The Beginner's Guide To

Creating & Growing Your Blog

By Emma Bostian

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Welcome

It's a bit mind-boggling to believe I wrote this book in about a month's time. At the time I thought I'd maybe write down some tips for writing a great blog post, but what this book has turned into is so much more than I could ever have imagined.

It's been quite the revelation diving into my blog post statistics and finances. For the past three years I've been quite blind to the numbers. At first I was nervous to share my finances, but I am a firm believer in breaking down the stigma of discussing money. Although I won't publicly discuss my full-time salary and benefits, I'm more than happy to make my side project income transparent.

While wrapping up this book I realized something: I am not an expert and I have a lot to learn about building a successful and financially stable blog. As a result I've decided to take the next year and invest in courses and resources for growing my blog financially. I will be furthering my knowledge and experience with WordPress and affiliate marketing so come version two of this book I will hopefully have more knowledge to share around earning money with your blog. Stay tuned for that update!

Thank you so much for joining me on this journey and I hope that it helps inspire you to start your own blog.

Take care of yourself,

Emma

Getting Started

My Story

From a very young age, I loved to write. I'd sit in my room and scribble nonsense stories down on pieces of A4 computer paper in the hopes that one day I'd be an accomplished author. Although I am not an accomplished author, I have been a vast backlog of blog posts in the past two years, some of which have gained over 45,000 views.

