Bound to Create

You are a creator.

Whatever your form of expression — photography, filmmaking, animation, games, audio, media communication, web design, or theatre — you simply want to create without limitation. Bound by nothing except your own creativity and determination.

Focal Press can help.

For over 75 years Focal has published books that support your creative goals. Our founder, Andor Kraszna-Krausz, established Focal in 1938 so you could have access to leading-edge expert knowledge, techniques, and tools that allow you to create without constraint. We strive to create exceptional, engaging, and practical content that helps you master your passion.

Focal Press and you.

Bound to create.

We’d love to hear how we’ve helped you create. Share your experience: www.focalpress.com/boundtocreate
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Ten Questions to Ask before Posting

This is the one skill that you must get right. If you miss it, you’ll fail. After all, if you consistently choose stories none of your site’s visitors are interested in reading, they’re not likely to return for more. Before you decide to write a story, think about this: Why are my readers coming to my site? They’re probably looking for variety, novelty, and entertainment in their lives. They want to be engaged. So you need to be sure that every post you write has entertainment value. That doesn’t mean you have to be a comedian. It simply means you need to tickle that novelty-and-variety jones almost every reader has. This story-selection process is complicated and changes from day to day, but we’re here to help. We’ve boiled down your selection of stories to a list of questions you need to ask yourself before you give it the go-ahead for publication.

1. Is It New?
There’s good reason why it’s called “news.” Your readers will be expecting the latest products, services, and occurrences. If you’re in the tech world, posting about an old product that you characterize as new will hurt your credibility, showing readers that you don’t know what’s old and what’s new. Check carefully to see if the product is indeed brand-new, and this is not as easy as it seems, because as we’ve warned, PR people and over-eager companies often try to characterize older products as new.

Example: “Ray Dolby, Father of Modern Noise Reduction, Dead At 80”

2. Is There Something Fascinating and Different about It?
People are drawn to novel situations and products, and if you’ve never seen anything like the item you’re considering, that might be a good enough reason to post it. Talk about why it’s groundbreaking, what’s new about it, and what you think about its implications for the future.

Example: “Your Board Game Is in My Video Game: Tangible Play Mixes the Real and Virtual”
What do you get when you put a pair of board gaming geeks who have worked at NVIDIA, Google, LucasArts, and Ubisoft together in the same room? (http://techcrunch.com/2013/09/10/your-board-game-is-in-my-video-game-tangible-play-mixes-the-real-and-virtual/)

3. Does Anybody Really Care about This?
When you ask the question, “Why should I care?” do you have a good answer? Many skeptical readers are thinking that phrase to themselves as they read every one of your blog posts: “Why should I care? Why should I care?” After scanning the day’s possibilities, always ask yourself that, too. If you can’t come up with an answer, move along—there’s nothing to see here.
What to Write About

Example: “Bing Refresh Brings a New Logo, More ‘At a Glance’ Info with Cards and Info from Your Friends”
Microsoft’s search engine continues to push the rock up a hillside as it chases Google, and some new Bing features add or enhance its search in very familiar ways. (www.engadget.com/2013/09/17/bing-logo-refresh-new-features/)

4. Is There Something Hilarious, Quirky, or Unbelievable about It?
Some story topics are wonderful sight gags, with built-in humor that will make readers laugh as you tell them the story or show them the picture. Sometimes few words are needed for these humorous and crazy stories.

Example: “Hilarious iPhone 5S Launch Parody Touches on Truth”
As buzz reaches a fever pitch over the iPhone 5S launch just a few days away, Matthias and J-Fred might have stumbled upon some truth in this parody video. (www.charliewhite.net/2013/09/iphone-5s-launch/) 

5. Have You Had Personal Experience with It?
Here’s your chance to relate your own unique experiences. This is the gold that you have to mine—your own observations, judgments, and firsthand opinions about your topic. Elevate yourself above the crowd that’s busy rewriting press releases and scribbling their secondhand accounts, and talk about what you’ve learned, firsthand, about your chosen topic. Maximize your personal experiences with the field you’re writing about, and you’ll be a much better blogger.

