

For Teachers New to Weblogs: An Introduction to Blogging

I. Purposes and Practices

A. What is a blog?

According to Jill Walker, "A weblog, also known as a blog, is a frequently updated website consisting of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order so that the reader sees the most recent post first. [...] Freely available tools on the World Wide Web make it easy for anybody to publish their own weblog, so there is a lot of variety in the quality, content and ambition of weblogs, and a weblog may have anywhere from a handful to tens of thousands of daily readers." (Walker, Jill. "Final Version of Weblog Definition." *jill/txt*. 28 June 2003. 1 September 2005
<http://jilltxt.net/archives/blog_theorising/final_version_of_weblog_definition.html>.)

B. Why do teachers ask students to blog?

1. Weblogs are already a significant part of students' culture. According to the Pew Internet & American Life project's January 2005 report on "The state of Blogging" <http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_blogging_data.pdf>, "27% of internet users say they read blogs," and 48% of bloggers "are under age 30." Students are already engaged in the literate practices of composing and reading weblogs, and even students unfamiliar with the term 'weblog' may have a LiveJournal site. Weblogs are shaping and changing notions about the practice of literacy.
2. Blogging helps students learn that their writing has value to other people. In the social rewards and sense of community (within and beyond the classroom) it offers, and in its ease of use and approachability, blogging offers incentives for students to write regularly, and writing regularly helps them become better writers.
3. Blogging can serve the inner-directed expressive and personal purposes typically associated with the print genre of the journal.
4. Beyond journaling purposes, blogging can serve as a valuable interactive space for recording ideas for future writing, for taking and commenting on reading notes and class notes, for highly interactive peer review and peer response work, and for the collaborative production of knowledge.

C. What should teachers new to blogging know?

1. Many of those who teach with weblogs find having a blog of their own helps to better understand the rhetorical and technical concerns their students will face. Also, keeping a central course blog is a good way to distribute information. It's important, of course, to read what you're asking students to write, and it's useful to show students that you're reading by commenting (publicly and constructively) on what they write.
2. Not all writing need be public writing, and some traditionally personal or private writing topics may not be appropriate for weblog writing. Since weblog writing is public writing, it's useful to discuss the implications of writing for a public audience -- including the need for a sense of writerly decorum and the awareness that writing on the Web is public, archived and searchable.
3. Blogging is different things to different people. Some students will have blogged outside your class, and will have enjoyed blogging outside your class. Don't spoil their enjoyment of writing by trying to domesticate it too much; don't reduce it to a school genre.
4. It's essential to set clear evaluation criteria for student blogging, and it's useful to model the sorts of blog posts and comments you're looking for. Some teachers find that setting word count requirements and mandatory post formats to be unduly restrictive, but also find criteria concerning frequency and depth of posting and commenting to be quite useful.

II. Technologies

Two divisions in blogging are between paid technologies and free technologies, and between hosted services and services that require hosting. Paid technologies like Movable Type and TypePad offer elegance, ease of use, a robust feature set, and responsive tech support; free technologies, while often easy to use (Blogger and LiveJournal) and sometimes quite powerful (Drupal), will not offer as much hand-holding for new users. Hosted services take the tech support burden off the teacher, but in so doing take away some control. Services that require hosting (often available for less than \$10 per month) place more technological responsibility on the teacher (although most hosting services offer the Fantastico autoinstaller, which will set up blogging applications for you), but also offer much more control.

Blogger (Free; very easy to use; hosted.) <<http://www.blogger.com/>>

LiveJournal (Free; easy to use; hosted; open source.) <<http://www.livejournal.com/>>

Mo'time (Free; hosted.) <<http://www.motime.com/>>

Xanga (Free; hosted. Blogs have advertisements.) <<http://www.xanga.com/>>

TypePad (Hosted; very easy to use; good features. Not free.) <<http://www.sixapart.com/typepad/>>

Movable Type (Very powerful features; highly configurable; very robust user community; excellent support. Not free; not hosted.) <<http://www.sixapart.com/movabletype/>>

WordPress (Powerful features; highly configurable; robust user and support community; open source; free. Not hosted.) <<http://wordpress.org/>>

Drupal (Very powerful content management features; very highly configurable; robust user and support community; open source; free. Not hosted; steep learning curve.) <<http://drupal.org/>>

III. Resources

Blogs, A Primer (Barclay Barrios)

<<http://www.bgsu.edu/departments/english/cconline/bap/index.html>>

Peda-blogging (Collin Brooke)

<<http://wrt-brooke.syr.edu/cgbvb/archives/2004/12/pedablogging.html>>

Repair, Reinforce, Recycle (Amanda Cochran)

<<http://blogs.setonhill.edu/AmandaCochran/004169.html>>

Academic Blogging: Strategies for Using Weblogs to Promote Active Learning and Professional Development (Educational Technology Collaborative, University of Tennessee)

<<http://edtech.tennessee.edu/~set31/toc.htm>>

When Blogging Goes Bad (Steven Krause)

<<http://english.ttu.edu/kairos/9.1/binder.html?praxis/krause/index.html>>

A Guided Tour to Blogging (John Lovas)

<[http://faculty.deanza.fhda.edu/jocalo/discuss/msgReader\\$795](http://faculty.deanza.fhda.edu/jocalo/discuss/msgReader$795)>

Online Writing / Writing Online (Clancy Ratliff)

<<http://culturecat.net/onlinewriting>>

Weblogs: Learning in Public (Jill Walker)

<<http://jilltxt.net/txt/Weblogs-learninginpublic.pdf>>

This document was compiled by the CCC Blogging SIG listserv and owes a considerable intellectual debt to the pathbreaking work of Jill Walker and Rebecca Blood. A more comprehensive list of sources discussing weblogs, compiled by Charles Lowe, is available at <<http://kairosnews.org/blogbib>>. Offer questions, revisions, requests, or comments to the CCC Blogging SIG listserv at <http://kairosnews.org/mailman/listinfo/blogs_kairosnews.org>. This document is offered under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike commons license <<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/>>.