Chapter 1

Discovering Blog Basics

In This Chapter

- Recognizing the hallmarks of a blog
- Getting started with your own blog
- Deciding what to blog about
- Blogging successfully

Unless you live under a rock, you’ve heard the word blog used sometime in the last couple of years — journalists, in particular, are fascinated by this new type of Web site. And bloggers, in turn, are showing up as commentators and experts in news stories and on television. At the same time, you might have a son or daughter who has a blog, or perhaps you’ve been told about a blog your company is starting. What exactly is it that all these people mean when they say they have a blog? And how can such different organizations be using the same technology to communicate?

Don’t be too hard on yourself if you aren’t exactly sure what a blog is. The word blog is actually a mashup of two other words — Web and log — so if it sounds made up, that’s because it is. A blog is a chronologically ordered series of Web site updates, written and organized much like a traditional diary right down to the informal style of writing that characterizes personal communication.

In this chapter, you find out just what makes a blog bloggy and why so many people are jumping on board with this trend. (Hint: It’s isn’t just that we’re all narcissists!) You get some ideas that you can use to start your own blog and become part of the blogosphere (the community of blogs and bloggers around the world).

No matter what your teenager tells you, there is absolutely no requirement that you must write your blog while wearing your pajamas. Also, you are allowed to use a spellchecker.
Making Yourself Comfortable with Blogs

I talk to lots of people about blogs, many of whom know that you can find a blog on the World Wide Web, but who also have the impression that all blogs are written by navel-gazing cranks with an axe to grind or by 12-year-old girls. It’s true that some blogs really are diaries in which the minutiae of day-to-day life are recorded, but blogs can be much more than that and are written by all kinds of people.

One of my favorite blogs falls into the personal diary category: Mimi Smartypants (http://smartypants.diaryland.com). This humorous blog is written by a woman living in Chicago who records her thoughts and activities with such hilarious prose that I find myself laughing out loud.

For contrast, visit Mäni’s Bakery Blog Café (www.manisbakery.com/blogcafe), a blog written by the staff of Mäni’s Bakery in Los Angeles for its customers (shown in Figure 1-1). Mäni’s uses the blog to announce menu changes and weekly specials, offer coupons, and describes changes going on in the restaurant (like the recent addition of an ATM).

Figure 1-1: The Mäni’s Bakery blog does a great job of keeping customers updated.
Think of a blog this way: It’s a kind of Web site. All blogs are Web sites (the opposite isn’t true, though), and what makes them blogs isn’t the content or creator — it’s the presentation. A blog can be many things: diary, news source, photo gallery, even a corporate marketing tool. Blog content can be text, photos, audio, and even video, and bloggers talk about nearly any subject you can imagine.

One of the reasons blogs have become such a popular way of publishing a Web site is because they are particularly good at generating high search engine rankings. With a blog, you’re more likely to come up high in lists of search results for the topics you discuss, because your posts are fresh and current. Search engines give an extra boost to Web pages that have the most recently updated or created content on the keywords being searched. And better search engine listings mean more visitors, more readers, more comments, and a more vibrant community. Individuals and companies have been quick to take advantage of the medium to reach out to Web users.

**How blogs are being used**

With millions of blogs in the world — the blog search engine Technorati was tracking more than 75 million around the world in July 2007 — it’s obvious that blogging is a popular and successful format for publishing a Web site. But just what are people doing with blogs? They can’t all be people talking about their cats!

And they aren’t. Bloggers are using the blog format to communicate effectively in all kinds of information spheres, from the personal to the professional. In fact, many blogs serve multiple purposes at once, mixing posts about activities at home with news pertaining to work. Your blog can serve many purposes in your life.

**Documenting your life**

Lots of folks use blogs for the same reason they might keep a diary — to chronicle their life and activities. This urge to communicate is expressed in all kinds of mediums, from scrapbooking to taking digital photographs, and if you’re interested in sharing these personal details with others, a blog is a fast, efficient way to do so.

If you send Christmas newsletters every year or e-mail a group of friends and family to let them know about exciting events in your life, you’ll find a blog to be a lot of fun. You can blog as often as you like, and your readers visit when they’re ready to get more information. Best of all, each blog post gives your friends and family a quick way to respond to you without having to find the stamps; all they have to do is leave a comment on your blog post. You might find you’re talking more to your family than ever before!
You don't have to find the stamps either, so keeping in touch is inexpensive and less time-consuming (no more envelopes to lick).

