



## Branching out: How to Reap in the Benefits of Blog-groups

**G**ood news for those who weren't practically raised in front of a computer screen: you don't have to be a tech-savvy youth in order to reap in all the benefits of blog-groups. "Blog *what?*" you might ask yourself, baffled at the term. You've heard of blogs, as the blog itself has become an integral part of the technology-filled lives of the youthful individuals close to you, but a *blog-group*? Blog-groups serve as miniature communities on blogging websites, such as Myspace.com, and within these groups the users communicate with each other about common interests, beliefs, or experiences. These groups are often perceived as places for tech-savvy youths to gather in order to gripe about parents, school, or search for on-line rendezvous, but, in reality, countless groups exist on these sites that appeal exclusively to the older generation. Group topics range from parenting to the nightlife, politics to religion, sports to crafts, and within these groups you can interact and establish relationships with other members. Sounds appealing, does it not? Many people, however, find getting started in establishing online blog-group networks difficult. If you find yourself confused as to where to begin, some guidelines do exist concerning finding and joining blog-groups, selecting fruitful discussion topics, interacting with other members, and using online shorthand.

### CHECK IT OUT!

The first step to finding groups to belong to is to browse the types of groups on the site. Over one million groups exist on Myspace.com, and the number is growing each day. No limit exists as to how many groups you can join, but don't join too many, because although one of the benefits of these groups remains that they require little or no set time commitments, joining too many groups will prevent quality interaction within the groups. Join several different groups in several different areas that interest you. For example, don't join ten similar groups within the "Parenting" category, as a lot of the discussion content will be similar among the groups and you won't be able to experience a good variety of topics. You can either search for group categories, or merely browse from the groups homepage. When you see a group that interests you:

1. **Click** on the group's site
2. **Read** the group's profile
3. **Glance** over the discussion topics within the group
4. **Click the "Join Group" button** at the top right hand corner of the specific group's page.



## SELECTING A FRUITFUL TOPIC

Forums serve as the main method of communication on a blog-group's homepage. No, not forums as in those pesky things you fill out during tax season, but rather an interactive, virtual discussion board in which group members post topics and other members post responses. While you can just respond to the existing topics on these forums, should you feel so inclined to fabricate your own topic, you should follow certain guidelines while brain-storming a topic.




- **Leave your topic open for discussion** To make responding easy for other members, leave your topic open-ended so that discussion can easily occur and you can get to know your fellow group members through their responses. Yes and no questions generally lead to dead ends on forums.
- **Relate your topic to the group's concentration.** When thinking of a topic; make sure it relates somehow to the general topic of the group. Chances are your "Conservative Politicians of Myspace" group will not fully appreciate the silly antics of your dog as much as your "Dog-Lovers United" group will.
- **Make the topic your own** Don't just ask a slightly different variation of an already posted topic. Taking an existing topic, however, and using it as a starting point remains a viable method for choosing a topic. One way of doing this is either broadening or narrowing down an existing topic to mold it into a unique idea.

## WHEN IN ROME: NETIQUETTE

As the old saying goes, when in Rome, do as the Romans do. When

interacting in blog-groups, certain codes of conduct exist on discussion forums and blog-groups in general. Blogging communities are not utopian. Most members exist within blog-groups for mutual

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Post a New Topic   View All Topics	
Topic Starter	
<b>Wills</b>	 10/05/2005 8:49 AM by: <b>someone else</b>
<b>Wills</b>	 10/06/2005 10:39 AM by: <b>Emily</b>
	 10/06/2005 10:19 AM by: <b>...</b>

The "Post New Topic" link, located in the top right hand corner of forum

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## BECOMING AN ESTABLISHED GROUP MEMBER

1. Don't Be a Lurker-Participate often!
2. Keep an Open Mind
3. Branch out in the types of groups you participate in
4. Contact other group members
5. Use the Quote and Reply Features when responding to discussion forum topics to make your responses readable
6. Stick to the discussion topic in your responses. Try to avoid babbling.