Example: “iOS 7 Makes My iPhone 5 Feel Brand New [REVIEW]”
Even if you aren’t buying a new iPhone this week, you’ll feel like you did if you upgrade to iOS 7. (www.charliewhite.net/2013/09/ios-7-review/)

6. Is There a Good Graphic or Photo Available?
Sometimes even a so-so story will be a winner if you’ve found an interesting graphic. Most readers are skimmers, and a compelling photo will draw their eyes into the story and get them instantly involved, where a blurry shot or tiny icon-sized graphic might not draw in their attention enough. Besides the headline, the quality of the graphic is one of the main factors in drawing readers into your work. And we’ve noticed that a big graphic is more likely to attract the interest of users of discovery engine StumbleUpon, who are more likely to be lured into your post—and ultimately click that “Thumbs Up” button—if there’s a compelling pic at the top of your post.

Example: “Smartphones Leave Yesterday’s Supercomputers in the Dust [INFOGRAPHIC]”
Do you have any idea how powerful that smartphone in your pocket is? (www.charliewhite.net/2013/09/smartphones-vs-supercomputers/)
7. Is Everybody Else in the World Covering It?

When a major story hits (such as the release of the next iPhone), everyone will be writing about it, and if you’re writing about gadgets, you will, too. But if there is a minor gadget or story topic that everyone seems to be writing about, and you don’t really have anything extra to add to the conversation, skip it. However, don’t let what other blogs are covering dictate what you’ll cover. Keep in mind that your readers aren’t scanning hundreds of blogs like you do. See the situation from your readers’ point of view—do they want to hear what you have to say about this product? If you’re a good blogger, the answer is probably yes.

Example: “The NSA Can Read Some Encrypted Tor Traffic”

Security expert Robert Graham has done a bit of research and posts that the encryption standard used by earlier versions of the “secure” Tor protocol is most probably insecure and readable by the NSA. (http://techcrunch.com/2013/09/07/the-nsa-can-read-some-encrypted-tor-traffic/)

8. Is It a World’s First or Record-Breaking?

People are delighted by something they haven’t seen before, and finding something that’s the world’s first, fastest, craziest, tallest, oldest, smallest, etc. might be interesting enough to capture a crowd of readers. Just think, something that’s the best in the world! How can they resist?

Example: “Sharp Unveils World’s First THX-Certified Ultra HDTV”

Ultra HDTV is getting more affordable, and Sharp did its part on Wednesday by unveiling a THX-certified 70-inch ultra-HD television for $8,000. (http://mashable.com/2013/06/26/sharp-ultra-hdtv/)

9. Is It a Hot Topic of Considerable Controversy That Will Lure Comments from Readers?

Sometimes people are itching to comment about something that’s going on in the news. Give them a chance to comment on that topic in your blog, too. Be sure that the current event that’s causing such controversy is related to your blog’s mission, but if the story is, for example, a massive terrorist attack or natural disaster, there’s probably a way you can figure out an angle that would fit with your blog. (Find the hot topics of the moment by using the Google Trends site we mentioned earlier in this chapter: www.google.com/trends/hottrends.)

Example: “NSA Project XKeyscore Collects Nearly Everything You Do on the Internet”

Further leaks have revealed an NSA project called XKeyscore that, with a few keystrokes, can give a data analyst access to nearly everything a user does on the Internet—from chat sessions to email to browsing habits. (http://techcrunch.com/2013/07/31/nsa-project-x-keyscore-collects-nearly-everything-you-do-on-the-internet/)
10. Do You Have a Unique Opinion or Spin on the Topic?

If an item you’re considering writing about has the potential to function as a springboard for you to go off on a rant about a related topic, this might be your chance. After all, your unique interpretations of topics are what will make your blog unique and keep those readers coming back to you day after day. Maybe there’s a great unanswered question you’ve pondered, and you’re ready to reveal your grand answer. Post it.

Example: “Are iPhone 5S, iPhone 5C Worth the Upgrade?”
Apple rolled out the iPhone 5S and iPhone 5C on Tuesday, and there were few surprises (www.charliewhite.net/2013/09/iphone-5s/)

Notes
1. www.truthdig.com/report/item/huffingtons_plunder_20110221