Of course, not all lives come up roses every day; it can’t all be wedding and travel blogs. Personal blogs can be intense when they document rough times. Derek Miller (www.penmachine.com), a Vancouver-based writer, has used his blog to document his experiences with cancer. He posted this on June 26, 2007:

“To boil it down: my cancer has grown and spread. My goals now are to see the Winter Olympics come to Vancouver in 2010, and beyond that to renew my driver’s license when it expires again in five years. But while my medical team and I will do everything to try to make that happen, there is a significant chance I might not live that long, that I might be dead before five years are up.

“It’s a heavy day. I have cried, and laughed, and shared a drink and nachos with my friend Simon, and hugged my wife and my children and my parents. And I will fight on. It’s a fine line between acknowledging and accepting what could happen and denying it. I’m naturally an optimistic guy, but I can’t pretend that everything will be just fine, because it already isn’t. The future, even the near future, is a mystery, and I must walk into it.”

Figure 1-2 shows Derek’s blog.

Figure 1-2: Derek Miller blogs about everything in his life, from chemotherapy to Apple’s new operating system.
Don’t forget, in your eagerness to let your friends know about what you’re up to, that a blog (unlike a real diary or scrapbook) is available to anyone in the world, now and in the future. Don’t publish anything you might find embarrassing in the future, and have the same consideration when talking about others or in using photographs.

**Exploring a hobby or passion**

If you have a passion or hobby you just love to talk about, consider doing so in a blog. Anyone who shares your interest is a potential reader and is bound to be looking for more information wherever they can find it.

You can detail your own experience, offer advice to others, drum up support for whatever you like to do, or just talk about what you love. Best of all, you might be able to make connections with others who share your infatuation, making friends and finding ways to get involved with your hobby more deeply.

Cybele May runs a blog about something she loves: candy. Candy Blog ([www.candyblog.net](http://www.candyblog.net)) is her personal labor of love and a great excuse to buy lots of candy! Cybele reviews candies, writing extensive descriptions of taste, texture, and ingredients for fellow sugar-enthusiasts. And they respond! A post about Dots garnered 18 comments from fans and critics of the chewy movie theater favorite. Check out Candy Blog in Figure 1-3.

![Figure 1-3: Candy Blog is a sweet labor of love for Cybele May.](http://www.candyblog.net)
Sharing information

Sometimes a blog is all about sharing information. Journalists have used blogs to report on local, national, and international news; critics and commentators use the medium to state their opinions and predictions. Educators keep parents and students abreast of classroom happenings and dates. Co-workers let colleagues in geographically distant offices know what’s going on with collaborative projects. The uses of the informational blog are really limitless.

The popular blog Boing Boing (www.boingboing.net) is a great example of an information-sharing blog. Self-described as a “directory of wonderful things,” Boing Boing’s several contributors are dedicated to keeping you up to date on all the weird and wonderful Web sites in the world. A selection of posts from July 2007 described a ceramics company that makes skull cake toppers, pointed out artistic vintage Polish movie posters, and explained why meerkats attack newcomers to their groups (and how to keep it from happening). This site is truly a random collection of news and links, perfect for the eclectic consumer of trivia.

Another popular information blog is Gizmodo (www.gizmodo.com). This gadget guide for the geek in all of us keeps you current on the latest Apple hardware releases, advises you about price drops in Xbox 360s, and explains how to insure your Apple iPhone against theft or damage. You might not find every post useful, but if you’re trying to keep up with the breakneck pace of technological innovation you can fit in your purse, Gizmodo (shown in Figure 1-4) and blogs like it are an invaluable resource.

Making money

You spend a lot of time producing your blog, and a lot of people read it. Why not turn those eyes into dollars? That’s a question many a popular blogger has asked, and there are several ways to make it happen.

The most common technique is to include advertising on your blog pages. Google Adsense is one provider of in-page advertising that is designed to match the content of your blog and therefore be of interest to your readers. Each time a visitor to your blog clicks one of these advertising links, you earn money from Google. I talk more about making money from advertising programs, affiliate links, sponsorships, and more in Chapter 16.

