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The Arse First Method of Technical Blogging

**A personal & practical guide on
technical writing for your blog. Plus tips
& tricks for getting it done well.**

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Arse First Method of Technical Blogging

Practical advice on writing and publishing technical blog posts

EtherealMind

This book is for sale at <http://leanpub.com/Technical-Blogging-Writing-Arse-First>

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This is a [Leanpub](#) book. Leanpub empowers authors and publishers with the Lean Publishing process. [Lean Publishing](#) is the act of publishing an in-progress ebook using lightweight tools and many iterations to get reader feedback, pivot until you have the right book and build traction once you do.

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1 Introduction to Arse First Technical Blogging

Why write this book? Well, um. My guilty secret is simply that I am weary of being asked.

Co-workers, readers, bloggers and friends are constantly asking how I find the time to write? What tools do you use? How do you know what to write about? I'm tired of answering the same question over and over so I just decided to write it down instead (like many of my own blog posts).

That's a tip right there. Blogging 101 in the first paragraph.

I started my own blog at <http://etherealmind.com> in January 2008 and since then I've published more than 1350 blog posts at a reasonably regular pace. My journey in "media" continues today as I've expanded to include podcasting at <http://packetpushers.net>, public speaking, presenting & semi-professional writing into my fun bag of things to do when not working for my day job. During that time, I've worked out many different methods or systems for keeping myself on track, to keep focussed and keep delivering more writing. This book presents the systems that have stood the test of time for me. Hopefully, they will help you to start blogging too.

I'll be covering my own "**arse-first**" writing method that makes short form technical writing easier & achievable for anyone. I'll discuss your attitude and help you find the technical voice that brings your inner nerd to life. I'll provide some suggestions on things you **should** do & some tips on what **not** to do. They are both equally important. Finally, I'll offer some of my more advanced tips on the technical writing process and ways you can build your own style.

I look forward to reading your blog posts soon. Right?

2 About the Author

Greg Ferro is a Network Architect and Engineer working in the UK. Over the last 25 years or so he has worked across the industry for FTSE 250 companies, and previously across Australia and Asia Pacific. Today, Greg specialises in the design and deployment of Data Centres including Network Fabrics, Data Security, Cloud and Internet. He has worked as a consultant for high profile companies throughout Asia and Europe and now lives in the UK.

Greg is the founder and co-host of the weekly “Packet Pushers Podcast” at PacketPushers.net¹ where he interviews network engineers, vendors and industry figures on a range of highly technical topics where the motto is “*Too Much Networking Would Never Be Enough*”. Packet Pushers reaches an audience of 10000 downloads per show.

Greg is widely known for his blog at EtherealMind.com² where he writes regularly about many aspects of Data Networking since 2008. His personal and non-technical blog is at GregFerro.com³.

He also writes for NetworkComputing.com⁴ and a range of other respected websites.

About Lean Publishing and Book Updates

The book will receive updates on an occasional basis. I’ve have chosen to use Agile project methods to write this book instead of using traditional publishing. The basic idea is to *Publish Early and Publish Often*. Most publishers require authors to endlessly polish a 600 page epic that is out of date by the time of publication. Agile methods let me cut down the early scope of the book to the bare minimum and publish early and often.

This book is only available electronically and you can always return to the [Arse First Method of Technical Blogging on LeanPub](http://ArseFirstMethodofTechnicalBloggingonLeanPub)⁵ website to download an updated version from your account.

This book is available in PDF, ePub and Mobi formats so that you can use your preferred eBook reader. **There is no DRM**. If you have obtained the book from a friend, then you can help me update this book & publish other books by [purchasing a copy](#)⁶.

I first started about a year ago to write a long blog post that got way out of scope. I’m publishing it as an eBook because I want to learn how to write eBooks – you can find more of them at my LeanPub⁷ page – <https://leanpub.com/u/EtherealMind>.

¹<http://packetpushers.net>

²<http://etherealmind.com>

³<http://gregferro.com>

⁴<http://www.networkcomputing.com/blogs/author/Greg-Ferro>

⁵<https://leanpub.com/Technical-Blogging-Writing-Arse-First/>

⁶<https://leanpub.com/Technical-Blogging-Writing-Arse-First>

⁷<https://leanpub.com/u/EtherealMind>

Version Information

Version	Date Released	Updated
1	20130518	First Version of the Hasty Guide to Technical Blogging and Writing
2	20130521	Grammar, Spelling and some minor edits Special thanks to Jennifer Huber http://jenniferhuber.blogspot.com for proof reading Special thanks to John Herbert http://lamejournal.com for edits & proof reading
4	20130522	Based on feedback, removed the Chapter Headings because they looked awful in Kindle/ePub format Added Section Don't Apologise for Not Posting Added section on Knowledge Management Screencasts on Vimeo Added section Why Starting At The End Works to expand more on why writing the conclusion first works.
	20130525	Super huge thanks to Lindsay Hill @northlandboy for his copywriting skills http://lkhill.com
	20130526	Thanks to Tim Smith for his tips on Markdown for Microsoft Windows
	20130527	Minor changes to the cover image
5	20130804	Added new sections Starting a Blog Site
	20130804	Some advice on choosing a Theme in Wordpress
6	20130818	Grammar, spelling. Thanks again to Lindsay Hill http://lkhill.com
7	20140118	Added info on Ghost blog software in Which Software Platform
	20140311	Updated posting with iPad to use Wordpress App
	20140311	Bottom Line Up Front - about Leading With Lede's
	20140311	Section on Better Grammar
8	20140525	Customer Activism Persistence Pays Big updates to Bottom Line Up Front

