

GradLife **McGill** Blogger Handbook

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Mission

The mission of GradLife McGill is to showcase graduate students' own experiences through their voice, and to foster a sense of community across departments and disciplines. Blog posts portray students' personal reflections, aspirations, triumphs, challenges, and resources associated with their graduate journey.

Your Responsibilities

- Contribute 2 blog posts per month for 1 year.
- Write original posts on topics pertaining to the graduate experience.
- Write about your experiences and reflections to maintain a student voice on campus.
- Show autonomy in decisions pertaining to the creative content of each blog post.
- Show ethical judgment, respect of copyright, and professionalism in representing McGill University.
- Follow the guidelines and feedback provided by the GradLife McGill Coordinators.
- Actively engage with the GradLife McGill team members online and through meet-ups to maintain a sense of community.

Ethical Judgement: What (Not) To Post

Do:

- Be creative and independent in choosing the content of your posts.
- Compose your posts carefully and thoughtfully.
- Remember that you are writing on a McGill-run platform, and for a specific audience.
- Ask yourself whether what you have written could offend or harm your own reputation or the reputation of the University, other students, alumni, colleagues or Faculty members.
- Maintain anonymity when describing people in your posts.
- Keep it clean, folks! No swearing, no vulgarity, no hate speech.
- Respect [copyright](#): Link back to original sources and use proper citation techniques for content from other sources (text, photographs, content from other blogs or posts).
- Give credit where credit is due. We encourage you to use our Instagrammers photos for your posts, so be sure to properly give credit for any images. Follow [McGill guidelines](#) for any photo content.

Don't:

- Post anything that you would not present publicly.
- Divulge confidential information about the University, other students, alumni, colleagues or Faculty members.
- Post during international, national, provincial or civic emergencies. The blog should not distract from the news.
- Post while you are angry or frustrated. Negativity and emotionality does not equate critical thinking; instead hold off on publishing your work. Wait a few days and reread your post and/or consult with the GradLife McGill Coordinators.
 - When in doubt about a topic or theme, please speak to the GradLife McGill Coordinators **before** publishing your post (gradlife@mcgill.ca).

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Content

- Readers are curious about GradLife and they want to hear your stories. Be honest and authentic.
- Your experiences are important and writing about them is fun! If you're excited about the subject, your readers will be too.
 - **Tip:** Write from your personal perspective. We're a blog, not a newspaper, so feel free to have an opinion.
- When inspiration runs dry...
 - Refer to the [GradLife Content Library](#) for ideas, hashtags, etc.
 - Brainstorm content with other bloggers during meet-ups or on Facebook secret groups.
- Accuracy of the information you share is your responsibility. Please fact-check your posts.
- Every writer's perspective is different, so numerous posts on the same topic are acceptable.
 - **Tip:** Cross-reference other bloggers' or Instagrammers' posts on similar topics to complement each other's work and foster a dialogue.
- Your audience is mostly fellow grad students and post-docs at McGill and beyond. However, McGill Faculty, staff, service units as well as alumni also follow the GradLife blog.
- Please consider that your audience is interdisciplinary and avoid jargon. Break your subjects down so they can be enjoyed by non-experts.

