



To Blog or Not to Blog: That is the Question

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I. Blogs: A Definition

According to Jill Walker, associate professor of humanistic informatics at the University of Bergen, a blog (short for "web log") "is a frequently updated website consisting of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order so the most recent post appears first (see temporal ordering). Typically, weblogs are published by individuals and their style is personal and informal. Weblogs first appeared in the mid-1990s, becoming popular as simple and free publishing tools became available towards the turn of the century. Since anybody with a net connection can publish their own weblog, there is great 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."

<http://jilltxt.net/archives/blog_theorising/final_version_of_weblog_definition.html>

II. Blogs in Action

- A. Crooked Timber: This blog is considered by many to be the central blog that brings academic blogs together. Check the sidebar to the right for a list of blogs in disciplines as diverse as education, engineering, law, physics, and philosophy.

<<http://www.crookedtimber.org/>>

- B. PTW 210W: Foundations of Argument: This is the blog I created during Fall 2004 for my argumentation course. Blogging allowed us to do two primary things. First, we were able to connect to classes at two other universities who were also reading George Orwell's *1984*. Second, we were able to ask questions of the author of another book we were reading, *Driving by Moonlight* by Kristin Henderson.

<<http://ptw210wfall04.blogspot.com/>>

- C. 1984 Project: This is another blog discussing Orwell's *1984*. It involves students from a high school in Texas and another in Luxemborg.

<<http://1984project.blogspot.com/>>

- D. Blog Assignment for an Advanced Professional Writing Course: This is a PDF file of an assignment prompt that Dr. Jennifer Bay of Purdue University assigned for her graduate course in professional writing.

<<http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~jbay/515/weblogproject.pdf>>

III. Resources

- A. Blogger: This is THE most important resource for anyone who wants to explore blogging. It really is easy to use and it's free. You can upload a blog to their free webspace (the "blogspot" blogs listed above) or you can upload to your own space (as I do with mine)

<<http://www.blogger.com/home>>

- B. Typepad: This is another popular blogging tool that many consider to be more efficient and useful than Blogger, but it does cost to use. To get a class online would cost \$14.95 per month.

<<http://www.sixapart.com/typepad/>>

- C. Wordpress: This is another blogging tool that is free and relatively easy (though I do not have experience using it personally).

<<http://wordpress.org/>>

- D. Educational Weblogs and Resources: This website contains links to guidelines for students, which include detailed guidelines for developing a blog at Blogger. It also lists resources for those in various disciplines.

<<http://www.wordsworth2.net/writing/weblogresource.htm>>

IV. Legal Considerations

Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) guidelines were designed to protect the privacy of a student's educational records. Though they do not address blogs, they do suggest that it might be best never to require students to use their real name when creating or posting to a blog. Offer students the option of posting under a pseudonym that they only disclose to you and that you do not disclose to anyone.

*Note: When it comes to anything in the blogosphere, simply find a blog and, from the links there, find another, then another, and so on, and so on, and so on. That is the best way to learn about how blogs work and what can be done with them.

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