

BLOGGING FOR FUN AND LEARNING

Think before sending your class into cyberspace

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Before you start, ask yourself one question: **Why?**

- Why is this the best instructional technology?
- Why will this accomplish what I want? (What exactly do I want to accomplish?)
- Why do I think students will respond?

Blogging is not always the best option. A wiki might be another.

Some reasons for blogging by students:

- Give a sense of "real" publication to writers, with real public feedback.
- Teach effective linking.
- Teach community moderation.
- Teach editing using "live" copy. Also distinguish online editing from traditional print model (less style emphasis, for instance, and more on preserving voice).
- Allow students to work out extended thoughts beyond the time and space available in class.
- Try to produce robust debate.
- Share information and updates.

Blog vs. wiki:

- Blog is like a constantly flowing river – great for quick, easy updates, but things flow by quickly and can be missed.
- Wiki is a more stable resource, like a pond, It can be deep and large, but you can see the boundaries. Can recall earlier versions, but lacks the dynamism of a blog.
- Neither is perfect for everything, and each has hybrid capabilities of the other, especially with widespread RSS feeds.

What is a blog:

- Mechanical definition: Publishing system in reverse chronological order in which each post is preformatted and gets its own URL. May or may not have photos. Time and date stamp (and usually author) and the ability to have comments. An RSS feed for syndication usually is generated automatically.
- Ethos – **FTLP**: Frequent (not necessarily daily), Transparent (makes biases known; links to original documents and other opinion.) Links: Deep and often; link to your competition if it has the info you don't. Personal expression prized.

Many free or low-cost blogging services and enhancements. A comprehensive list is at

<http://web2.econsultant.com/blogging-services.html>

Easy and quick to set up. No need to buy a domain name.

Easy to file copy, with some limited formatting capabilities.

Becoming more customizable with "widgets."

Types of blogs (any single blog may have aspects of some or all):

- Diaries/microjournals. More personal, of the moment.
- Link: Listing interesting links with minimal comment.
- Comment: Often focused on one event (or class).
- Filter: Links elsewhere plus longer observations (common journalistic form).
- Story/"notebook": Longer forms. Often substituting for another more traditional media form. Can include photo essays, too.
- Specialized types
 - Video blog (vblog): Collection of video clips.
 - Mobile Web log (moblog): Marries photos with short messages. Designed to be posted from mobile devices. Can create a journalistic "mosaic."

Some other decisions you'll need to make:

- Public or private?
 - For the sense of "real-life" publishing, a public blog may be best. Same for link blogs that can be valuable public resources.
 - For things like comment blogs that are centered on class, a private blog might be better. But if the comment is on the world around us, then public.
 - Realize some students might be shaken by comments. After all, writing is a very personal thing and some commenters can be "frank."
 - Keep an eye on comments and posts to make sure students don't put themselves in an awkward position.
 - In some cases, there's a separate RSS feed for comments you can use to monitor.
- Hosted outside or inside the school?
 - Inside-school blogs raise questions such as whose work is it? What happens when the student graduates? Are there legal liabilities?
 - Outside hosting can limit your control. The material lies forever on an outside server – unless the service shuts down, which can happen.
- Individual or collaborative?
 - Individual probably best for writing instruction.
 - Linking works well as a group.
 - Commentary is somewhere in between.

Above all, be clear in what you expect the blogs to do (be able to summarize the concept in five words or fewer), how often you expect posts and how you will grade them.