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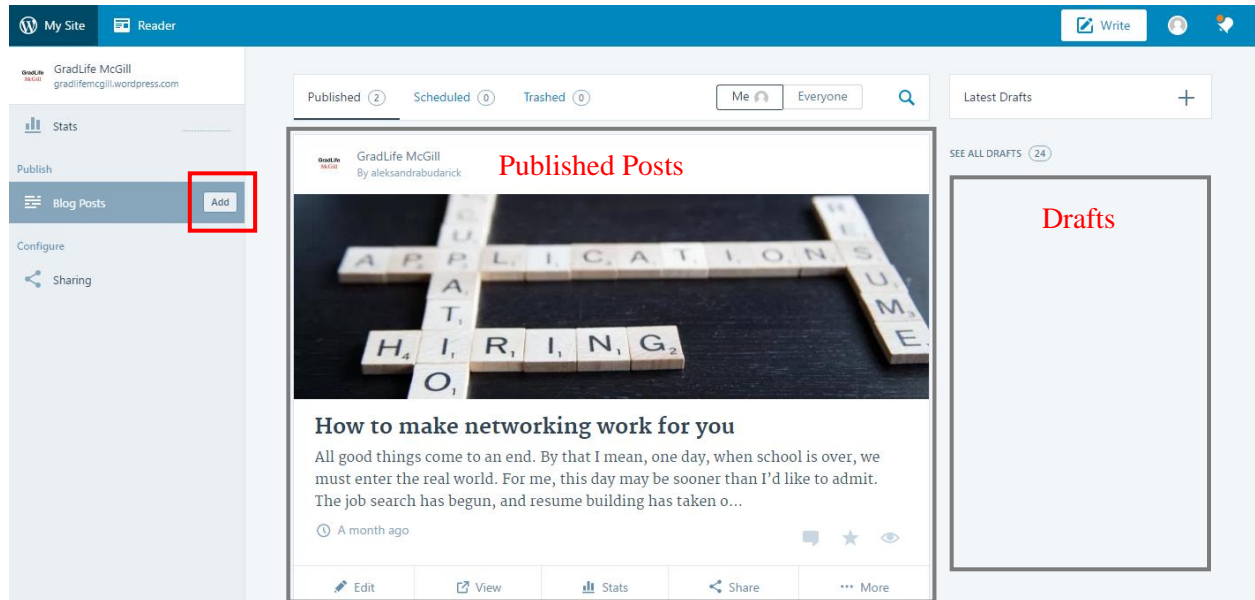
Creating a Blog Post

Working with a Wordpress website is simple and fun! Below is a step-by-step guide on how to post.

Step 1: Create a new post

This is your dashboard. Click on “Blog Posts” in the left menu.

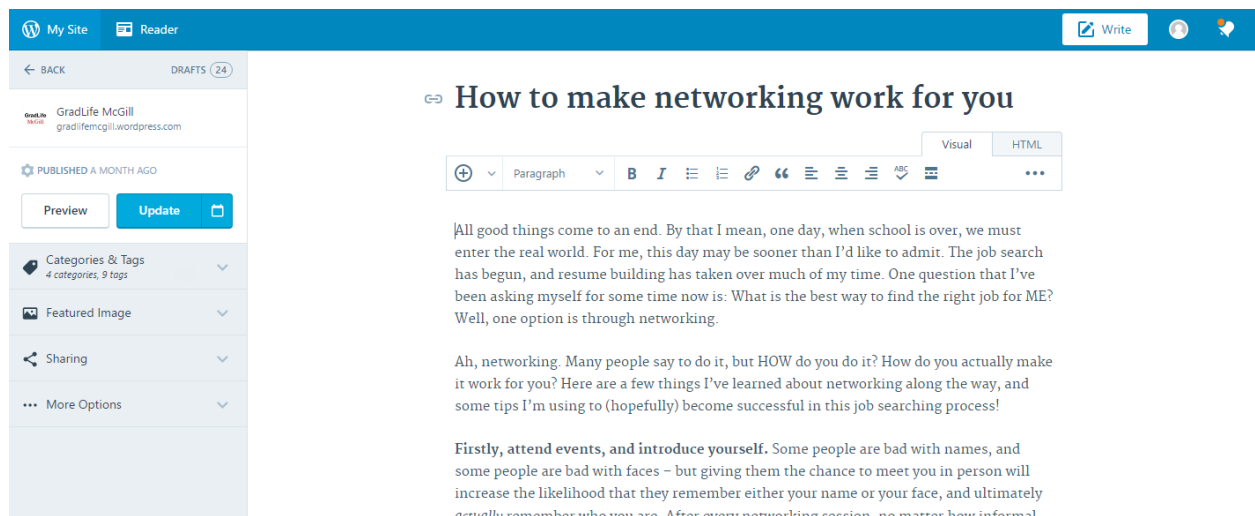
Here you can see all your published posts in the center and saved drafts to the right. Click “Add” on the left to create a new post!