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reasons, to branch out and meet new people, to discuss issues of interests, to share experiences, advice, and pictures with other members. However, blogging communities such as Myspace.com are extremely diverse and contain members from all different political, religious, and cultural backgrounds. Some individuals, however, exist in groups

merely to make quality discussion difficult and to anger other members (i.e. a Conservative advocate in a Liberal group, a homophobic individual in a Gay Rights group). When encountering these members, do not by any means fuel their attempts to annoy other members and either try to ignore them, or try to diffuse their negative comments as respectfully as possible. Keeping the Golden Rule in mind, (“Treat others as you wish to be treated”) will likely help you avoid conflict with other members

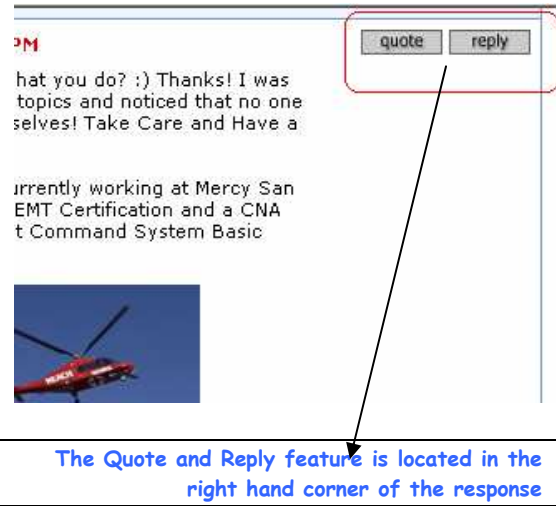
Make sure to keep an open mind, as some member’s views might differ from yours. Remain open to the option of “agree to disagree”, especially applies to the political and any groups that concern beliefs.

As most interaction between group members remains conversational and informal, typos remain forgivable mistakes, although an excessive amount might portray a negative impression on fellow users. On-line short-hand, phenomena later discussed, remains prominent in a lot of the groups, yet might not exist within the more serious, formal groups. If you feel unsure as to what style of communication the group members use on the forums, look through the existing responses to topics and observe the formality, style, and use of on-line shorthand and slang.

Furthermore, when replying to specific responses, use the “Reply” feature, which will place your response directly under the response you reacted to. The “Quote” feature places a member’s response in a subset box in your own response, allowing readers to refer back to the quote you are responding to.

Last but not least, take the initiative when it comes to communicating with other members in the groups. Leave a comment on their site or blog, message them through the blogging site, regardless of your method, you will find that relationships will be formed after the initial steps. Participate often! Don’t just read other’s responses, respond

yourself, and establish a name for yourself within the group.



### A GUIDE TO OSL:

- BTW:** By the Way
- FYI:** For Your Information
- ASL:** Age, Sex, Location?
- ITSFWI:** If the Shoe Fits, Wear It
- BIF:** Before I forget
- KISS:** Keep it Simple, Stupid
- IMHO:** In My Humble (Honest) Opinion
- ROFL:** Rolling on the Floor Laughing
- IDK:** I Don't Know
- MOF:** Matter of Fact
- CYA:** See you
- THX:** Thanks
- IRL:** In Real Life
- PLZ:** Please
- TAFN:** That's All For Now
- WIBNI:** Wouldn't It Be Nice If
- LOL:** Laughing out Loud
- WTH:** What the Heck?
- TTYL:** Talk to you later

For a more comprehensive guide to OSL, visit <http://netforbeginners.about.com/cs/nettiquette101/a/abbreviations.htm>

### BLOGGIN' LINGO:

Ever noticed how the nimble fingers of youth glide over the keyboard as if typing exists as

second nature to them? Whereas you, having been introduced to the keyboard at a much later age, and lacking the agile fingers of youth, stumble over the keys like a man with his feet tied together? A phenomenon has occurred in many areas of on-line communication called Online Shorthand (OSL). OSL consists mainly of acronyms and abbreviations that relieve the user of the tedious process of typing out every minute word or common phrases used in on-line interaction. OSL can become excessive, however, so use discretion while utilizing these shortcuts.

Alas, now you've no excuse to pass up the opportunity to join blog-groups and branch out in your online social network! The mere fact that you and technology didn't meet up until later in life doesn't prohibit you from participating in blog-groups. Through contributing to the discussions among blog-group members, understanding the etiquette among members, and utilizing online shorthand understanding the etiquette code and on-line short-hand, you will be well on your way to existing as a vital member of your blog-groups.