

Tattoo Talk: A Study in Blogging

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## Overview

The main purpose of my blog, Tattoo Talk, is to reach and educate both those inside and outside the tattoo community on the significance of tattoos as more than the art they function as on the surface. Tattoo designs and styles often have deep cultural and historical roots to them, and often include interesting stories of artists who popularized these styles and designs or fascinating symbolism within the art itself. My purpose in blogging about this is to educate even those already familiar with the world of tattooing on this significance and to perpetuate the idea that tattoos are much more than just art in a forthcoming and accessible way.

Since the creation of the blog, I have expanded this purpose to also include the use of the blog as a sort of jumping off point for readers. If they have been able to somehow find one of my posts by searching for a specific type of tattoo, that post might lead them to seek greater knowledge of tattoo styles and their origins as a whole, and keep them as returning readers to the blog. My targeted audience is still fairly niche, as I intend to mostly reach those already within the tattooing community, but my posts are written in a way that they can also extend to many different smaller groups, such as people who are interested in getting a tattoo, or even people who know nothing about tattoos and assume they have no significance or purpose.

The blog posts are structured in a way that each one focuses on a particular style of tattooing or specific tattoo design and breaks it down into the historical or cultural significance, as well as how the style has evolved over time or how the style was popularized by a specific artist and their work. The posts are written in an educational, but not pretentious or technical tone meant to be accessible and understood by all potential audiences. Since the beginning of the blog I have adapted the tone of the posts to be more personal and even a little bit casual, as I wanted readers to be able to connect better to the blog as well as be educated by it. As stated in *Everybody Writes*, the goal should be to avoid the kind of writing that exudes too much professionalism that it isn't concise or clear (Handley 103-106). That is the purpose of avoiding this technical speak or wordiness that might confuse the audience and lessen the efficacy of the

knowledge and education I am seeking to provide them through my blog. I attempted to focus more on this goal throughout the more recent posts. Since making that a goal of the blog in every post, the writing has also improved in that way as well.

Overall, the user engagement with the blog has been small, but since employing various strategies to amplify engagement, it has grown considerably from the 0 viewers that were present in the first several weeks of operation. These strategies include the search engine optimization of the blog and the social media used to promote the blog, as well as the improvement of the overall design of the blog website from the start of the blog. Although the user engagement with the blog is humble, I have achieved success in running all aspects of the blog and constantly seeking to improve them throughout the past weeks, greatly expanding my prior knowledge of blogging as a skill in professional writing.

### **Audience and Purpose**

The most specific, defined audience of my blog is people familiar with or a part of the world of tattooing (i.e. people who already have tattoos and have interest in them as a form of art and expression) who desire to become more educated about different styles and designs of tattoos and their respective histories, origins, and cultural significance. This group of people will have to comprise those who have taken an interest in tattoo art, which is a unique art form from other visual art. Tattoo art is different from any other kind of art in the way that the styles are developed specifically for tattooing on skin, which is a completely different medium than used in other art. Because of this, most tattoo styles are inspired by typical visual art styles, but differ in their delivery because the final product ultimately appears on a person's skin. Because of this, the targeted audience will have to be specifically interested in tattoo art, more so than art in general. The audience will, in addition to being interested in tattoo art, also have to want to learn more about different styles, and thus, cannot already have prior knowledge of them. Since the first blog update, I have expanded the scope of my primary audience to include a new group

that might be reached by my blog just as easily as those who go searching for knowledge of tattoo styles. This new group consists of people who may search for one style in particular, perhaps because they are interested in getting a tattoo of this style. Because of the way search terms and keywords function in the titles of blog posts, they may end up finding the blog through a more specific search on one style than a search on the history of all tattoo styles, or something that might just lead them to the homepage of my blog. Regardless, this audience may end up developing a curiosity about tattoo art and other styles, which is what the blog is all about, and may explore more posts in an attempt to gain this knowledge. For the entire primary audience, this search of knowledge and interest in tattoos, whether newfound or preexisting, will be their main motivation for reading the blog, which summarizes different aspects of tattoo art in an educational, but brief and concise manner.