Step 2: Add your title

The [title](#) area is at the very top of the page. Titles should be engaging and catchy, as it is the first thing a reader sees. Be creative and draw the reader in!

When creating a new blog post you’ll see this page:



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Step 3: Write your text

Posts should be about [300-600 words](#) in length. Please see the section on [Length & Formatting](#) for more information.

Block quotes “ ” can be used to highlight passages.

Step 4: Insert hyperlinks

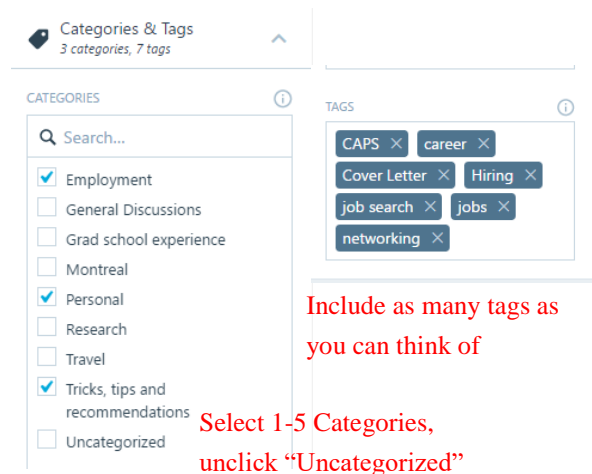
To insert hyperlinks, use the  button. In the pop-up window, simply paste the URL to create the link. It's important to link back to original sources, community partners and previous posts.

Step 5: Categorize and tag your posts

Once you've inserted your blog text, don't forget to [Categorize and Tag Your Posts](#). This allows people to find them. Click on the “Category and Tags” menu to the left.

Choose no more than 3-5 Categories and be sure to **unlick** the “Uncategorized” option.

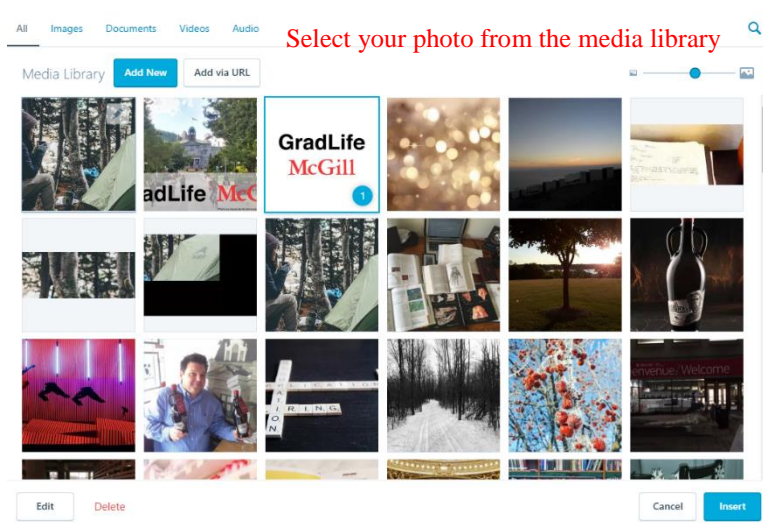
Type in tags to make your blog easier to find in Google. You can use as many tags as you like!



Step 6: Add a featured image


Finally, [An Image is Worth 1000 Words](#), so don't forget to include a featured photo.

Click on the “Featured Image” menu to the left. Upload your photo or choose one from the media library. The banner photo will be 900 x 300 pixels, so be sure to [resize/crop your photo](#) before uploading, or the program will crop it for you. Be sure to credit your featured image in text at the bottom of your post. (ie “Banner image by GradLife McGill Instagrammer @christinekts // @gradlifemcgill”).



