Blogs and Blogging

Blog is the shortened form of 'web log' and so a blog can relate to any topic imaginable. This page explores the purposes of blogging and the process of setting up a blog for professional learning and reflection. It will be relevant for any professional but has been particularly written with educators in mind. Welcome to the wonderful world of blogging!

Samuel Zeller

Why blog?

A blog is a contemporary way to contribute to professional dialogue that occurs within the online context. Blogging allows for reflective practice to be shared publicly with other professionals, and the genre is useful for documenting a learning journey.

Blogs can form a rich element of one's professional digital footprint, and regularly blogging can lead to the development of a vibrant professional digital identity. Building a professional digital identity is a valuable way for educators (and all professionals) to demonstrate active engagement in contemporary social technologies and to maintain connections that enhance professional learning and career aspirations.

A blog serves also as a useful archive, capturing your professional growth and offering a digital space (domain) of your own, which may be used as a portfolio and record of high-quality practice.

Choose your blog space

If you are completely new to blogging, it is best to begin with a free blogging platform, so that you can experiment with different hosts and find the option that suits you and your style. In most cases you can transfer or simply build upon content developed on free platforms over to more flexible (paid) services should you choose to expand your blogging at a later time.

Free web-based blog hosts include <u>WordPress.com</u>, (please note WordPress.org is a paid self-hosted option), <u>Edublogs</u> and <u>Blogger</u>. You might also consider <u>Tumblr</u> or <u>Medium</u> (although if you are developing a blog for assessment in a University course, these are **far more limited** and will probably **not be suitable**). <u>Wix</u> and <u>Weebly</u> are also platforms you might consider. These two options are more suited to websites that also feature a blogging function, whereas WordPress, Edublogs and Blogger are specifically designed for blogging.

Set up your blog

There are many options available to users when setting up a blog. If you are setting up a blog as part of your assessment for Uni (and even if you are not) here are some things that you need to keep in mind when choosing the style, layout and design of your blog.

*The blog must be one available on the open web at all times. Setting up a blog within a learning management system or intranet limits access to those who have the password, and possibly only to those within your place of employment. The blog must be freely accessible to all.

*Comments must be activated on every blog entry. This is ESSENTIAL if you are setting up your blog for assessment! Even if you are setting it up for personal, professional purposes, commenting is part of the blogging experience, and how you create community and gather feedback. Most blogging platforms enable you to MODERATE (check the comment) before publishing it if you

are concerned that someone may leave an inappropriate comment (rare, but it does happen ☹).

*You are free to use a pseudonym. Protecting your identity is a personal choice. For a professional blog, a pseudonym may block connections being made (people will not know who is sharing all the great content and will be less likely to get in touch with you). However, there are many reasons why people may choose not to use their own image and name online, and only you can make the choice.

*There is a difference between Posts and Pages – you are free to use either (or a combination of both!). Posts are time ordered entries, which readers can scroll through, presented in order from most recent to least recent. Posts are what blogs are generally formed of. Pages are stand-alone entries that are usually connected to form a website. Here is a great explanation of the difference between the two with examples from WordPress.

*Create a hand-drawn blueprint for your blog to help you decide whether your blog will be all Posts, all Pages, or a combination of both. Look at examples online or from previous iterations of the course to see the ways in which previous students have set up their blogs in regard to Posts and Pages.

"plans" shared to the Public Domain by Pexels

*When choosing your blog template, choose one that has a wide content bar which will give you plenty of space for images and tables. Some themes or templates have very narrow, newspaper like columns for your content, which may suit some bloggers, but which will make including multimedia,

images, tables, diagrams etc much more awkward (hint: use the affordances of the blog to include information in different forms – no one likes to read long blocks of text on a screen!).

*Set aside plenty of time to choose your template/theme for your blog. It will take much longer than you think to find one that works for you. Once you've started, if you don't like what you've chosen, don't worry. In most cases you can change the template or theme and your content will be reformatted to fit the new look.

*Another thing to preview when deciding on your blog template or theme is the menu style. Some offer only a static menu, while others offer a fly-out or drop-down option. Fly-out or drop-down menus make it much easier to organise your pages, as you can have main pages and sub-pages (known as Parent and Child pages). Make sure your menu is easy to see and use – it is how your readers will navigate your blog. If it is too much trouble, most won't bother and will go somewhere else!

*Table editing can be tricky in blogs. In many cases the built-in table option is clunky and may look ugly. If you find that this is the case (or if there is no table editing option at all) a good tip is to create the table in Word or PowerPoint (I like PowerPoint best). If you use Word, simply screenshot the table. If you use PowerPoint, choose Save As and then from the drop down for file-type, choose .jpg or .png (image files). It will ask you if you want to save just the current slide as an image or all of the slides. I prefer PowerPoint because you can make the table quite large and saving the table as an image rather than taking a screen shot usually creates a clearer picture. You can always scale an image down once you insert it in your blog but dragging a smaller image to make it larger usually results in loss of clarity. Test and see!

