

Educational (We) Blogging

EDC Blog: <http://edc.carleton.ca/blog>

What is a (we)blog?

- A handful of Weblogs were first present in 1998. While its original identity emerged as a “web log”, a means of annotating shared links found on the web, it has now grown to encompass many more functions. It is now commonly referred to as a “Blog.” Below each entry is a comments space where readers can contribute reactions and/or questions for the writer. Written entries are archived in chronological order and displayed in reverse chronological order, the most recent entry displayed first.
- Well suited to courses in which students post weekly journalistic entries or reading responses, the blog is a space which supports: web links, commentary, personal thoughts, essays, news, event information, and creating photo essays (for example: using Flickr.com), among other types of information. Blogs can be made private (password-protected) or public to a wider outside audience.

What are some benefits to the blogging format?

- **Democratic.** The blog equalizes voices and allows students to learn more about themselves and other students by the process of writing about course material. Within the space of the blog they can also collaborate and share ideas.
- **Critical thinking and writing development.** Blogs are great for students who are not used to articulating their thoughts, as a starting point in a first year seminar or larger class: it can become an ideal space for criticizing, questioning, and reacting to course material and/or readings. Avid blog writers will eventually develop honed skills in effective self-expression and confidence in their written abilities. Record keeping about the course will allow students to have a document to refer back to for future paper writing and related courses. They can also workshop papers or run brainstorming ideas past their readers – expanding learning beyond the single instructor-student relationship.
- **Transferable skills.** Beyond the scope of the course students will be able to acquire skills such as online knowledge about the application, some aspects of html, social collaboration with public and peers, and writing for a wider audience.

What are some potential difficulties in the use of blogs?

- The need for back-up contingency plans in case of students not wanting to participate, software issues, or other related mishaps.
- The length and/or level of a course possibly being a factor in the usefulness of a blog.
- Other issues include: whether to keep the blog public or private, how to organize and preserve information, to motivate students to post, to grade individual or group contributions, and the need to get feedback on the entire process from students.

A few ideas for blogs in education:

There are many different ways to use a blogging tool in your course, depending on the needs of the course format, the size of the class, and the nature of the subject matter.

- **Instructor Research Blogs.** As a researcher, easily publish findings accessible to interested readers,

Continued on reverse.

get feedback on ideas from a wide audience, and use it as a means to connect to the wider learning community of your subject area. As a personal writing space, it is automatically archived and stored.

- **Instructor-led Course Blogs.** The instructor runs the blog as a kind of interactive course webpage: posting course-related links, announcements, assignments, answering common questions, providing information about office hours, etc. If you use entries to post critical questions to the class to provoke discussion, students can post responses in the comments space. As opposed to total immersion in the creation and maintenance of a blog, requiring students only to post a certain number of comments a week may be an easier way to introduce them to the blogging format.
- **Community Blog.** Especially in the case of smaller classes, consider using one shared community group blog. This makes it easier to keep up with new entries, for students to feel they have a larger audience for their contributions, and enhances the feeling of an active learning community.
- **Student Group Blog.** With smaller student group blogs, student groups for projects have a space in which to easily collaborate and share their ideas. The instructor, in turn, can easily see the levels of participation for members within a particular student working group; allowing them to judge fair contribution of all members.
- **Individual Student Blog.** You can encourage students to keep separate blogs in which they can fully customize appearance and guide their own writing in response to the course. In this scenario, a makeshift wiki page or instructor blog with which to link to all of these individual blogs is a useful way to both promote reading of the blogs by other students and organize them for yourself. Also, be sure to subscribe to their blogs in the form of RSS feed so they're easier for you to keep track of. The downside to this format is that students may not receive comments from other students as often, giving them the feeling that they're writing into a vacuum, reinforcing the previous Instructor-student only relationship.

How to get started:

- **Find a host.** Choose a blog application that meets your needs, taking into account the finer details of ease of use, customization, features, privacy, dependability, etc. Recommended are two top hosts: **Blogger** (<http://www.blogger.com/home>) and specifically targeted to the field of education, **Edublogs** (<http://edublogs.org/>).
- **Develop an Acceptable Use Agreement.** Clearly outline what constitutes acceptable participation and behaviour in the blog(s). To make it an even more dynamic document, consider allowing students to contribute to this Agreement (for example: in the comments section of the entry), pending approval of their additions. If any of their behaviour comes into question, you can then refer back to the Agreement for reinforcement.
- **Plan integration with your course.** Decide what format your blog or blogs will take in the course – and how they will form connections to learning content. Develop in-class tutorials, set up a means of helping students keep up with each other's blogs (ie: putting all blog urls on the WebCT course). Also consider critical issues such as possible student fear of publishing in front of their peers (or if public, in front of the internet in general), the means of grading individual and/or group contributions, and making accommodations for the reluctance of inexperienced technology users.

Remember that EDC is here to help you with your technology projects!
Set up a meeting with a Technical Assistant or review our other online and print guides on our website. **We can be reached by mail at edc@carleton.ca and by phone at extension 4433.**

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