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Step 7: Add images within your text

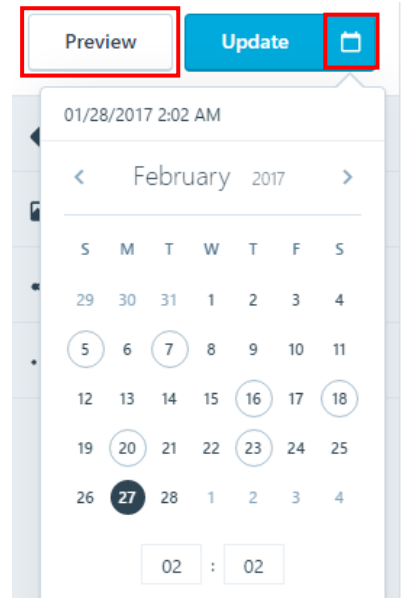
You can add additional photos within your post text by clicking the  button. The Media Library screen will pop up. Here you can upload or select your photo. Click “edit” at the bottom left to insert a caption and credit the photo. Then click “Insert” to upload it.

Step 8: Preview and publish!

Now that you’re ready to publish, you can preview you posts to make sure everything looks perfect. Once you’re ready, press the “Publish” button, and you’re done!

Note: Your post will then go into the posting cue, and will be scheduled to be posted by the GradLife McGill coordinators. All posts will be scheduled on Sunday evenings for the following week, and will go “live” on the specified day.

If you would like your post to be scheduled for a specific day (i.e. in the case of a time-sensitive post), please email gradlife@mcgill.ca.




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Recommended Practices

Now that you've got the hang of how to publish your post, take a minute to review some of our recommendations and tips on [Length & Formatting](#), [Categorize and Tag Your Posts](#), [An Image is Worth 1000 Words](#), [Comments](#), and [Sharing and Reach](#).

Length & Formatting

- Truth is, the [shorter](#) the post, the more likely that it will be read.
- Try to keep posts between 300-600 words. According to *Medium*, the optimal post length to engage readers is 7 minutes.
 - If you have a lot to say, consider creating a series of posts on the subject.
- Break up text into paragraphs of 3-4 sentences.
- Lists work great in blog posts.
- Only the first ~55 words are displayed on the home page, so try to draw your reader in quickly and choose [catchy titles](#).
- Minimize varying text formatting (bold, italics). Use it for emphasis, but too much can be distracting.
- Block quotes  can be used to emphasize entire paragraphs if desired.
- Spellcheck, spellcheck, spellcheck!

Categorize and Tag Your Posts

- Categories and tags determine the “related posts” that appear at the bottom of your post. They allow readers to see similar posts, to sort, and to search by topic.
- Categorize each post using the list of main categories. Please aim for 3-5 categories.
- Don't forget to unclick/unselect the “Uncategorized” box.
- Tag posts with relevant keywords. Try to repeat popular tags to better group posts (i.e. use the existing “career” tag instead of a new “careers” tag).
 - **Tip:** In choosing tags, ask yourself what *you* would search for if you wanted to find the post you've just written. This helps users find your post when searching one of the subjects you've tagged, and brings more traffic to the blog.
- Posts are searchable by author, so it is not necessary to tag your own name.

An Image is Worth 1000 Words

- [Photos and visuals](#) enhance your posts.
- Images will make the post more engaging on social media channels, such as Facebook.
- Always [credit your images](#), even if it's your own.
 - The banner images should be credited at the bottom of the post.
 - Other images can be credited in their caption. Always credit the photographer and the source (i.e. Photo by GradLife McGill Instagrammer @aleksbud // @gradlifemcgill)

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Where can I find images for my posts?

- Your own: Feel free to use your own images. If photography is your passion along with writing, use the blog to showcase your work.
- GradLife Instagram: All of the GradLife McGill Instagram images are available on [Flickr](#) or you can e-mail the photographer and ask for a copy. Be sure to credit both the photographer (using their Instagram handle) and @GradLifeMcGill.
- Creative Commons: There are a number of sites where you can find images available under a [Creative Commons \(CCO\) license](#). Be sure to use a CCO image which allows for the reproduction, modification and distribution of the photo without needing to pay for the image. Always credit the source, even if the source doesn't require it (i.e. Photo by @sasint // @pixabay). Some good websites with high-resolution photos under the CCO license include, [Pexels](#), [StockSnap](#), [Unsplash](#), or [Pixabay](#) (avoid top row, they aren't CCO photos).

