

Blogging 101

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.](#)" "27% of internet users say they read blogs." Another [survey](#) found 54% of bloggers "are under age 30."
2. Weblogs are shaping and changing notions about the practice of literacy, primarily by how they "work as *interactive* texts; as texts which are jointly composed and which are interwoven with other texts, texts for which authorship is often multiple and unpredictable" (Davies and Merchant, 2007, p. 167).
3. Blogging helps students learn that their writing has value to other people. In the social rewards and sense of community (both 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 one become a better writer.
4. Blogging can serve the inner-directed expressive and personal purposes typically associated with the print genre of the journal.
5. Beyond journaling purposes, blogging can serve as a valuable interactive space for recording ideas for future writing, for taking (and commenting on) reading and class notes, for highly interactive peer review and peer response work, and for the collaborative production of knowledge.

What are we blogging about exactly?

Your posts should focus on the issues and trends in communication/design that you find most interesting. If reacting to assigned readings, those posts should summarize what the readings covered, discuss the main concepts introduced and then go on to consider how these texts inform your own ideas and experiences as a technical communicator.

I encourage you to follow Alex Halavais' advice, abbreviated from his brilliant post "[The perfect blog entry.](#)" to (1) be original (2) have a thesis (3) have a title that reflects your thesis (4) assume a third person reader[†] (5) include hyperlinks (6) check for spelling and typos (7) use concrete examples and (8) double space between paragraphs.

How long should my blog posts be?

The blog genre is known for longer thoughts than tweets or Facebook status updates, but still shorter essays than one would read in a print text. The post length can vary according to topic, see "[Bloggers: This is How Long Your Posts Should Be](#)" for a statistical rundown, but for the purposes of our course, I suggest aiming for **at least 250 words** and breaking up paragraphs with white space or by inserting images or embedding videos when applicable.

When are we blogging?

Each week you are expected to make at least one substantial blog post and at least three

thoughtful comments on other students' blog posts. Beginning **September 16**, these blog posts should be posted on or before midnight every Monday so we can start Tuesday's class meetings with a quick review. Comments should be posted on or before midnight every Wednesday.

How will my blog posts be evaluated?

I will grade your posts based on the following criteria based on the rubric offered at <http://www2.uwstout.edu/content/profdev/rubrics/blogrubric.html>; however, I won't be tallying points for each post. Instead, in addition to providing feedback via weekly comments, I will offer a midterm assessment of your blog in the D2L gradebook.

Using WordPress

WordPress is relatively simple to use, but if you have questions, please post them to the Blog Q&A discussion forum in D2L. Please also review the following video: [Our zero-to-hero guide](#) if any questions go unanswered.

Logging in to WordPress

1. Go to your blog's URL & click on Login or Site Admin.
2. Enter your WordPress.com username and password.

Posting to the blog

1. Look at the left-hand of the "dashboard" for "Posts" and then click "Add New."
2. Enter a title for your post.
3. Enter your blog post text in the larger box.
 - a. Unless you prefer to write in HTML, be sure that you've clicked on the "Visual" tab at the top right of the box where you're writing your blog post.
 - b. I recommend your posts include links/images/videos whenever applicable.
 - c. If you've copied and pasted your post from a text-editing program like Microsoft WORD[†], scroll back up to the top of the post to be sure it didn't paste any junky code at the beginning. If it did, simply delete it.
 - d. At any time, you can click on the "Save Draft" button in the top right-hand sidebar. After saving, you can also "Preview" the post, which will open a new tab or window in your browser and let you see what your post looks like. This is especially helpful if you're embedding images or videos and want to see if they will appear properly.
4. In the right-hand sidebar, check the appropriate category for your blog post. You will need to create your own categories so to reflect your work all semester long.
5. Click the blue "Publish" button.

Yay! You're done. If you make a mistake, you can edit your post anytime by returning to the "Posts" page [link at the top of the left-hand sidebar). If you hover your cursor over your post title,

an “Edit” link magically appears underneath it. Just be sure to click the blue “Update” button when you’re finished with your revision.

Commenting upon your peers’ blog posts

1. Under every post you can click on “Leave a Comment.”
2. Enter your comment in the textbox then click on “Post Comment.”
3. Some great guidelines for how to comment are listed at <http://lifehacker.com/software/top/special-lifehackers-guide-to-weblog-comments-126654.php>. I especially appreciate the advice to “Contribute new information to the discussion” and “Don’t comment for the sake of commenting.”
4. WordPress.com offers you a variety of ways to login to comment, but I suggest you consistently use your WordPress.com account to identify yourself.
5. While I expect you to bookmark and visit the blog site regularly, you may also decide to take advantage of the email notifications regarding follow-up comments and new posts.
6. As authors, please return to your posts from time to time to respond to the comments left on your posts. That way a dialogue can continue throughout the semester.

[*] The Pew Internet and American Life Project is an amazing resource and I recommend you bookmark the site <http://pewinternet.org/> as they continually publish quantitative studies about social media trends. In their words, “The Project produces reports exploring the impact of the internet on families, communities, work and home, daily life, education, health care, and civic and political life.”

[†] **I cannot stress this point enough.** As Halavais states, it isn’t enough to say something vague like, “What the author writes...” or “This week’s readings discussed...” You **always** need to identify the author and briefly recapitulate his or her position. Remember, the blog is now part of the public sphere, so anyone can stumble upon your posts, whether during our semester or years after. Unless you identify the assigned essays by title and author, no one will know what you’re referring to.

[‡] I do advise that you type out everything in WORD before pasting it into the text box. That way 1) you can check spelling & grammar and 2) you are sure to have a saved copy in case WordPress experiences a glitch.