Of course, companies haven’t missed out on the fact that blogs are a great way to drum up interest in their products and services or to inform and connect with consumers. Many companies have added blogs to their Web sites, and they’ve used the blogs to start conversations with their customers and potential customers. In many cases, taking on the informal voice of the blog medium has helped customers to understand that there are real people in these organizations. The result is better credibility for the company and often better recognition of the company and its values in the marketplace.
General Motors, Google, and Sun Microsystems all have company blogs, but many smaller businesses, and even individuals, are also taking advantage of this new format, giving readers a peak inside the corporate culture of what might otherwise be fairly faceless monoliths.

Southwest has taken this approach (www.blogsouthwest.com). In the blog’s “user guide,” Southwest says, “Our goal with this blog is to give our readers the opportunity to take a look inside Southwest Airlines and to interact with us.” Southwest tries to make sure that lots of voices inside the company are represented on the blog, from managers to captains — even the president of the company. As with personal blogs, the tone is light and conversational, making the company seem friendly and accessible.

**Recognizing a blog**

Chances are good that you’ve seen a blog online already. Because there’s no requirement that the blogger put a big “This is a blog!” sticker at the top of the page, you might not have realized that you were seeing a blog at all. With a little practice and familiarity with standard blog elements, though, you can identify any blog in a snap.
Regardless of what the blog is about or who writes it, every blog is characterized by

- **Frequent updates:** Most blogs are updated a few times a week; some are even updated a few times a day. There isn’t a schedule for publishing; the blogger simply updates the blog when it seems appropriate.

- **Posts or entries:** Each time a blogger updates the blog, he or she creates a blog post, or entry, that is added to the blog.

- **Permalinks:** Each time a post is added to a blog, it’s placed on the home page. At the same time, a permalink page is created to contain only that blog post and its comments. (The word permalink is short for “permanent link.”) Permalink pages are a big part of why blogs do so well with search engines — every post adds a new page to your Web site and is another opportunity for your blog to come up as a search result.

- **Chronological order:** When a blogger writes a new blog post, it’s displayed at the top of the blog’s first page. The next time a post is written, it shows up at the top, and the older posts move down the page.

- **Comments:** Most (though not all) blogs allow readers to leave comments — short text messages — in response to blog posts. It is comments that really differentiate a blog from most Web sites, by encouraging interaction and conversation.

- **Archives:** Because a blog is updated so frequently, many blogs are sorted into a date-based archive so that readers can find older information easily.

- **Categories:** Blog posts can also be sorted by subject, or categories, allowing a blogger to blog about a number of different topics and readers to focus in on the topics that most interest them.

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**Blogging through the ages**

The concept behind a blog isn’t new; after all, people have been keeping diaries and journals for as long as the written word has permitted it. Even on the Web, diary Web sites existed long before the word blog was first used.

No one really knows when the first true blog was created, but estimates put the date around 1994. The term weblog came into existence in 1997, and it was quickly shortened to the more colloquial blog. If you want to read more about the history of blogging, visit Wikipedia at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog).

Blog and read author Rebecca Blood’s essay on the early days of blogging online at [www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog_history.html](http://www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog_history.html).

In July 2007, the blog search engine Technorati ([www.technorati.com](http://www.technorati.com)) was tracking more than 93.8 million blogs from all over the world. Even if you discount some of that number as tests or short-lived experiments, the number of blogs is huge — and it’s growing every month.

In May 2007, for example, Technorati was tracking only 75 million blogs.
Blog anatomy: Dissecting a typical blog

In this section, I give you a tour of the usual blog elements using baker Rose Levy Beranbaum’s blog, Real Baking with Rose (www.realbakingwithrose.com). This is an unusual blog because although Rose writes it herself, it’s sponsored by Gold Medal Flour, who paid for the blog to be built and handles any maintenance costs associated with running it. It still has all the usual features that I discuss in this section, as shown in Figure 1-5.

Rose’s sponsorship is unusual, but the format of her blog isn’t. In fact, most blogs — no matter what topic they cover — look quite similar, because the elements of one blog are common to all blogs.

All blogs typically have the following common elements:
Branding/logo header: A header at the top of the blog displays the name of the blog, often using a logo or other visual element. This header is visible on every page of the blog, identifying it even to a visitor who visits one of the interior pages without first going to the home page. In Figure 1-5, the header contains the name of the blog and also a caricature of Rose and the Gold Medal logo indicating the blog’s sponsorship.