Notes on photo selection:

- Exercise good judgement with your photo choice; make sure the subject matter is appropriate.
- Avoid:
 - Blurry images,
 - Very dark images,
 - Personal images that you are not okay with strangers seeing, or
 - Photos of people without their [permission](#).

Editing photos:

- The banner photo on the home page is cropped to a 3:1 ratio. Try to crop your photos ahead of time (see below). Alternatively, if you upload a different size photo, the program will crop it for you automatically (but you are unable to select which portion of the photo shows in the "Featured" bar)
 - Ideal resolution: 900 across x 300 vertical pixels
- You can crop and re-size your photos using free websites such as [Web Resizer](#):
 - Step 1: Choose your file and upload your image
 - Step 2: Press "Crop Image"
 - Step 3: Insert the photo ratio (900 by 300 pixels, or different 3:1 ratio)
 - Step 4: Apply your changes and download the image

Photo permissions - McGill guidelines:


- Any subject of a photo taken at McGill must be accompanied by a [photo release](#) signed by the person. No consent is required when using a person's image in a manner that is incidental to the photograph of a public place (e.g., someone who happens to be walking on campus as a photo is shot of the Roddick Gates) or if an image of a crowd where there is no single dominant figure. If you do get a photo release, be sure to forward a copy to the GradLife Coordinators (gradlife@mcgill.ca) to be properly filed.
- To get electronic signatures, you can use the [Adobe Fill & Sign App](#).
- Use of McGill insignia is not permitted without the University's [official consent](#).

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Comments

- Keep an eye out for [comments](#) on your posts and respond to them, both on the blog and on Facebook. Responding to comments makes commenters feel good and it will make them more likely to continue reading and engaging with your future posts.
- Do not delete comments, unless they are spam. GradLife McGill Coordinators will help to monitor for spam.
- Unsure of how to respond to a comment? Or if a comment is spam? [E-mail](#) the GradLife McGill Coordinators. We're here to help.

Sharing and Reach

- Enhancing the visibility of the blog is important for its writers. Sharing your posts on your personal channel(s) (e.g., Facebook, blog, etc.) is encouraged. We will promote your blog posts on the GradLife McGill Facebook page; like and share from Facebook once we've posted it to better track its reach.
- Cross-promotion between the GradLife Blog, Instagram and Vlog is vital. Try to use Instagrammer's photos (with credit), link back to related posts using the  button, and promote Vlog posts.
- McGill departments or service units have shared GradLife blog posts on their own networks (e.g., McGill, which reaches over 100K individuals). Other posts have triggered employment opportunities or have drawn the attention of local newspapers.

We're a Team

- There is no "I" in team. As a blogger, you should be engaging in a dialogue with readers and other members of the GradLife McGill team.
- Read, comment and support other bloggers' posts as well as the Instagram and Vlog teams. It fosters a sense of community and makes blogging more fun.
- Add to our content library. If you get a fun idea for a post from comments you receive, send it to the GradLife McGill Coordinators! This idea can be added to the [content library](#) to inspire your fellow bloggers.
- Attend meet-ups to get to know your fellow team-members offline.

Professional Benefits

- Develop your written communication skills through blogging experience.
- Build your digital communication portfolio.
- Learn about and apply your knowledge on responsible social media contribution.
- Develop soft-skills and obtain valuable volunteer experience.
- Be eligible for leadership opportunities (e.g., Apply to be a team leader after 3 months).
- Connect with people from other departments who share similar goals.
- Have a creative outlet within academia.
- The Dean of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies will provide you with a recognition letter if you have fulfilled the 2 post/month, 1-year commitment.

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HAPPY BLOGGING!

Questions?

Get in touch with us (gradlife@mcgill.ca) if you have general questions, uncertainties or if issues arise.

Have a more specific question?