Language

This book is written using British English (not American English). However, the PDF version is in US Letter size because most people are able to print Letter on A4 paper.

3 Dedication

This book is dedicated to my wife & daughters who don't mind, much, that I wrote this instead of watching TV. Especially to my wife who lets me indulge in computers & writing when I probably should be doing other things. Probably.

And to my Mum who made me pay attention to English when I was at school even though I was a science/maths nerd. Hey Mum, it's paying off.

And to the readers of my blogs for the last five years who left positive comments & then supported me when we started the Packet Pushers Podcast. I hope I've given something back to community because everyone has given me so much support and assistance.

4 Part 2 - Basic Writing Tactics for Blogging

People often tell me how hard it is to sit down & write about anything technical. I agree with you. Doing anything for the first time is hard. It is even harder to do something that will be public & have your name on it. If you are like me then you are sensitive to criticism, afraid of making mistakes & hate being told that you are wrong.

That sort of thinking slows you down, saps your confidence and prevents you from achieving a result.

This book aims to give you some tips on writing technical blog posts.

I came up with a process that helps me with writing. I can't tell you it's the right way to write a blog post but I can tell you what has worked for me. I've written about my experiences to help you to write a blog post & start on the journey of bringing your knowledge to other people.

I continue to focus on tools & techniques that help me to write better. This book is an introduction & intended to give you a starting point. Hopefully, you will develop your own process & blog about it. I hope you will too and take the time to tell me about it. Head over to my contact page at <http://etherealmind.com/contact/> and tell me about it.

5 What to write about?

A lot of people tell me that it is hard to figure out **what** to write. I would say that finding a topic is the easiest part because there is so much to write about.

My advice is to find something that annoys you enough to want to shout “that’s stupid!” or “why did they do that!” or “what were they thinking!”.

Thats it!! *Right there*. Write down what made you get steamed up. Find that **something** that made you argue with someone at work, bash the steering wheel or yell at your windscreen when listening to a podcast.

Capture that motivation, that little piece of energy, that little piece of fire by writing it down. Right there, you have the gold nugget that will give you the push to write a bigger story about that thing.

Use the anger!

The Technical Learning Experience

Another motivation for writing is about learning a new technology. Lets say you are preparing for some sort of technical examination for a vendor certification. The experts tell us that writing down concepts reinforces the learning process and helps to retain what you have learned.

Personally, I follow a lot of study blogs and make point of reading every post to maintain my knowledge. I’ve done exactly this when learning new products or technologies & it works for me.

For The Love of Something

Instead of anger you can go with passion. Everyone has got something that they get excited about. A new technology, a great experience or some form of inspiration that can give you the motivation to write.

6 Why Write a Blog?

If you are reading this book then you have already started down the path to be a blogger. Right? Whatever the path that led you to download this eBook & start reading tells me that you probably have some ideas of the positive outcomes from sharing your knowledge & views.

I'll cover a few of them here.

Paying it Forward

My personal motivation for starting to blog was to share what I knew with other people. Simply, I had no colleagues to talk about networking & no junior staff to mentor or support.

In 2008 when I first started blogging I was kind of lonely. As a Senior Network Engineer / Architect who works on a freelance basis, I was hired by a number of companies to design & build infrastructure where I was the only network engineer in a large team of infrastructure engineers & web developers. Some days I was working on technologies that I didn't understand properly & would have preferred to discuss them with someone. Instead I would make copious notes while I'm developing a new design or researching a product.

One day I realised I could quickly turn those notes into a blog post & ask people for input, advice while helping others who may have the same problems.

Does that sound arrogant? I thought so for a while too. I worried about what might happen if I got something wrong & looked stupid. Instead, lots of smart & helpful people left comments & discussed ideas with me. I got smarter & felt more confident about my work.

I also wanted to share my knowledge with other people in the community. As a freelancer / contractor, I don't get to work with young network engineers & help them in their career progression. I'm still trying to support other people today.

Your reasons for blogging might be like mine or they might be different.

Living Resume

A well maintained blog is a resume for your skills & can help to get you a better job. Its true.

Many employers will search for your name on the Internet when applying for new job role. A blog with good content will demonstrate your knowledge & communication skills to your employer. It only takes a few dozen posts to show what you know & that you know how to apply that knowledge.

