



## Supporting Reflective Learning through the use of Weblogs

*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 Weblog?**

Weblogs are often referred to as a Web-based public diary with dated entries, usually by a single author, often accompanied by links to other weblogs 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”, the use of weblogs 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 (i.e., [weblogs.ucalgary.ca](http://weblogs.ucalgary.ca)), 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. Most blogs allow visitors to subscribe using a *Really Simple Syndication* (RSS), a Web content sharing feature. Effective blogs tend to be updated on a regular basis.

### **Why Use Weblogs to Support Reflective Learning?**

Weblogs can be used for reflection about assignments, course work, careers, or current events; they can also capture and disseminate student and faculty generated content. RSS feeds make blog content accessible through newsreaders, allowing bloggers to increase the sharing of this information among interested individuals.

Weblogs offer students, faculty, staff and others a high level of autonomy and freedom, while creating a new opportunity for interaction with peers. Blogs 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 instructors or textbooks, and weblogs offer an effective medium for peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and application.



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## Give Me an Example

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

1. Have each student create their own weblog (i.e., [weblogs.ucalgary.ca](http://weblogs.ucalgary.ca)).
2. After the completion of each course assignment have the students post responses to reflective questions on their weblog.  
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 weblogs. 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 weblog can also be used to:

- Replace the standard course Web page. Faculty can post class times and guidelines, assignment notifications, suggested readings, and exercises
- 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

Weblogs are unmediated and public, they allow students to openly express themselves and air their opinions, ideas and attitudes. While this may be acceptable for a personal blog, it might be inappropriate for a blog hosted on an institutional server. Weblogs are also highly volatile. Bloggers can edit or delete posts, and this transient nature can make blogs difficult to archive or index. In addition, the time-limited relationship of students to universities and colleges influences the length of time a student blog can be institutionally hosted, causing havoc in the blogosphere for those who have linked to the postings of a student whose blog has expired after graduation. To avoid this problem many students are now using weblog services, external to higher education institutions (i.e., [edublogs.org](http://edublogs.org) and [bloglines.com](http://bloglines.com))

## Where Can I Go for More Information?

### 1. What Makes a Weblog a Weblog?

A blog posting by David Winer (2003) of the Harvard Law School about what actually constitutes a weblog.

<http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/whatMakesAWeblogAWeblog>.

### 2. Educational Blogging

An EDUCAUSE article by Stephen Downes (2004) about the educational potential of weblogs

<http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ERM0450.pdf>

### 3. Content Delivery in the 'Blogosphere'

An article by Richard Ferdig and Kaye Trammell (2004) from the University of Florida about the use of weblogs in educational contexts.

[http://www.thejournal.com/articles/16626\\_6](http://www.thejournal.com/articles/16626_6)

### 4. Blog (Weblog) - EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative Library

An extensive listing of resources and articles related to the use of weblogs in higher education

[http://www.educause.edu/Browse/645?PARENT\\_ID=645](http://www.educause.edu/Browse/645?PARENT_ID=645)

### 5. University of Calgary Weblog

This weblog is hosted by the Learning Commons as a service to support innovation in teaching and learning at the University of Calgary.

<http://weblogs.ucalgary.ca/>