

How to write a social media post

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I was working with my son, James, earlier this week, explaining my approach to writing a social media post, and most especially, an opinion piece. His prior career as a student, a student journalist at Leeds, and in a local authority did not really prepare him for this, so I outlined my suggestion that such a piece is akin to "an idea going for a walk". We agreed I should make a note for reference purposes, and I thought it was worth sharing here.

The goal

Knowing how to write a blog article is key to becoming a social media writer, and even a content creator, because the disciplines are very similar.

Social media pieces fall into two broad categories. They are either journalism or opinion pieces. This post will explain how to write both.

Journalism

The conventional logic of journalism is that you are reporting a story. So, the questions to be answered are:

- * What happened?
- * Where did it happen?
- * When did it happen?
- * To whom did it happen?
- * Who did it?
- * Why did it happen?
- * What are the consequences?

That is what a standard piece of journalism tries to do. There is no harm in trying to write in that way on occasion. Sometimes we need to do that kind of writing, but not that often: this is not what most of social media is about.

Opinion pieces

An opinion piece is different, but you are still going to need to provide a logical sequence through the piece you're writing.

Think of an opinion piece as being like an idea going for a walk. To make that work, you need to know:

- * Your start point (the 'hook').
- * Where you are going (the conclusion).
- * Your route between the two (what you're going to note on the way).
- * An explanation as to why you chose that route instead of the other options (your argument).

Without knowing those things, no one is going to even join you on your walk. Likewise, without displaying your awareness of those things in the piece you intend to write, by ensuring they unfold in a logical order, no one is going to join you in the journey through it by reading what you have to write.

The Hook

You start with a hook, which is the opening two or three sentences, at most. This frames the whole opinion piece that you are going to write, and so it has to include:

- * A reference to the matter you're writing about.
- * An indication of why either you or the person who did whatever you were referring to thinks this is important.
- * Some indication of whether you agree with the person whose actions you are commenting on, sometimes with a little hint as to why.

The aim is quite simple. You are trying to set up stress. You want the reader to think that there is something important that they need to know. The promise that you're trying to create is that when they have finished reading your piece, they will be better off in terms of understanding than they are now.

The conclusion

Once you have written the hook, it is important that you know where the article is

going. You can't let it wander. If you do, so too will the reader. They simply will not stay with you to the end, but you want them to.

So, before you fill in the gaps - which represent the route and why you chose it - you have to work out why you either strongly agree or disagree with the person you've referred to in the hook. It can be either, but if you neither strongly agree nor disagree, the article isn't worth writing. It's just padding, and no one wants that. In other words, you have to know the conclusion, which is your destination, before you know your route or why you chose it.

There is an important point to make: the hook and the conclusion have to be linked. It's like knowing whether you're going on a circular walk, and if not, how you will do the return leg to the start point if needed. Unless you have worked that relationship out, there is no point going any further.

The facts

Then you have to be able to explain why you strongly agree or disagree with the proposition you are discussing. This is where a clear development of the facts as you see them is required. I often do this by using paragraphs starting "first, second, third", and so on as my argument develops. What I am setting out is a series of views that support my argument. Almost invariably, I am also reframing the argument of the person referred to in the hook to show why I think it is wrong.

The best arguments here are that:

- * The person referred to in the hook has misunderstood the question they're trying to answer.
- * They have used the wrong data when answering the question.
- * Their framing is wrong because they are using:
 - * neoliberalism,
 - * austerity economics, or whatever. This means they are bound to come to the wrong conclusion.
- * They have misread the other players in the situation.
- * Their sequencing of events is wrong, meaning, for example, they assume that events will happen in the order one, two, three, four, but in practice, I think the events will run in the order two, one, four, three (or whatever)

There are variations on all these themes, of course, but the point is that you are establishing that there is some significant and logically explained difference of opinion

between you and the person referred to in the hook.

The arguments

Then, having walked the reader through these steps, you need to explain what should be done. A good opinion piece is solution-focused, meaning that you have to suggest an alternative outcome or outcomes to those proposed by the proponent of the argument referred to in the hook. This is the "choice of route" argument to which I referred above. This requires clarity of thought - but not necessarily something excessively complicated. You might suggest that the person whose arguments you are addressing should:

- * Put people or planet first.
- * Change their framing because governments can always find resources to fulfil their objectives if they wish to do so, presuming there are underused resources in the economy at present.
- * Note the country's political mood and adjust their actions accordingly.
- * Do whatever you decide is appropriate.

Finally

Having done all that, you need to write a punchy close of a few words, if that is possible. This is usually best done by referring back to the hook and making clear that your opening observation that whoever is referred to in it is wrong is justified.

That is it. That is how to write an article.

So where does AI fit into this?

Let's be clear that AI might be useful to you.

Firstly, there are some things to note, including most especially that:

- * ChatGPT can never work out what the hook is for you. You have no choice but to work that out if this is to be your own piece.
- * ChatGPT cannot work out what the conclusion is. That has to reflect your opinion.
- * ChatGPT is not always very good at working out the steps in between, either. You might well have to do that, too.

That does not, however, mean that once you have these ideas in note form, you cannot then use ChatGPT, but these things are critical:

- * Delete all the dashes it likes so much unless they look absolutely essential, and always replace their long dashes with short ones.
- * It seems to love putting certain words in quotation marks at present in ways not commonplace in most writing. In most cases, just delete them.
- * They also usually want to write in the style of an angry person just out of journalism school, when in practice, if you're writing narrative opinion pieces, you might well want to appear to be a seasoned observer, meaning that you can write narrative English in reasonably, but not excessively, long paragraphs.

You might need to include these preferences in your ChatGPT prompt.

If you do decide to carry on with ChatGPT (or some other AI agent), having thought about all that, feel free to ask it for help, but remember, there is just about nothing it has ever produced that does not require:

- * A careful edit.
- * Fact-checking.
- * Personalisation.

And if you still do not like what it has done, ask it to have another go.

All that being said, the next thing to do is try writing, and keep doing so time after time. Ultimately, that is the only way to learn how to write a social media post.