Prospective employers can read your blog to get a sense of your personality & your approach to technology. For those engineers who are early in their careers blogging will set you apart from your peers. You have demonstrated commitment, communication & willingness to be creatively different. In the end, you are more likely to get an interview.

Improve your Communication Skills

The last time I had any formal education in writing as communication or English was when I left school at 17. In the last thirty years, I've written metaphorical crap-tonnes¹ of technical documentation, reports, notes, summaries, excerpts, conditions reports & email. Oh, yes. Lots of email.

But no one taught me these life skills. All of these forms of “*communication*” did not exist when I was at high school. High schools or universities are still not teaching the necessary skills for short form writing in the way that business communicates. I've found that regular blogging has improved my written communication skills. My emails are shorter & focussed, my technical reports read better & take less time. I can get more done in less time because I'm better organised at preparing for writing. I'm doing better diagrams.

You can see the differences on the <http://etherealmind.com> website by looking at blog posts from 2008 & comparing with some from 2013. It's a positive side effect that I certainly wasn't expecting.

Value of Storytelling

The practice of writing regularly has a secret outcome on your working life & career. The process of working out **what** to write & then creating a process on **how** to write it down has helped me think & communicate better. In meetings, I have become better at communicating my ideas. I have new habits on thinking through my ideas & proposals.

My documentation has improved in subtle ways as well - I'm writing less for the same result. Less time writing documentation leaves more time for other activities.

It took me sometime to understand this was a *thing* or a skill. I've since realised that it's usually described as “storytelling” and it's big thing in certain circles. Storytelling is simple enough, take an idea, understand it and then communicate the idea in a way that people can understand.

In fact, people pay big money to learn storytelling in corporate training classes and workshops. Check out the Internet & be surprised.

Storytelling is not *only* about fairy tales for your children or science fiction books in your spare time.

¹A “Crap-Tonne” is highly technical term used describes a lot of something that was mostly crap.

Customer Activism

Federica Monsone of A3 Communications in the UK has conducted a survey on staying informed on the storage industry. The data shows blogs & bloggers are highly trusted sources for customers. Specifically, decision makers turn to analysts and vendors about 45% of the time, mainstream press about 35% and blogs about 25%. I'm surprised that the bloggers have this much impact, I'm more surprised that vendors aren't allocating more funding to use those websites for marketing campaigns.

Blogs on the other hand, especially in Europe, are usually written by independent experts such as consultants or end users. Their information is often unbiased and informal, perhaps the result of personal experience or meetings over beers. Differently from journalists and analysts, bloggers don't tend to write as a job and therefore publish posts once or twice a week at most, typically because they enjoy sharing their views on a particular product, technology, company or other subject. This means they feel quite passionate about the subjects they do choose to write about.

Today I view blogging as a form of Customer Activism that is done publicly instead of face to face with sales rep or company executive. And has much more ability to drive change in vendor organisations than some faceless sales person.

[A3 Communications > Blog > Storage Industry - In the know...](#)²

Forrester Research

In a recent survey published by Forrester - [Buyer Behavior Helps B2B Marketers Guide The Buyer's Journey | Forrester Blogs](#)³

Forrester research shows that today's B2B buyer will find three pieces of content about a vendor for every one piece that marketing can publish or sales can deliver. They are finding this content in an ever-expanding number and variety of channels. And they are accessing these channels from an increasingly diverse array of devices. Without debate, the business from business buyer is already much more multichannel than the business-to-business sellers are. Buyers of business products and services are online, in social channels, on YouTube, going to events, and evaluating options on their iPads and smartphones.

²<http://a3communications.co.uk/blog/storage-industry---in-the-know..>

³http://blogs.forrester.com/lori_wizdo/12-10-04-buyer_behavior_helps_b2b_marketers_guide_the_buyers_journey

IDG Survey

Another survey from IDG [Driving Engagement Through Social Media 2014](http://idgknowledgehub.com/research-drive-engagement-social-media-2014/2014/01/13/) | IDG Knowledge Hub⁴

New research conducted in November 2013 by IDG Connect shows that 86% of B2B Information Technology (IT) buyers are currently using social media networks in their purchase decision process. Social media is not only important for companies, but it is now a necessary investment and crucial element of any go-to-market strategies. And findings suggest this is only set to increase over the next couple of years.

- 86% of IT buyers are using social media networks and content in their purchase decision process
- Social media is used most often in the general education stage of the buying cycle
- 89% of IT buyers prefer educational content to promotional content in their favored social media channels
- 62% of IT buyers are most interested in seeing e-seminars (virtual events) from social channels

Product/Service reviews are the content types that IT buyers prefer to see links from via social channels In two years, social, peer-generated content will have greater weight versus editorial and vendor content in making IT investment decisions

You Can Make a Difference

The research shows that you, just one person, can have a voice that other people will see. If you have ever used the Internet for your next purchase then maybe it is your turn to contribute too.

⁴<http://idgknowledgehub.com/research-drive-engagement-social-media-2014/2014/01/13/>