Most recent posts: At the top of the blog’s home page, the most recent post is displayed. As you scroll down the home page, you see the next most recent post, and the next most recent post, and so on. New posts are always at the top, making it easy to find the latest, freshest information when you visit. The number of recent blog posts displayed on the first page of the blog is usually around a dozen, and to read older posts readers can visit the archives.

Post information: Along with each entry, blog software displays information about the post. This sort of post information is typical — but not mandated. A blog might be missing an element or two that I list, or have others I don’t mention:

- The date and time the post was published.
- The name of the post’s author. On blogs with multiple authors, this info is especially important to the visitor.
- The number of comments on the post. In Figure 1-5, you can see the first post has two comments.
- A link to the permalink page, usually labeled Permalink. Sometimes, as in Figure 1-5, the link to the permalink page is labeled Post a Comment because you can both read and post comments on the permalink page.
- The category in which the post has been placed. In Figure 1-5, the category of the top post is Announcements.
- Other links to bells and whistles unique to the blog, like the links to Trackbacks or Send to a Friend (that allow you to quickly e-mail the post to a friend) in Figure 1-5.

Sidebar material: Most blogs are laid out in two or three columns, with the most real estate given to the column containing the blog posts themselves. The second and/or third columns display organizational material for the blog, and peripheral information. Some blogs don’t have sidebars at all, and on some blogs you may see elements I don’t mention in this list of typical sidebar components:

- Date-based archives: Nearly every blog is archived as it’s published, by date and by category. In the sidebar of a blog, you can usually access both archive methods. Figure 1-6 shows the date-based archives of Rose’s blog, broken down by month. Date-based archives can also show weeks and years.
• **Categorized archives:** Figure 1-7 shows the category archives of Real Baking with Rose. By sorting each post into a category at the time it is published, Rose creates an archive organized by subject, making it easy for you to find the posts you’re most interested in. Clicking a category link displays only the posts in that subject area, in reverse chronological order.

• **Blogroll:** A blogroll is a list of blogs that you find interesting or useful. By including the blogs and Web sites Rose likes to read on her blog, she can direct her readers to other interesting Web sites (see Figure 1-8). And who knows, those sites may return the favor, sending their visitors to her site.

• **Information about the author:** Because blogs are so personal, sometimes you want to know more about who’s writing them. Many bloggers know their readers are curious and put together short bios and other information for readers. This information is sometimes displayed in the sidebar, or linked to as in Figure 1-9.
• **RSS feed link:** RSS, or Really Simple Syndication, is a way readers can subscribe to your blog by using a newsreader such as Google Reader. After a reader subscribes via RSS, she can read the latest updates via the newsreader rather than visiting your blog. This is helpful because it means your readers don’t have to visit your blog several times a day to see whether you’ve updated it. A blog often includes an RSS link near the bottom of the sidebar identified by a small orange icon, as shown in Figure 1-10. I talk more about RSS in Chapter 11.

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**Getting a Blog Started**

One of the reasons that so many blogs exist is that they’re so easy to set up and publish. The early days of the Internet were full of heady talk about the democratization of publishing; there was a lot of discussion about absolutely anyone having the power to publish thanks to the prevalence of personal computers. In fact, that wasn’t strictly true. It’s true that a writer no longer needed a printing press and a distribution method to be read, but specialized skills and technology were still required.

Unless the would-be publisher spent time learning HTML, had a computer with an Internet connection, and understood how to put files onto a Web server, he was still pretty much in the same boat he had always been in. Acquiring those skills and the tools to publish wasn’t impossible, but it wasn’t terribly easy, either.

The answer, as it turns out, comes down to technology, and specifically to software. I believe blogging goes a long way toward making that initial promise of the Web come true. If you can write an e-mail, you can figure out
how to use the simple interface of blogging software without any of the muss or deal with HTML, FTP, or any of those other awful Web acronyms everyone is supposed to understand these days.

Figure 1-11 shows the publishing interface of my favorite blogging software, ExpressionEngine. When I want to write a blog post, I simply log in to my blogging software and fill in the blanks for a new post. When I’m done, I click Save and the post is published to my blog. It’s that simple.

![Figure 1-11: Publishing a blog is as simple as filling in a few form fields and clicking Save.](image)

Different blog software offers different feature sets. As with all software, the tricky part is finding the right one to use for your situation and needs, but be reassured: blogging software comes in all shapes, sizes and price ranges. In Chapter 4, I talk extensively about choosing the right software solution for your blog. And Chapter 2 shows you how to start a blog with Blogger (popular blog software) in about 10 minutes.