A secondary audience, completely different than the primary, may emerge almost by accident. This secondary audience is made up of those who have no current interest in tattoos and do not believe in their value as art or that they are more than the art they appear as on the surface; however, I could see this blog being used by individuals defending the value of tattoos as an educational tool for this secondary audience who lacks this awareness. Another secondary audience could also be made up of simply those who are not involved in the tattooing community but find the blog out of their own personal curiosity. These secondary audiences have remained nearly the same since the beginning of the blog, though I imagine the blog could also probably reach another unintended audience, possibly in the form of someone researching different styles of tattooing for a project or out of their own personal interest, just as I am doing for the blog itself.

The main sources from which I initially drew inspiration are the culture section of “Tattoo Life” and the Instagram profile @tattoo\_origins. My blog is similar to both of these in the way that it focuses on the deeper meaning involved with tattoo art, as “Tattoo Life” regularly discusses the history and symbology of various designs and styles of tattooing, and

@tattoo\_origins focuses on the history of specific tattoo designs and the original art references from which modern tattoos come. The biggest difference between my blog and “Tattoo Life” is that my blog focuses on just styles and designs, while the culture section of this website also touches on tattoos centered around certain topics, and also features different “listicles” or compilations of work by specific artists. The Instagram account @tattoo\_origins also only focuses on specific pieces of art, while my blog also delves into whole styles and categories of tattoo art. Despite these differences, the purpose of my blog and behind these sources of inspiration are very similar, if not the same: to educate those within the tattoo community and expand their knowledge of tattoo art and the deeper meaning behind it. These two initial sources were helpful, but since then, I have added a third source of inspiration, which is the website “Tattoodo,” which includes a section on their site of articles about different styles of tattooing in a similar format to the one I use to convey information. The main difference is found in the length and depth of the articles when compared to my posts, which are a bit more surface-level and concise in terms of the information and amount of images.

The greatest change in the purpose in the last few weeks of the blog has been the attempt to cater to active readers of the blog that have discovered it through the social media or the SEO strategies I have employed, as this audience is more concrete and tangible than the idea of the target audience that the blog began with. Though this audience is small, it does exist, and the purpose of the blog has expanded to include keeping the viewers engaged.

### **Reader Engagement Evaluation**

Some time into blogging, I set some goals for readership and engagement with the blog, hoping that the strategies I was employing would pay off and I would make some of these achievements I wanted to as far as the number of visitors to the blog and followers, as well as smaller things like “likes” on blog posts or Instagram posts. On the blog itself, there were no specific numerical goals set, but the hopes for the blog centered more around generally

maintaining the readers I had before and obtaining new readers that came from sources other than Blackboard and the class blogroll page.



*Fig. 1: A chart showing readership and viewers on the blog over time.*

Ultimately, readership fell since the last blog update. This could have been due to multiple things. Previously, most of the readership on the blog had been directed from Blackboard, and since the last update, only a couple views have been from Blackboard. This means that less of the readership has come from the class blogroll page and more has come from other sources, which is a legitimate reason for readership to fall. Even though I lost readers, the readers I maintained came from sources such as Facebook (I'm not entirely sure how this one originated -- there is no connection between the blog and Facebook as far as I am aware) and Wordpress, which was probably the result of beginning to utilize Wordpress tags and categories on the blog posts.

Another reason why readership probably fell was a dry spell in blog posts that hit around November. The blog was neglected for a couple weeks at this point and no new posts were made, which contributes to a lack of continuity that typically drives viewers away for fear that the blog has "died." Even though readership fell, the new readership that did originate during this time from sources outside of Blackboard seemed to be more quality engagement with the posts, as the blog received a new follower who "liked" several of the recent blog posts, which definitely indicates a more in-depth level of engagement and experience with the blog.

As demonstrated through the data and insights provided by Wordpress as well as my own general assumptions about what makes a successful post, there is definitely a correlation between the fact that the most successful posts to the blog were the ones that were posted about on Instagram as well as tagged using the Wordpress tags built into the posts. There was nothing particularly different about the quality of writing or content discussed in the posts, so the conclusion can be drawn that attempts to drive readership to the blog by new means as of the last blog update were successful and encouraged more meaningful participation with the site and the blog posts themselves.