*When initially setting up a blog, consider naming the URL with a meaningful name that relates to the content. Try to find a name that describes what your blog is about (so that people know whether they might be interested from the web address) but is not too narrow (so that you can continue to maintain the same blog even if your professional interests morph and change. For example, this blog, www.linkinglearning.com.au has seen me through my role as an educator, librarian, PhD student and now University lecturer – it is

always about learning, but what I am learning and how often changes, so my blog changes with me!

Designing and creating blog content

Every blog has a 'tone', and the content and design of the blog should reflect that tone. As these pages have been written for professionals who are using their blog for reflection and professional networking and learning, the advice that follows will direct readers towards creating a blog that is professional in tone.

It is good to keep in mind general web design principles as well as principles related specifically to blogging. At all times when making design and content decisions, keep in mind that the site is part of your professional digital identity. It is important that you convey your personality and personal style, because this is what makes a site authentic, but find the balance between 'you' and 'professional you'.

This mind map, created by Dr Mandy Lupton, gives a great summary of the elements of web and blog design that you should keep in mind. A larger version is available online.
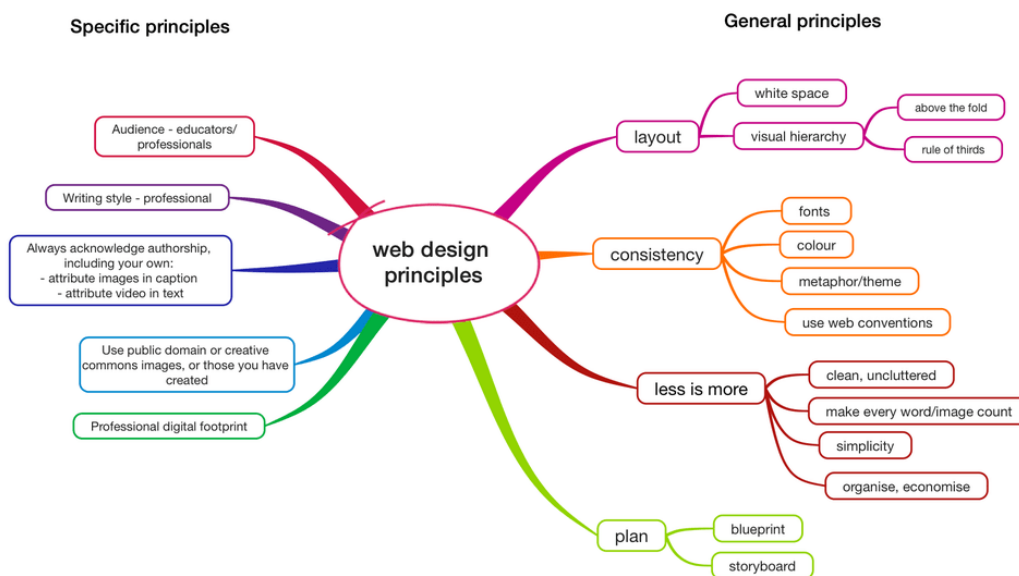
Created by Dr Mandy Lupton. Used with permission.

This Pinterest board contains links to a range of sites that explain the key web design principles referred to in the mindmap above.

General Design Tips

One of the first things you need to consider is colour scheme. Consult the colour theory websites on the above Pinterest board for more detailed information, but in summary:

*Choose two or three colours (no more than this) to underpin your blog

*Consider your readers when making colour choices (readers may be colour blind, may have visual impairment, may just not like reading a lot of yellow text on black background!)

*Consider using a colour scheme generator

Images

When publishing a blog on the open web, no 'education exceptions' or 'fair use' applies. Even though you may be a student, and your work may be created as part of your learning, your blog is public and open to the world. Therefore, you must only use images that are:

* created by you, or

* licensed through creative commons or

* in the public domain,

* 'stock' images you have purchased or are freely provided by your blogging tool

* ones you have written permission from the copyright holder to use.

You must also credit each image regardless of their licence (see information on citing and referencing below).

DO NOT search Google Images and use whatever you find. Freely available to view online does not mean freely available to republish.

Three excellent sites for images and icons are: Pixabay (public domain photos and image files), Unsplash (public domain photos) and The Noun Project (creative commons licensed icons).

You are always free to embed anything into your blog if the content item provides an embed code (e.g. YouTube videos). Embedding is just a fancy form of hyperlink, as the content remains on the original host page. Therefore, embedding does not infringe on copyright.

Further information is available in this printable PDF, and I have included infographics at the bottom of this page – both infographics link to printable (PDF) versions.

Citing and referencing images

What referencing conventions should I use?