**Choosing What to Blog About**

Blog topics are all over the map. If you haven’t already read a blog, follow these simple steps to finding one and reading it — it’s the best possible way to become familiar with the medium:

2. Type any search term you’re interested in reading about into the search box at the top of the page.

   For example, you might enjoy reading a blog written by someone with whom you share a hobby, like knitting or parasailing. Or, try a search term that describes what you do for a living; if you’re an accountant, for example, you might search for “tax regulations.” Or, search for something that can help you accomplish a task, like buying a house or learning to paint.

3. Click Search.

   Technorati returns a list of recent blog posts that used your search term. When I searched for “knitting,” for example, Technorati showed me blog posts by someone who just bought some new yarn for making socks, a recipe for a knitting-themed birthday cake, and another post by someone who was frustrated with a pattern.

4. Choose a blog post that looks interesting and click the title to visit the blog and read more.

5. Repeat as needed until you find a blog you enjoy!

There are blogs on so many topics you won’t be able to keep from finding something interesting, whether it engages you professionally or personally. I read blogs on all kinds of topics that interest me, from (surprise) knitting to the arts to real estate.

The blog format is exceptionally well-suited to letting you explore an idea, a hobby, or a project, but don’t let that stop you from using it for other things. There have been blogs created to pass along marketing expertise, sell shoes, cover the latest celebrity gossip, raise funds for bike rides, and even to write books. The topic or topics you write about should excite you and hold your interest, and they can be about absolutely anything.

Having that much freedom can be a little scary, and if you’re like me, leave you with an absolute blank in your mind. No problem; you can start a blog today about one topic, and when you actually figure out what you want to write about, change directions and go down another road. It’s a very flexible format!

Think about these things when you start a blog:

- **Choose a subject that genuinely interests you.** Don’t choose a topic that you think looks good to be interested in or will attract a lot a readers. You’re the one who will have to do the writing for the blog, and it really helps if you’re enthusiastic about your subject. That passion will shine through to your readers and keep them coming back.

- **Decide whether any topics are off limits.** Bloggers who keep personal diaries for their friends and families might decide to keep certain subjects out of the public forum of the Internet. For example, do you really
want your boyfriend reading a frank account of last night’s make-out ses-

Think about your potential readers. Who are they? How can you appeal
to them and get them to keep reading your blog? Do you even care about
how many readers you have? If you do, what do you have to show or
Teach or ask them?

Creating a Successful Blog

Blogs are so quick and easy to set up that it’s very easy to start one without
having much of a plan in place for what you’ll blog about, why you’re blogg-
ging, or what you’re trying to accomplish. Some people thrive on this kind of
wide-open playing field, but others will quickly become bored (or boring!).

To get your blog started on the right foot, you have to do some serious think-
ing about why you’re blogging and then make a commitment to attaining your
goals somehow. Don’t get me wrong — this isn’t a job! But, just as you wouldn’t
expect good results from a dinner prepared without paying any attention to
ingredients, you can’t start your blog without having a recipe for success.

Here’s my recipe for a good blog:

1. Preheat the oven by setting goals.
2. Measure out several cups of good writing.
3. Mix well with frequent updates.
4. Sprinkle in lots of interaction with your readers.

One way to get ideas for how you’ll be successful is to observe other blogs
and bloggers. Keep track of how the blogs you enjoy are keeping you inter-
ested: Take note of how often the blog is updated, the writing style, and which
posts are the most engaging and get you to leave a comment. Watching how
someone else blogs is a great way of finding out how to be successful yourself!

Setting goals

Just as you have many different ways to approach a blog, you have many
ways to be successful with your blog. Don’t forget that your goals and plans
might not be the same as another blogger’s. Do think about what your goals
are and keep those in mind as you start your blog.

Here are some ways you might define a successful blog:
Many bloggers are eager to attract a lot of readers to their blogs, and they define success by the number people who visit every day.

For some bloggers, the interaction with readers in the comment area of the blog is very gratifying. For these bloggers, getting a comment every day or on every post might mean they’re being successful.

Many bloggers start their blog in order to accomplish a task, like raising money for a charity, or to sell a product, or even to get a book contract (there have been blogs that have done all these things). When the goal is met, they know they’ve succeeded!