### **Writing Strategies Applied**

Throughout the entirety of the blog this semester, the constant writing strategy that stood out above all others was one discussed in *Everybody Writes*. In the first few weeks of blogging, a weakness in the writing was identified, which was the tendency to use an overly technical or educational tone, which did not allow the blog any advantage over other educational resources for the same information, such as Google or Wikipedia. After identifying this as a weakness, I began incorporating the strategy of conciseness and avoiding “techy” speech from *Everybody Writes*. It became clear that the obvious thing missing from an online Encyclopedia or Google search was personality and voice. Upon first starting the blog, I had tried to keep the voice of blog posts more formal and educational, because I felt like that more closely aligned with the purpose of the blog. Since then, I have realized that trying to be overly educational can sometimes allow me, as a writer on the blog, to fall into the trap of techy or marketing speak that loses clarity and conciseness “at the altar of sounding professional,” according to *Everybody Writes* (Handley 103-106). When technical lingo is used and the writing lapses into these sometimes vague marketing terms (or overly specific terms, in this case), the reader is lost and could easily gain that same knowledge quicker and from a more popular site. I realized what the blog was missing that could make it stand out from those other sites was a more personal voice.



Still, I tried to maintain some of that educational tone as well, since that is one of the purposes of the blog, and I also don't want that to get lost in an attempt to sound more casual. But, the more recent blog posts maintain a nice balance there, and do a better job at developing a stronger and more personal element through the voice used in the writing, which has kept a small amount of readership on the blog.

Another writing strategy that has been employed throughout the course of blogging has been another from *Everybody Writes*: "Break Some Grammar Rules (At Least These Five)." In this chapter, writers are encouraged to not follow every rule of grammar precisely, such as beginning sentences with conjunctions in order to create logical flow (Handley 107-108). This has been helpful in meeting a goal I set for the tone of the blog, which was to keep things accessible, and in some ways, what some might call "conversational." This was something else that mattered in attempting to distance my blog from other resources where one might find the same information presented in a more formal tone, or at least one without a distinct personal-sounding voice.

The final strategy used in the writing of the blog posts was actually found in the titles of each post. In the beginning of the blog, I sought to self-identify and develop a style of headline writing that would function well given the tone and topic of the blog. Even before reading the CoSchedule article "Why Headlines Came to Rule the Content Marketing World," which states that "headlines should have meaning whether the content is read or not" and that they should be able to stand alone, I gathered that information on my own when trying to formulate a successful way of writing headlines tailored for my individual blog posts but all with a similar format and structure across the blog (Neidlinger). The basic design of each headline is made up of an initial phrase, which is often the style of tattooing or design to focus the post on, separated from a brief, several-word summary of the post by a colon. For example, some of my blog posts are entitled "Blackwork Tattoos: Long-lasting and Versatile," "Watercolor Tattooing: A Style for the New Age of Tattoos," and "Tribal Tattoos: Trend or Tradition?" and all follow this design despite

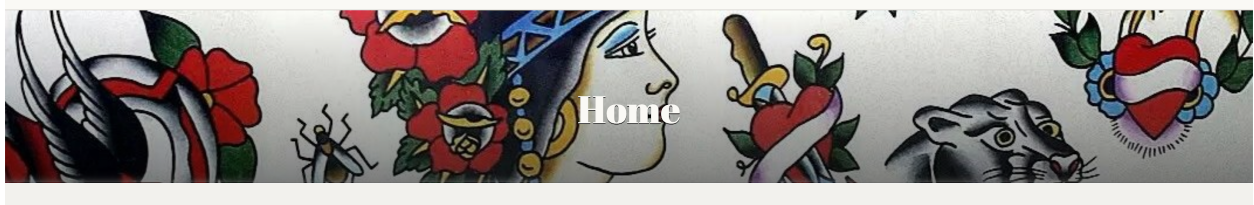
being different for each blog post and topic. This format for the headlines of my blog posts works particularly well, since it can easily stand alone without even reading the post and inform the reader of the topic of the post, and what the opinion or insight offered about the topic will be, generally speaking. I also think I have done a good job avoiding headlines that are too kitschy or clickbait-esque, which could certainly detract from the quality and purpose of my blog, as well as the potential for readership by the target audience of my blog. This has been consistent throughout the entirety of blogging this semester, and is one of the greater successes in the writing strategies applied in the blog.