In general, when using a web-based format and you are referencing material available on the open web you should hyperlink within the text and caption each image with citation details. If you are citing material which is not available on the open web (for example if you are citing an article only available through a library journal database) you should use an in-text citation and provide a reference list at the end of the post where the reference has been made. For QUT students, Faculty of Education uses APA referencing. Here is the CiteWrite guide which provides indepth referencing information.

Using images and video

When using images and video on your blog, you need to make sure that you have the necessary permissions and that you provide attribution. If you have created your own image or video, you must state that it has been created by you. You can say something like 'image/video created by author'. If an image doesn't have an attribution it may be assumed that it has been republished inappropriately. For assessments, all content must be referenced and cited!

If you are using an image as a banner, attribute the image on the Home page or About page of your blog as it is not possible to caption a banner image. Another way to ensure all images are cited appropriately is to use all Public Domain images and then make a blanket statement on the Home or About page, stating that 'All images are from the Public Domain unless otherwise stated'. Then, if you happen to use a creative commons image or one you have received permission to use, you need only caption these images.

Referencing images: reference in the image caption (you don't need to include reference in the reference list)

Referencing video: reference in the text immediately before you embed the video e.g. 'In this video Sir Ken Robinson discusses creativity' (you don't need to include a reference to the video in a reference list)
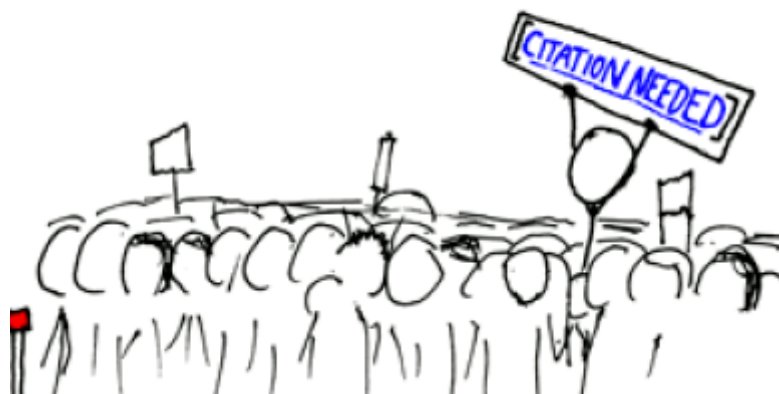
Randall Munroe (en:User:Xkcd),Webcomic xkcd – Wikipedian protester, Cropped to crowd shot by K.Oddone, CC BY 2.5

Writing your blog posts

What writing style should you use?

The writing style of a blog is determined by its purpose and audience. When writing for university, you should write in a professional, reflective and scholarly style. What does this mean?

Professional: Your colleagues and other scholars and professionals are your reading audience. Imagine giving a professional development session at

a staff meeting, or a conference presentation. That is the sort of tone and style you should adopt. You don't need to use a highly formal academic style. A professional tone is friendly but not overly familiar. This blog is written in a professional style. I imagine that I am speaking with others who are interested in what I am interested in, but I remember that I am not speaking with family or close friends, so I write clearly, and don't use any slang or 'in-jokes', and I don't make assumptions about my readers.

Reflective: Your feelings and opinions about teaching and learning are encouraged. You are an experienced educator, and you should use your experience to create a professional conversation. People will find your blog more engaging (and are therefore more likely to read and respond) if you share professional anecdotes, opinions and what you have learnt.

Scholarly: Reference and cite all sources (hyperlink all open access sources). Write strong, clear and succinct topic sentences. Support the topic sentence with 2-4 sentences that provide evidence for the topic sentence. Each paragraph should have only one main idea. Start a new paragraph when you introduce a new idea.

Headings and Subheadings: Consider using headings and subheadings in your blog posts to direct the reader and to break up the text. It is easier to read text that is broken into smaller sections when reading on screen.

Also remember that professional information can be communicated in many forms thanks to the affordances of the blog format. Use videos, images, diagrams, tables, infographics, mindmaps or any other appropriate content to break up text and to effectively explain complex ideas.

Proofreading: Make sure you read all of your writing aloud. The world is reading your work (not just your university lecturer) and while no one is perfect, typos and poorly constructed text is not professional and reflects poorly.

Further Copyright information

Here is a downloadable pdf guide to essential copyright information: <u>Copyright-for-Students.pdf</u> ⌄

a GUIDE TO
COPYRIGHT
& CREATIVE COMMONS

Becoming Copyright Aware

Technology makes it easier than ever to reproduce, create and communicate content. This ease of production and reproduction means we must all be aware of our rights and responsibilities as content creators and content consumers.

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It's a spectrum?

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http://www.copyright.org.au/

Designed by @KayOddone

More about
CREATIVE COMMONS

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http://www.copyright.org.au/

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