

SPICE UP YOUR BLOG

Last week, we launched into the world of blogging with a lesson in starting a blog, or Web log, from scratch. We even touched on inserting photos into your blog so the readers could see who the blogger really is. This time, we are going to go over some simple formatting tricks that anyone can and should use to make their blog site easier to read and more pleasant to look at.



Then, for instant gratification we'll look at how to post to your blog without wading through the screens of your Web browser. You can simply e-mail a post to your blog. For the ultimate trick, you can send a blog post via text message from your cell phone. Check out my blog at:

1. Don't Look Like a Dummy

One of the best ways to make a bad impression is to have misspellings in your blog. If you are handwriting a personal letter, you can cover up bad spelling with sloppy penmanship. With a Web log, your spelling is right out there in 12 point type, and when your fifth grade teacher sees your blog, she will know she wasted her year with you. She deserves better than that.



Besides, there is no excuse for spelling errors as most editors, including the ones used to post to blogs, have a spell check feature. If you just take the time to use it, you can catch the mistyped word that you know perfectly well how to spell, as well as the words that you missed in the fifth grade spelling bee.

2. Go Back and Check

After you are finished typing a post, go back and proofread it. I do a lot of writing and I'm pretty good at it, but I'm still amazed at the errors I find when I reread what I've typed, such as missing or duplicated words, grammatical and spelling errors. At least the spelling errors can be addressed right away.

If you have finished a post using the Compose window, just click on the icon with the check mark. It checks your spelling and allows you to correct it. It works much like the spelling checker in Word or any similar word processing software you may use.

If you have already posted a piece and want to go back and clean it up, most blog sites will allow you to edit your old posts. Just click on the Edit button and you are back at the Compose window where you can run the spell checker. While you are at it, you can add any of the text improvements we are going to talk about next.

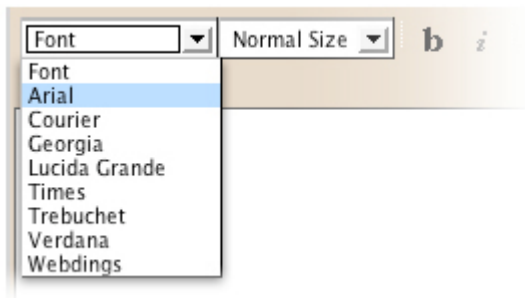
3. Fancy Fonts



Fonts can really change the character of your blog text. Most people just use the default font and don't even think about it, but an easy switch of fonts can make your text stand out.

At the top of the Compose window, there is a drop-down box with a selection of fonts, again just like Word. If you don't know which font will suit you, just try them until you are satisfied. Select some or all of the text and make the font change. Beware of using too many fonts together as

this begins to look like a ransom note.



One difference between using fonts in your blog and in a Word document is that you are limited to the fonts used on most computers that will view your blog. In a Word document, the fonts are carried along in the file so it shows up the same everywhere. When viewing a blog, the Web browser must draw on the locally available fonts and will have to substitute a font if it doesn't have the one called out by the blog page. The solution to this is to stick with the Web safe fonts offered in the Compose window because almost

everyone has those fonts.

Pick a sans serif font like Arial for a clean and modern look. Sans serif means the letters don't have those little bars at the ends of the lines. For a traditional style use a font such as Times New Roman font. That looks more like text in a book. To give the effect of dashing off a note on a typewriter, use a font with a fixed-width like Courier font.

4. Punch Up Your Text

Even though the number of fonts in a blog limits you, there are other effects that can stress a point or attract attention. Select a word or phrase that you want to stand out and click on the icon with the big "B" for Bold. That will fatten up the lines in the letters and make the text stand out on the page. For extra impact, you can even increase the font size for just that word, though that trick changes the line spacing and can look a bit sloppy.

When quoting foreign words or titles of books or just because you like it, use italics. The letters will lean over and look special. Use the "I" icon for this type of effect.

Then, there is underlining to attract attention to a phrase. The "U" icon makes a line under the words, just like when the teacher was grading your papers.

If you get totally carried away, you can apply bold, underline and italics all at the same time. Your readers might think you are crazed if you do that, but hey-it's your blog!

5. Make it Colorful

The text effects we just talked about are pretty traditional and have been used in books for centuries. An effect that is more popular on computer screens and supermarket gossip rags is the use of colored text to punch up a phrase.



Select the text just as you do for the traditional text effects and click the color icon. Then, you have to select from a palate of colors. Keep in mind the background of your blog page when you select colors. Blue text on a green background is hard to read. Green on blue is even worse.

Also, keep in mind that colored text needs a little help. I like to use the bold effect to fatten up the letters that I color to make sure the color punches through the background. You are trying to emphasize that phrase anyway, so bold and color work well together.

6. E-Mail Posting

A screenshot of a Blogger settings page for e-mail posting. It features two main sections. The first section is labeled "BlogSend Address" and contains a text input field. Below the field is a small text instruction: "Enter an email address here to have your blog mailed to whenever you publish." The second section is labeled "Mail-to-Blogger Address" and contains a text input field with the text "techtips." followed by a small text instruction: "This is an address by which you can post to your blog via email. The secret name must be at least 4 characters long." To the right of the input field is a text input field containing "@blogger.com" and a "Publish" button. At the bottom of the form is an orange "Save Settings" button.

There are different methods for getting your words on your blog page. It's not hard to post to your blog via e-mail. Suppose I'm at my Mom's house where only a dial-up Internet connection is available and it's really slow going through all the Web pages to make a post via the Web interface. Mom has her e-mail client going so it's a snap to zip out an e-mail message that ends up on my blog.

In order to post to my blog via the Web, I had to first set up e-mail posting via the Web access. My blog site has a Dash Board that controls all the settings. One of the settings is the e-mail access. I filled in the blanks, which created a special e-mail address for my blog posts. I have to keep that special address secret so others can't mess with my blog.

Now, I'm at the fringe of the Internet hanging by an e-mail-only thread. I just type in the special address. The Subject line becomes the title for the post. Then, I just type in the post itself.

You can use plain text for your post if you want to keep it simple. Or, you can turn on the HTML feature of your e-mail client, if it has one, and add formatting like bold, fancy fonts and colored text. Make sure you have the settings of your blog Dash Board set to accept HTML messages.

7. Going Wireless



If you have a cellular phone that can send text messages to regular e-mail addresses, then you have a blog-posting device in your hand. I just posted to my blog with my standard cell phone. There are drawbacks, but I was using the most basic device.

First, the length of the blog post is severely limited when using SMS, or Short Message Service (also known as “texting”). I can usually squeeze three or four short sentences in a single message. Of course, you can send multiple messages all in a row and then go back on the Web interface and edit those posts together into one big entry.

So, when you are standing at the end of the pier watching the sunset and just have to write something for people to read, you can whip out your cell phone, tap out a brief message, and post it on your blog. You can instantly update your blog to follow your every move or mood.

Source : <http://www.geeks.com/techtips/2006/techtips-26jan06.htm>