### **Design and SEO Strategies Applied**

The two main considerations taken into account when determining the design and SEO strategies applied to the blog were maintaining a specific personality for the blog through the general layout of the website, as well as keeping the moving parts of the website to a minimum to boost both the searchability of the website and the ease of navigation for visitors to the blog. Upon beginning the blog, I identified a personality that would be evident in the writing and tone of the blog posts, and then attempted to reflect this same personality in the design decisions made throughout the website. The overall personality of the blog “Tattoo Talk” is meant to be forthcoming, understandable, and accessible, while still being an educational and stylish approach to the topic of the history of tattoo art. It is easy for the personality to come across in the voice of the blog posts through the writing itself, but it is more tedious attempting to capture that same energy through the design of the site; however, there are several elements of visual rhetoric at play in the design of the blog that attempt to allow for the personality to come through to users who visit the site.

The most obvious visual element of the blog meant to represent this accessible and educational, yet stylish, personality present in the writing of the blog posts is the use of the image in the banner of the website. According to Chapter 13 of *White Space is not Your Enemy*,

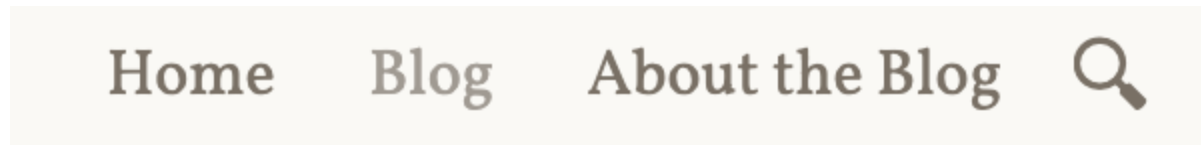
“Designing for the Web,” a website “needs a big bold something to catch the eye and set the tone for the site” (Hagen et al. 231). To evoke the personality of the blog, the main focal point in the design of the site is the banner image.



*Fig. 2: The banner image on the homepage of Tattoo Talk.*

The image used is meant to appear as what is referred to as a “flash sheet” in tattooing, where an artist will design multiple pieces in the same colors and style on a single sheet to be purchased and tattooed as they come. The flash sheet image is done in the American Traditional style of tattooing, which is a topic discussed in the posts of the blog, so it relates heavily to the overall content of the blog, meant to educate and inform readers without being bland. Imagery is an important part of the blog as it is, so the choice to use a more colorful and eye-catching image in the banner that keeps the design lighthearted but still rooted in the educational purpose of the blog was necessary, and is accomplished well in the use of the banner image.

The other most obvious decision made for the website contributes to the success of both the design and SEO of the site. This decision was the choice to avoid any extra moving parts on the website, such as dropdown menus or lengthy navigation bars. According to Chapter 13 of *White Space is Not Your Enemy*, the maximum number of navigation links that should be available is 7, and when using any more than 7, “the quantity of links becomes difficult to visually process” (Hagen et al. 235). On the website, there are only three simple links in the navigation menu.



*Fig. 3: The navigation menu on the blog's website.*

This is an easy amount for readers to digest and navigate when using the site, which ensures that they will not be overwhelmed -- something that a blog seeking to educate readers should definitely avoid. As a result of this condensed version of a navigation bar, there are also no dropdown menus featured within the navigation, as "pull-down menus can be difficult for some people to utilize," (Hagen et al. 235) which could detract from the understandable and accessible personality of the blog and detract from the overall user experience, as well as SEO of the site.