I published my first Medium blog on June 4th, 2017. The blog was titled "Journey Of A Front-End Developer On A Design Team" and it details the experience I had whilst working on an IBM Design team. This blog got three claps and accrued 417 total views.
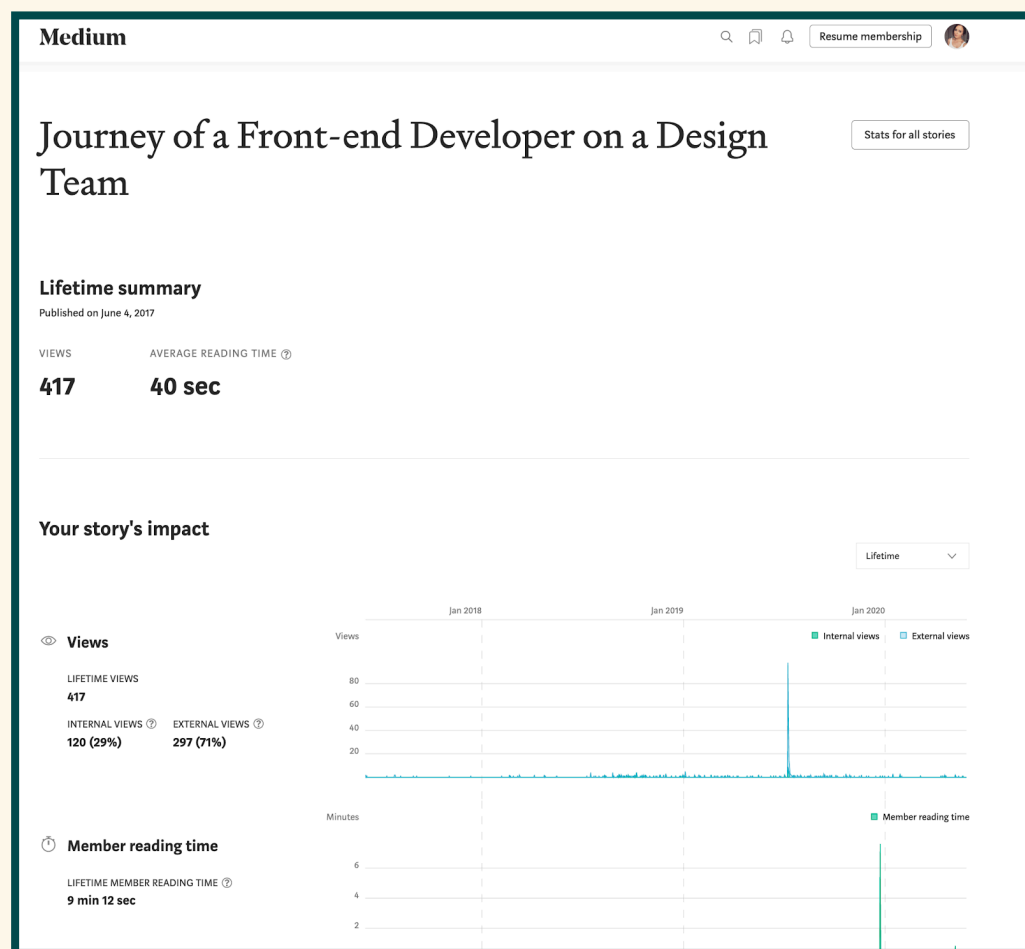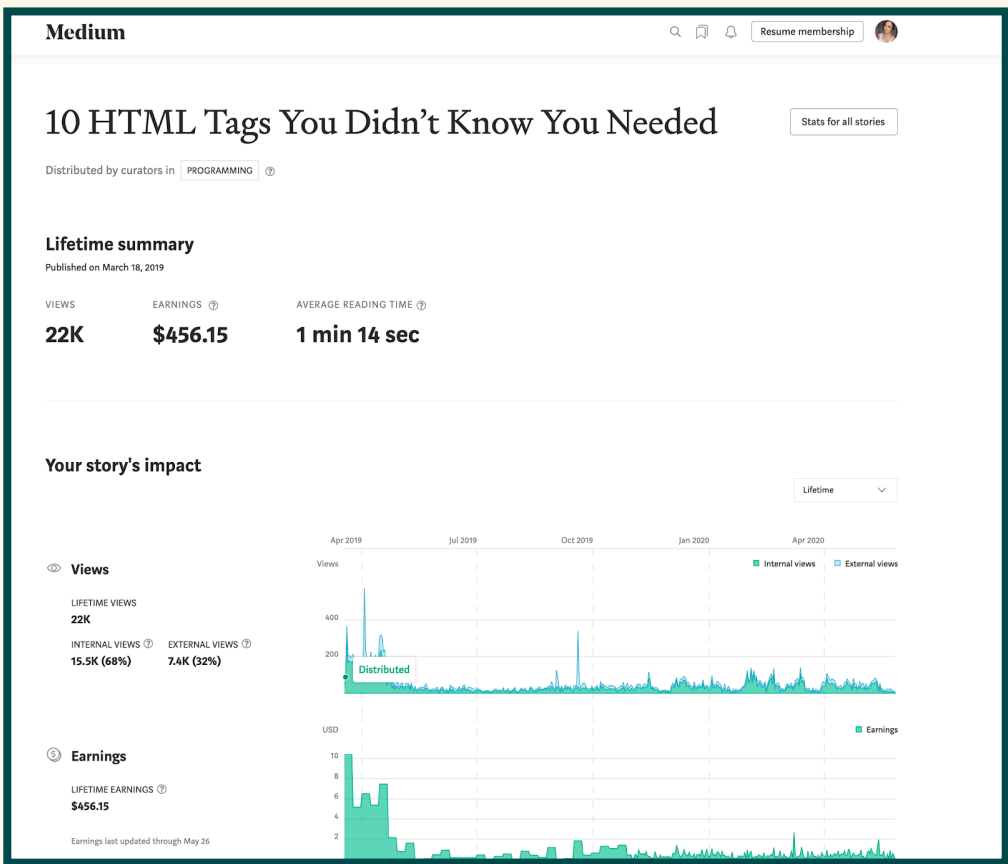
Chapter 1

