experience?

#### The "What"

- Don't just dive into the solution, set up the "what" of the problem first.
- What happens if you don't do the proposed solution?
- Help the reader understand why they should make a change.

#### The "How" (your solution)

- Make your solution easy to digest/scan (Leo likes to use lists to present solutions).
- Use sub-headlines for important points.

#### The Conclusion

- Always end a post with something memorable.
- Aim for something that would be quotable.

### POST LENGTH AND WORD COUNT

Post length doesn't matter much. Some bloggers are successful with 200 word posts, others with 4,000 word posts.



What matters is that your post is impactful.

Leo recommends new bloggers aim for between 500 and 1500 words to start with. If you go outside of those limits, that's fine, but make sure there is a reason.

### **Bonus tips:**

Don't be afraid to repeat yourself on your blog (new visitors need to hear your best advice).

Make text skimmable (with sub-headlines) so long-time readers can skip over your repeated advice.

### **RESOURCES MENTIONED IN THIS LESSON:**

A Zen Habits post with a memorable ending as mentioned in the video: <http://zenhabits.net/no-goal/>

### **ACTION CHECKLIST - LESSON 6**

- ☐ Use Leo's recommended post structure in your next blog post. Be sure to include an intro, the "what," the "how," and a conclusion with a memorable ending.

## **LESSON 7: HOW TO ENGAGE VISITORS**

**EFFECTIVE CONTENT GETS YOUR POINT ACROSS AND CONVINCES PEOPLE TO TAKE ACTION. ENGAGING CONTENT GETS THE READER INTERESTED AND MAKES THEM WANT TO CONTINUE READING OR WATCHING.**

### **Techniques for Engaging**

- Storytelling
- Invoking curiosity
- Humor





## Style, tone, language for engaging

- Be conversational
- Don't use jargon and acronyms (these can turn off uninformed readers)
- Explain concepts as if beginners are reading
- Be friendly + casual

## How to engage when addressing tough topics

Don't cram your opinion down peoples' throats; bring them along on an exploratory journey. Talk about yourself and your experience with the topic (how you came to change your mind/behavior).

### ACTION CHECKLIST - LESSON 7

- ☐ Pay attention to your style and tone in your next blog post. Try writing more conversationally. Be friendly and casual. Intentionally change your style and observe how your audience reacts.

## LESSON 8: THE IDEAL POSTING SCHEDULE FOR BLOG GROWTH

WHAT POSTING SCHEDULE IS BEST FOR BLOG GROWTH? FIND OUT IN THIS LESSON.

### ACTION CHECKLIST - LESSON 8

- ☐ If you're unhappy with your blog's growth, try increasing your posting frequency (if you can without sacrificing quality).
- ☐ If your blog's signal-to-noise ratio is too low (you're posting too much fluff), you may need to slow down your posting schedule to accommodate higher quality posts.