When you start your blog, spend some time thinking about how you will define success. Do you want to help your entire family keep in touch? Do you want to let your friends back home know more about your college experience? Are you starting a company and trying to get attention in the media? Consider writing your goals into your very first blog post and then returning to that post every few months to see whether your goals have changed and to remind yourself of what you’re trying to accomplish.

**Writing well**

Blogs are frequently characterized as being poorly written, misspelled, and full of grammatical no-nos like incomplete sentences. Most criticism has at least some basis in reality, and this case is no different. Many blogs are written very casually, with only cursory attention paid to spelling and grammar.

For many, this is part of the charm of the format. The colloquial, conversational tone is accessible and easy to read, and bloggers who write informally seem very approachable and friendly.

This isn’t an excuse, however, for ignoring all the rules of writing. Blogs that are well-written and spelled correctly are just as likely (perhaps more so) to be read as those that aren’t. You can develop a friendly, personal way of writing without losing touch with the dictionary. I encourage the use of spellchecking, even for very informal blogs intended for friends and family.

For a professional blog, don’t even consider writing without paying attention to spelling and grammar. Your readers will run the other way, and your competitors will get a good snicker out of it.

Most importantly, however, is to think through your writing and consider your reader. Take the time to practice and develop a voice that sounds personal and conversational while still qualifying as good, engaging writing. Don’t let the chatty style of a blog fool you — the best bloggers spend just as much time writing a casual blog post as they would a work memo.

You can find tips on how to develop your voice in Chapter 8.
**Posting frequently**

Commit yourself to writing new posts on your blog *frequently*. Ah, “frequently.” Such a deceptive little word — because really, what does it mean?

For some people, frequently is every day. For others, it’s three times a day. For the purposes of having a blog that doesn’t eat up every spare moment in your life and that’s still updated enough to keep people interested, define the word *frequently* as at least two or three times a week. (If you want to blog more often than that, go to town.) This number of updates strikes a good balance for most blogs.

Many bloggers use a little trick to account for periods of writers block or for when they go on vacation: They write posts ahead of time and then save them for later. Some blog software even allows you to schedule a date and time for a post to go live, making it possible for you keep your readers entertained even while you’re having your appendix removed or sitting on a beach in Hawaii.

Pacing yourself is also important. In the first heady days of having a blog, the posts flow freely and easily, but after a few months, you might find it difficult to be creative.

**Interacting with comments**

Comments are what make blogs really different from a Web site; the opportunity to interact and converse with the creator of a Web site and with other readers is almost unique to blogs. Bulletin boards offer one way to engage in online conversation on the Web, but they aren’t as directed as blogs.

Visitors to a blog have the opportunity to leave a comment on each post. Sometimes that comment is in reaction to what they read; sometimes it might be a suggestion or question. Because any reader can leave a comment, sometimes comments are even left about other comments!

Blog posts often include a link directly underneath each post indicating how many comments have been left. Clicking this link takes you to a page that displays the post, any comments that have been left on it, and a form you can use to leave your own comment.

After a comment has been made, it is displayed in the comments area, usually labeled with the comment writer’s name, along with the date and time the comment was left. On some popular blogs, readers compete to see who can leave the first comment on a new blog post.

In Rose Levy Beranbaum’s blog Real Baking with Rose (www.realtbaking withrose.com), Rose often responds in the comments on her blogs posts to
answer questions. Rose’s comments have a shaded background that other comments don’t have (see Figure 1-12).

Not every blog allows comments. Many popular bloggers find that they’re overwhelmed by the sheer volume of responses they get and must turn off comments because they can’t keep up with them. We should all be so lucky to have that problem. For most bloggers, comments are an important way of developing a dialogue with readers.

I recommend you keep comments turned on in your blog. They’re an easy way to involve your audience in your topic and to get valuable feedback about what you’re doing with your blog.

Unfortunately, spammers are able to take advantage of comments as easily as they are of sending you unwanted e-mail. If you keep comments turned on, you’ll get unwanted comments with commercial messages. Some might even be offensive, just as spam e-mail sometimes is. If you decide to allow comments on your blog, be sure to read them and delete inappropriate messages. Your readers will thank you. In Chapter 10, I talk at length about how to cut down on spam comments.

Figure 1-12: The Real Baking with Rose blog allows readers to leave comments and questions for the blog’s author.