Compare this blog to my most-viewed blog, "[De-Coding The Front-End Development Interview Process](#)" which has 47,000 total views with 3,800 claps, 12 comments, and earned $280.68 in revenue.
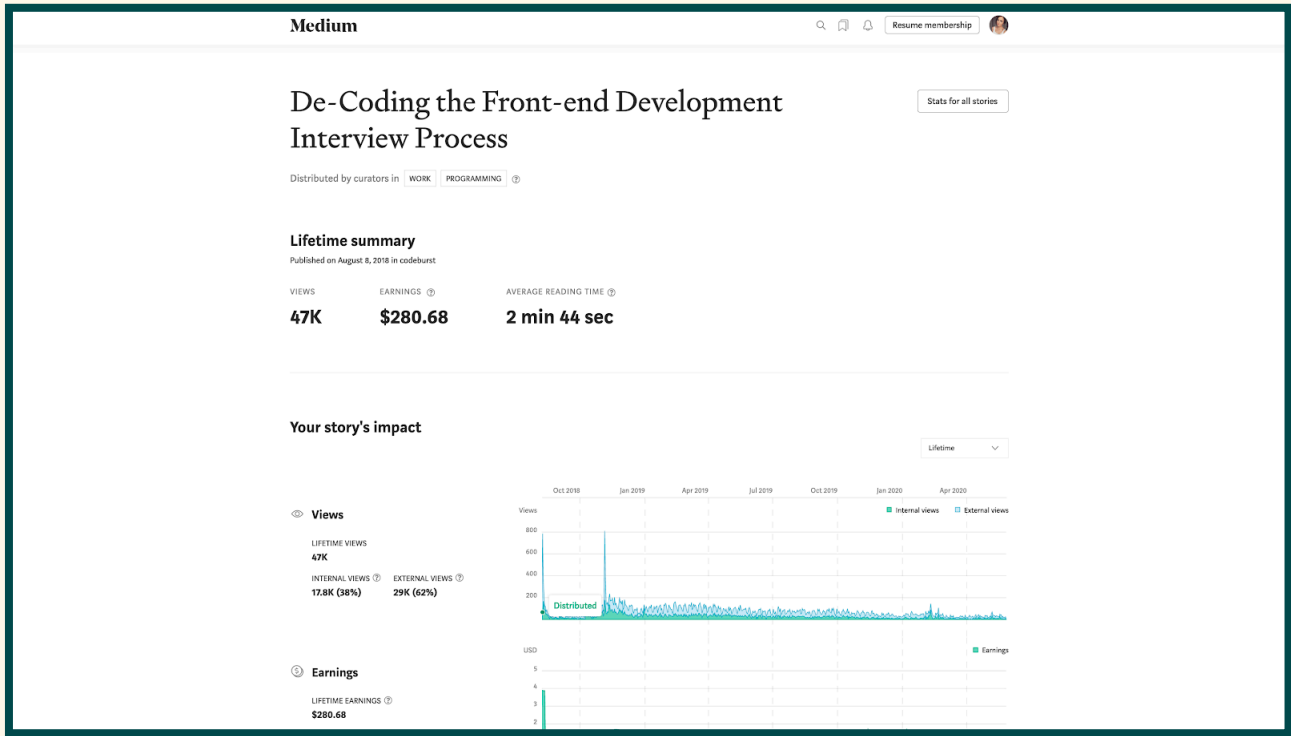
Even though this was my most-viewed blog, it wasn't my highest-paying blog. "[Ten HTML Elements You Didn't Know You Needed](#)" has 3,300 claps, nine comments, 22,000 total views, and has made $456.15 in revenue.

Chapter 1

In the past year and a half, I've gained 3,800 followers on [Medium](#) with $1,656.19 in revenue. I've gained 14,656 followers on [Dev](#) with 33,410 total post reactions and 987,086 total post views. I've guest written blogs for [Ultimate Courses](#), [Honeypot.io](#), and [Stack Overflow](#). I've also recently migrated my blogs to a personal blogging site, [compiled.blog](#), and gained 1,033 subscribers to my blog newsletter.

In this book, I will share with you my tips and resources for building your blog. I'll share tips for maximizing readership, tools which help me write and publish, and break down my finances to show how you can monetize your work.

Why Blog?

Blogging has many benefits, such as earning passive income and connecting with other passionate bloggers. I blog for two reasons: to remember the skills I've learned and to help others avoid issues I've encountered.

I never blogged as a way to grow my social media presence or earn extra money, and I believe it was my lack of focus in these areas which ultimately fueled my social media growth and drew in passive income. I began blogging as a way to document solutions I found for technical issues and to remember the skills I had learned.

When you're starting a blog it's important to establish your why: why do you want to blog? Maybe you want to blog to share knowledge with the community. Maybe you want to blog to gain social media followers. Finding your why will allow you to focus each blog post on achieving that goal.

Blogging is one type of side project which can earn a lot of passive income but has a low startup cost. You can sign up for a free account on a popular blogging site. You can create a blog using a content management system (CMS). You can even build a completely custom blog from scratch. You have the possibility to earn income for months or years on blogs that you wrote years ago.

"It's Been Written Before"

I have received so many messages from people who are scared to start a blog because "X has been written about before." My response is always the same: "who cares?"