The presence of extra "moving parts" have the potential to slow down the loading of a website, so the choice to avoid those was deliberate. Since Google searches prioritize faster loading websites, the template of choice and the avoidance of many different pages that would slow the site down and cause it to take a longer amount of time to load. Overall, the minimal design of the site in terms of the very few different links within the navigation menus and the lack of widgets serves to decrease the amount of time it takes to reach full interactivity on the site, which in turn improves the searchability of the site. This is ultimately helpful in achieving the purpose of the blog not only by aligning with the intended personality, but also helping to more effectively reach people who are searching for the information found in the blog posts through search engines like Google.

### **Social Media Strategy**

The social media platform used along with the blog was Instagram. This platform made the most sense in connection to the topic and content of the blog, since the blog itself is highly visual and reliant on images from within the tattooing community, and Instagram is an

image-sharing social media site. The most effective social media strategies utilized for the blog were certainly the use of hashtags on each post, the link of the blog being present in the bio of the Instagram account, and the engagement with other Instagram accounts' content to gain followers and engagement of my own.

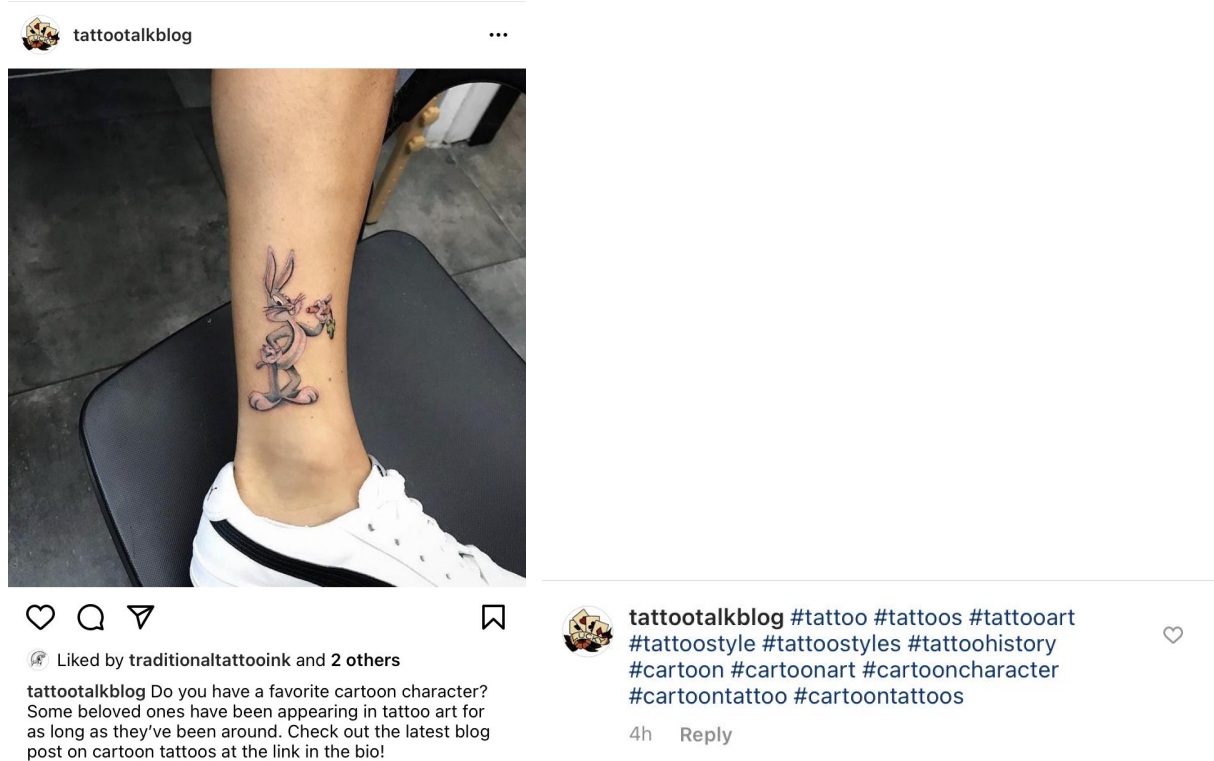


Fig. 4 and 5: Examples of social media posts and hashtags on the Instagram account.



