



A weblog is an online personal journal. Easy to create and use, blogs – a short hand term for weblogs – are a forum for Internet publishing that have become an established communication tool.

What is a Blog?

Blogs are often referred to as a Web-based public diary with dated entries, usually by a single author, often accompanied by links to other blogs that the author of the site visits on a regular basis (Downes, 2004). They have been compared to online personal journals, and are noted for being the “unedited, published voice of the people” (Winer, 2003). Blogging is considered the act of writing your thoughts within your *blog*, and the *blogosphere* is regarded as the intellectual cyberspace that *bloggers* occupy.

Although online journals have been around longer than the term “blog”, their use in higher education has gained momentum with the introduction of free services that allow students to publish blogs easily, without needing to code HTML. Bloggers simply enter posts into a blogging application. They add formatting or hyperlinks, and save the post. The software application adds the entry to the blog, making the content available online and alerting users who have subscribed to that blog’s content.

Entries can include text, hyperlinks, images, or multimedia. Visitors can read postings, submit comments, find blog entries by date, and search the site by keywords. Effective blogs tend to be updated on a regular basis.

WebCT provides a secure blog facility within a university environment. You may also have access to an internally hosted blog system. In addition there are a multitude of externally hosted systems (ie. Blogger - <https://www.blogger.com/>).

Why Use Blogs To Support Reflective Learning?

Blogs can be used for reflection about assignments, course work, careers, or current events; they can also capture and disseminate student and faculty generated content.

Blogs offer students, academics, staff and others a high level of autonomy and freedom, while creating a new opportunity for interaction with peers. They provide a far-reaching forum for discussion that goes beyond coursework to include culture, politics, and other areas of personal exploration. Students often learn as much from each other as from tutors or textbooks, and blogs offer an effective medium for peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and application.

RSS feeds make blog content accessible. Whether this is through newsreaders, it allows bloggers to increase the sharing of this information among interested individuals.

Equally blogs can be made private, only accessible to the writer and tutor. This supports a situation where you may wish to promote reflection of a more personal nature. For undergraduates you may label them “Think Books” instead of the more threatening “Reflective Journal”.



Give Me an Example

Blogs can be used by students for self-reflection and peer review of course assignments:

1. Create a blog ("Think Book" / "Reflective Journal") for each student in WebCT (discussion tool area).
2. After the completion of each module (group or individual) assignment have the students post responses to reflective questions on their blog. For example:
 - a. What did you learn in the process of completing this assignment?
 - b. How will you apply what you learned from this assignment to the next class assignment, other courses and/or your career?
3. In terms of peer review, you can have students post drafts of course assignments to their blogs. Then other students in the class can be selected to review these documents and post responses to the blogs. Examples of guiding questions for the peer review process could include:
 - a. What did you learn from reviewing this document?
 - b. What were the strengths (e.g. content, writing style, format and structure) of the document?
 - c. What constructive advice and/or recommendations could you provide for improving the quality of this document?

More Ideas

A blog can also be used to:

- Replace the standard module Web page within WebCT. Tutors can encourage student engagement, allowing them to participate in posting group/individual profiles and group rules, questions, resources facts and news.
- Annotate and link to Internet-based resources that relate to courses
- Organize and facilitate course based discussions
- Create summaries of course activities and readings

Other Considerations

Blogs can be mediated or unmediated, public or private. They allow students to openly express themselves and air their opinions, ideas and attitudes. Blogs have great potential in their support of learning and teaching. Like all technologies you need to decide why you would use them, the benefits to your teaching and the student's learning. Allocate enough time to experiment yourself and explore the scaffolding requirements (advice, trigger questions etc) that your level of student may require.

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Where Can I Go for More Information?

- **Reflecting on Blogs in Assessment**
Chris Ashford
<http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/directio/ns/previous/issue12/blogs.html>
- **What makes a weblog a weblog?**
David Winer
<http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/w/hatmakesaweblogaweblog.htm>
- **Educational Blogging**
Stephen Downes
<http://net.educause.edu/ir/libra/ry/pdf/ERM0450.pdf>
- **Content Delivery in the 'Blogsphere'**
Richard E. Ferdig, & Kaye D. Trammell
http://www.thejournal.com/artic/les/16626_6
- **Using Blogs for Peer Feedback in a Creative Writing Course**
Jess Moriarty and Vy Rajapillai, University of Brighton
http://www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/explore/publications/casestudies/technology/blogs_feedback.php
- **Placement Blogging**
Steven Curtis, London Metropolitan University
http://www.c-sap.bham.ac.uk/events/conference_jan_09/papers/curtis.ppt
- **Your College E-Learning Team**