Okay I realize that's a bit crass and I don't phrase my response so insensitively, but I wanted to make a point. Just because it's been written before doesn't mean you shouldn't write it. When I began learning web development in 2015 I had a very hard time finding beginner-friendly tutorials on complex topics, so I decided to write my own.

You have a unique experience and your knowledge is valuable. Your blog post or tutorial might resonate with someone who was previously struggling to understand a concept.

What do you have to lose? Nothing.

Content

Writing Your First Blog

Writing your first blog can be a daunting experience, but by following the steps on the following pages, you'll gain confidence breaking down this large task into smaller subtasks.

This is the process that works well for me, but if you prefer to jump straight into writing, go for it! There isn't one way to write a blog so do what works for you.

Picking A Topic

The first step to publishing your first blog is to pick a topic. Picking a topic is difficult; you might have SO many topics you don't know where to start, or you might not have any topics in mind.

Take five minutes and write down a list of topics that you're passionate about. The topics can be extremely focused (i.e. CSS selectors) or broad (JavaScript). Once you have a list of at least three topics, order the topics by how enthusiastic you are to write about it.

Forget what's trendy in the industry or what you think will get you the most reads; focus on the topics which spark your interest. If you're passionate about a topic your readers will be too.

Next, if your topic is extremely broad, break it up into subtopics. For example, if I want to write about JavaScript I can break this into smaller articles like so:

- Const, let, and var

- Scope & hoisting

- Asynchronous JavaScript

- Callback functions

Breaking a large topic into a set of smaller ones will make it easier for you to focus, and It gives you more content! As a new blogger, it's important to have quick wins, and having shorter, more focused blogs will help you produce more content quickly.

Picking A Topic Activity

Take the next five minutes and write down as many topics as you can think of that would be fun for you to write about. Forget what's trendy and instead focus on the topics you're either already knowledgeable about or want to become knowledgeable about.

Don't spend more than five minutes on this activity. The goal here is quantity, not quality.

Your topics can be as broad or specific as you'd like, but if they're extremely broad try to focus on smaller sub-topics within the larger umbrella. You're aiming for blog posts of around three to seven minutes in reading time.

Creating An Outline

Once you've picked a topic it's time to build an outline. Having an outline also allows you to logically structure your HTML code, ultimately leading to a more accessible user interface.

You can sketch an outline on paper, like a mind map, or you can build a linear outline in a word processor. I like throwing my thoughts into a Google document or other comparable word processor.

Let's say we're writing a blog about CSS specificity. Here's what your outline might look like:

- What is CSS specificity?

- What does specificity allow you to do?

  ◦ Organize your CSS code

  ◦ Write cleaner, and less, CSS

  ◦ Understand why your styles aren't being applied

- How does it work?

  ◦ Type selectors & pseudo-elements

  ◦ Class selectors, attribute selectors, and pseudo-classes

  ◦ ID selectors

    ▪ Additional rules

- Calculating specificity

Creating An Outline Activity

Pick one of your topics from the previous "Picking A Topic" Activity and sketch out an outline for it. Try to write down four to seven headers within the topic and fill in the smaller topics beneath it. You can refer back to the CSS Specificity outline on the previous page for guidance.

Writing Your Content

Now that you have a rough outline you can begin to fill in the content underneath each section header.

When writing a new blog the tool I use to write the content varies. Sometimes I'll write directly in the blogging platform editor, but more often than not I'll write my content in a Desktop application like [Notion](#) or [iA Writer](#). iA Writer is an amazing tool if you struggle to keep focused. It's a simple markdown editor with no fluff.

Filling in the content underneath each section header can be extremely time consuming. Try not to focus on adding code snippets or code examples right now, we'll get to those in the next step.

Here's an example of filling in content for the "What is CSS specificity" section header:

> *CSS Specificity is the set of rules applied to CSS selectors in order to determine which style is applied to an element. The more specific a CSS style is, the higher point value it accrues, and the likelier it is to be present on the element's style.*
>
> *There are many benefits of understanding CSS Specificity and leveraging it to your benefit.*

If you're struggling to fill in a section, don't worry; you can always come back and fill this section in later or remove it if it's unnecessary.

Writing Your Content Activity

Now that you have your outline, write your content! Don't worry so much about adding your code snippets in final form or any graphics, illustrations, or photos yet; we'll get to that in the next section.