Fig. 6: The link to the blog present in the bio of the Instagram profile.

Even when posts weren't being made, I still continually liked, commented on, and interacted with posts by other users who produced similar content in order to build rapport and direct users

to the profile for the blog. Specifically, a number of related hashtags, both popular and more obscure, were utilized on each and every post to increase the visibility of the posts, which ultimately did result in those posts getting a few likes and even a few followers in the end.

Initially, I believed that my past experience in running social media accounts for various businesses translated easily to running one for the blog, but this proved to be much more difficult, as it was not an account that already existed and had a following, but one that a following had to be sought out for. The hardest aspect of using social media in connection to the blog was building it from the ground up, which is more complicated for a platform such as Instagram. Not only did the Instagram account have to be updated, but engagement with other users was also necessary through liking and following, as well as commenting on posts by other accounts related to the one for the blog in hopes that this would drive traffic to the Instagram profile, and ultimately, the blog. This presented more of a challenge than I had anticipated at the start, even though the platform of Instagram is definitely the best social media for the blog. Given more time, the social media could have been much stronger and would definitely have driven more readers to the blog, but with the very slow stream of followers to the account and the small amount of engagement, it did not make a large enough difference in the time frame of the semester to dramatically affect the blog's readership.

### **Appendix: Blog Post Examples**

The following is a list of my blog posts in the last 5 weeks of the course.

<b>Post Title</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>Link</b>
<b>Micro Tattoos: A Tiny Taste of Tattooing</b>	This post covers the style of micro tattooing, discussing the reasoning behind getting a micro tattoo as well as the implications of micro	<a href="https://tatttalk.wordpress.com/2020/12/03/micro-tattoos-a-tiny-taste-of-tattooing/">https://tatttalk.wordpress.com/2020/12/03/micro-tattoos-a-tiny-taste-of-tattooing/</a>

	tattooing as related to the aging process of tattoos.	
<b>Abstract Tattoos: The Avant-Garde Tattoo Art</b>	This post discusses the abstract style of tattooing, describing its origins, possible iterations, and the meaning behind abstract pieces.	<a href="https://tatttalk.wordpress.com/2020/12/03/abstract-tattoos-the-avant-garde-of-tattoo-art/">https://tatttalk.wordpress.com/2020/12/03/abstract-tattoos-the-avant-garde-of-tattoo-art/</a>
<b>3D Tattoos: A Trick on the Eye</b>	This post covers the recent trend of the anaglyph or red and blue 3D style of tattooing, and how the optical illusion works in tattoo art.	<a href="https://tatttalk.wordpress.com/2020/12/03/3d-tattoos-a-trick-on-the-eye/">https://tatttalk.wordpress.com/2020/12/03/3d-tattoos-a-trick-on-the-eye/</a>
<b>Cartoon Tattoos: A Tribute to Television</b>	This post discusses the cartoon style of tattooing, focusing on how cartoon characters have a rich history and meaning in the world of tattooing.	<a href="https://tatttalk.wordpress.com/2020/12/04/cartoon-tattoos-a-tribute-to-television/">https://tatttalk.wordpress.com/2020/12/04/cartoon-tattoos-a-tribute-to-television/</a>
<b>Paintbrush Tattoos: Brushstrokes on Skin</b>	This post covers the recent style trend within the tattoo community, which is brushstroke style tattoos.	<a href="https://tatttalk.wordpress.com/2020/12/04/paintbrush-tattoos-brushstrokes-on-skin/">https://tatttalk.wordpress.com/2020/12/04/paintbrush-tattoos-brushstrokes-on-skin/</a>
<b>Tattoos: More Than Just Art</b>	This is the final post on the blog, which covers the initial goal of the blog and returns to the idea of tattoos and the different styles of tattooing being more than just the art that they are on the surface.	<a href="https://tatttalk.wordpress.com/2020/12/04/tattoos-more-than-just-art/">https://tatttalk.wordpress.com/2020/12/04/tattoos-more-than-just-art/</a>

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