For specific questions related to editing, proofreading, or how to use Wordpress:

Please contact the GradLife Blog Team Lead: Laura Jones (laura.jones2@mail.mcgill.ca)

With personal questions about your commitment or ethical questions related to the blog:

Please contact the GradLife Blog Coordinator: Aleks Budarick (aleksandra.budarick@mail.mcgill.ca)

Sponsors

Contact:

[Sophia Kapchinsky](#)

[David Syncox](#)

Office:

[Teaching and Learning Services](#)

[Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies](#)

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Appendix: Resources

- **McGill guidelines**
 - [Newsroom Social Media Guidelines](#)
 - [Guidelines for Blogs at McGill](#)
 - [Op-Ed Writing Tips, Newsroom](#)

- **Blogging guidelines from other Universities**
 - [Social Media Guidelines - Brock University](#)

- **Benefits of blogging in academia**
 - [Seven Reasons Why Blogging Can Make You a Better Academic Writer](#)

- **General blogging tips**
 - [10 Best Practices for Corporate Blogging](#)
 - [5 Tips to Write Blog Posts](#)
 - [16 Top Tips From Blogging Experts for Beginners](#)

- **Ethics and copyright**
 - [Top 3 Blogging Rules](#)
 - [Copyright and Fair Use Considerations](#)
 - [Understanding Creative Commons Licenses](#)

- **Engaging visuals and graphics**
 - [Photography resources](#)
 - [Top 6 Sites to Find Free Photos to Use on Your Blog](#)
 - [The Complete Guide to Using Images in Your Blog Posts](#)
 - [7 Ways to Online Improve Engagement With Visual Content](#)

- **Length and titles**
 - [The Ideal Length of Everything](#)
 - [The Secrets of Blog Post Length](#)
 - [3 Steps to Write Great Blog Post Titles](#)

- **Commenting**
 - [7 Splendid Techniques to Encourage Comments on Your Blog](#)
 - [Seven Types of Blog Comments and How to Respond to Them](#)

Appendix: Content Library

Examples of themes

- A day in the life of ...
- Lesson of the week/month/year
- When I grow up...
- Happening now
- My top 5...
- Fun fact!
- Did you know?
- Grad Milestone
- On my desk
- On campus
- In Montreal
- It's nice that...
- My reading list

Examples of topics

- Events attended
- Writing
- Procrastination / time management
- Supervisor / student relationships
- Oral presentations
- Communication with colleagues
- Teaching
- Organization / multi-tasking
- Funding
- Stress/mental health
- Long-distance collaborations
- Defense preparations
- Career development / applications / interviews etc.
- News (science, community)
- Interviews with anyone in the community
- McGill resources (CAPS, Skillsets, etc)
- Do's and don'ts
- Tips/resources from your own experience
- Events you've been to and what you've learned
- Being an international student in Montreal
- Language / culture
- Why did you decide to become a blogger?
- Why did you choose this graduate program?
- Your research in lay terms

- Personal challenges
- Personal triumphs
- Teaching experience
- Confidence
- Your favorite tools
- Your role-models or sources of inspiration
- Random thoughts or observations
- Opinion pieces (but no hate-speech)
- Conference experience
- Travel
- Breakthroughs big or small
- Goals, dreams, wishes
- Out on the field (in action)
- Montreal events
- Extracurricular interests / hobbies
- Work-life balance
- Getting involved
- Being an ally of the community

Seasonal themes

- September: Work-life balance, year ahead, life in Montreal, housing, international student, events in community, getting involved at McGill
- October: Fall activities in Montreal
- November: Challenges, triumphs, tips
- December: Winter activities in Montreal, holiday plans, looking back on year
- January: Hopes, goals and dreams for the year ahead; new projects
- February: Challenges, triumphs, tips, resources / events at McGill
- March: Writing / about your research
- April: Writing / submitting / conference or travel plans
- May: Plans for the summer / convocation / milestones
- June: Summer in Montreal
- July: Extracurricular / hobbies / guilty pleasures
- August: Look back on the academic year