This activity will take anywhere from 30 minutes to a few hours so be patient with yourself and take breaks.

Adding Graphics, Illustrations, Photos, & Code Snippets

Now that you have your content, it's time to add some graphics and illustrations. Adding graphics and illustrations keep readers engaged and help to break up walls of text.

Illustrations

If you're looking for illustrations I highly recommend [unDraw](). All of the graphics are royalty-free and allow for complete customization. You can export the illustrations as PNGs or SVGs.
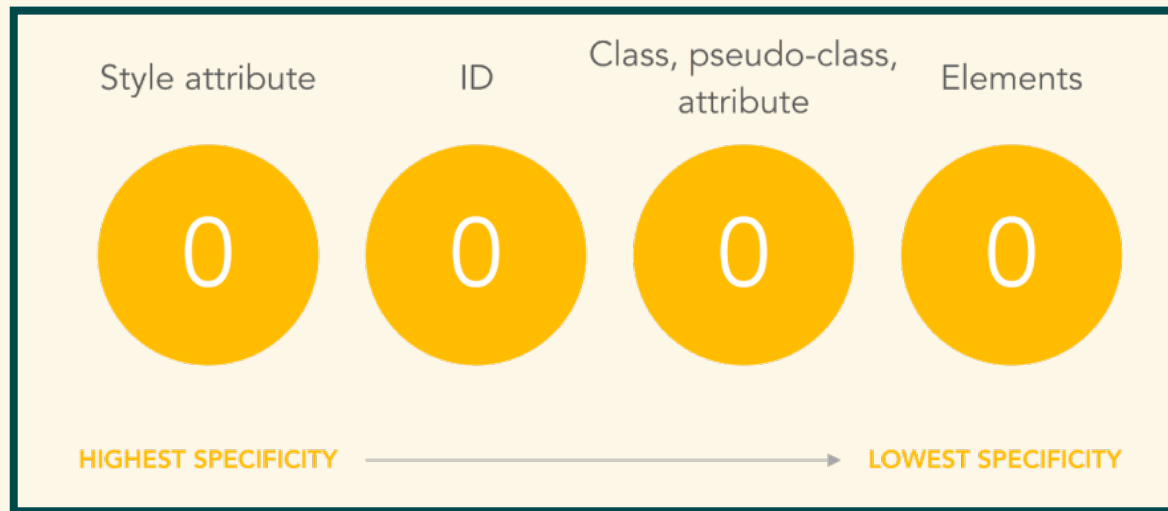
Graphics

Graphics are visual diagrams that depict a process and they are extremely effective in technical blogs. I create my graphics using [Sketch](), a paid visual design tool for Mac, but I highly recommend [Figma]() as a free web-based alternative that works across operating systems.

If you want to learn more about using Figma to create blog post graphics, here are a few courses to get you started.

- [Figma Tutorial]() by Design Course

- [Learn Design With Figma]()

- [The Beginner's Guide To Figma]() by Joe Previte

Chapter 2

Here are a couple of graphics I created for my CSS Specificity blog post.

Style attribute	ID	Class, pseudo-class, attribute	Elements
0	0	0	0

HIGHEST SPECIFICITY ⟶ LOWEST SPECIFICITY

Style Attribute

If the element has an inline style, it automatically overrides all other styles.

(1,0,0,0)

```
<button style="color: red">Click me</button>
```

ID

Add a 1 to the ID section for each ID selector denoted.

(0,1,0,0)

```
#cat {
  color: red;
}
```

Class, Pseudo-Class, Attribute

Add a 1 to the Class, Pseudo-Class, Attribute section for each class, pseudo-class, or attribute selector denoted.

(0,0,1,0)

```
.cat {
  color: red;
}
```

Elements

Add a 1 to the Elements section for each element selector denoted.

(0,0,0,1)

```
button {
  background: orange;
}
```

You can add custom headers to your blog to visually break up the content, but keep in mind that if you add text as an image in your blog posts, this has a negative impact on accessibility.

Screen readers cannot interpret images as headers and even if you add an alt tag that describes the text in the image, screen readers will not be able to jump to section headers if your section headers are images. Thus, try to use CSS to add styling to section headers (<h1>, <h2>, etc.) to maintain the page hierarchy while still being visually attractive.

How Does It Work?