

COURSE AND  
PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

## Guidance on blogging



Image: <http://www.thebluediamondgallery.com/scrabble/b/blog.html>

A blog is an online site regularly updated with short pieces of writing ('posts'). Posts are usually arranged by date (most recent first) but can also be 'tagged' to cluster by theme. Images, audio, video and links to other sites can be included. Readers can often comment on each post, and the original author can respond to them.

Blogging is a flexible tool and can support a wide range of educational outcomes. If you would like to use blogging in your teaching – as a learning activity, and/or a formative or summative assessment – the [Teaching and Learning Centre advisers](#) and [Learning Technology and Innovation](#) are happy to discuss it and explore the most effective approach and suitable platforms for your course.

Research into the effectiveness of blogging as a learning tool is complicated by the range of tasks that blogging can encompass. Most published studies are of the effects within an individual course. Some studies show a high degree of student enthusiasm, with students noting many positive outcomes (e.g. a small interview study by Kuzu, 2007). Other studies suggest that blogging positively impacts on learning and skills (e.g. Loving et al, 2007, found over 75% of blog posts on a teacher training course demonstrated in-depth information processing).

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this guidance further or if you have any suggestions for other resources that would be helpful, please email the Teaching and Learning Centre ([tlc@lse.ac.uk](mailto:tlc@lse.ac.uk)) or contact your [Teaching and Learning Centre \(TLC\) departmental adviser](#).

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## Benefits of blogging



Image: <https://pixabay.com/en/play-stone-network-networked-1237457/>

Blogging allows students to demonstrate their attainment of the Learning Outcomes of the course, communicate their disciplinary knowledge, and show their skills at argument as they might in essays or exams. But blogs also allow students to communicate in new ways, and share ideas with their peers and the wider public.

- **Writing for different audiences**, and to different criteria, is a skill which increases graduate employability. A well-written blog can also become a showcase to future employers.
- Writing and reading blog posts help to **develop the students' understanding, argument, and reflection** on the topic of the course. Blogs can become a 'knowledge log' of what has been learned by student to supports reflection on the topic and on the learning process. Blogs can function as extended notes for the student to return to during exam revision.
- Blogging encourages students to undertake writing at more frequent intervals, helping them to **become more proficient writers**, and to use writing as an aid to thinking. Regular writing on the course topics may also reduce anxiety related to the final assessment (Farmer et al, 2008, supports this) and create materials students can then use to revise.
- Because blogs can easily incorporate images, videos and links, they allow for the **presentation and discussion of a wider range of material** than (for example) essays.
- Blogs – particularly ones with an element of reflection or argument - **allow tutors more insight** into student reasoning and understanding during a course. Blogs can also allow tutors to note student writing problems before they impact on summative assessment.
- Blogs viewable by peers can **encourage the development of a learning community** among course participants (in Farmer et al, 2008, students reported this as the most valuable aspect). Students can be expected (or

- required by the assessment criteria) to impact on summative assessment.
- Blogs viewable by peers can **encourage the development of a learning community** among course participants (in Farmer et al, 2008, students reported this as the most valuable aspect). Students can be expected (or required by the assessment criteria) to read one another's posts, comment, and refer to each other's work in their posts and contact-hour discussions<sup>1</sup>. Blogging also allows students who are quieter during contact hours to nevertheless contribute to course debates. Finally, **blogging may also increase interaction during contact hours** (Davi et al., 2007, self-report from students). Learning through social interaction in this way has great potential to build student understanding<sup>1</sup>.
  - **Creating a wider network** - public blogging can bring students into contact and conversation with a wider community around a specific topic, including practitioners, academics, and members of the public.

## Possible approaches

Blogging can incorporate many forms of student writing and activity. Some blogs are used to demonstrate students' disciplinary knowledge. Others are a reflection on the learning process (similar to a learning journal or log). Blogs can be used for discussing critical incidents, responding to course texts, or recording progress in a project. Group blogs can encourage the joint creation of resources.

### Public or private?

There is also a spectrum between public and private blogging (these positions are outlined with the help of Curtis, 2003):

- Blogging for oneself (as a diary for reflection);
- Blogging so that the tutor can read (similar to formative essays, written mainly to gain tutor feedback, but with the possibility of several shorter submissions);
- Blogging so the cohort can read it (a semi-open blog, allowing peer comment);
- A completely open blog (permits feedback from practitioners and the public, and could become a showcase for future employers)

Nuances within these positions include:

- Pseudonymous writing (tutor and peers may have a 'key' or may not)
- Password protection for individual posts

Curtis' study found that students preferred public blogging to writing within a closed VLE, citing the possibility of gaining readers, comments and external approval as an

incentive for writing. However, students may experience disproportionate negative comments from the public, and it may be useful to offer the chance to post under a pen name, or with comments closed to the public.

You should choose the level of visibility and anonymity which suits your Learning Outcomes. Completely public blogging, for example, might encourage students to create polished work, but reduce their discussion of areas of confusion or struggle. If the blog is being used for summative assessment, you should also meet departmental requirements relating to anonymity.

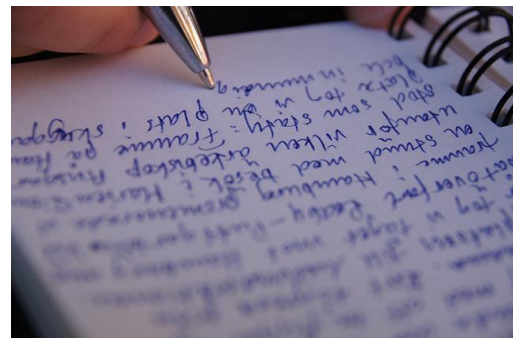


Image: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/froderik/9355090806>

Image: <https://pixabay.com/en/wordpress-blog-post-cms-265132/>

### An example from LSE: blogging with IR321

Students on the third year International Relations course 'Revolutions and World Politics' (IR321) have to prepare weekly 200-word blog posts responding to the set of themes that inform the issues of the week and including links to other resources and student posts.

As the course convenor George Lawson commented, 'The blog posts have a range of benefits for the students: first, they help students craft a range of thoughts about a topic; second, regular writing helps to foster wide reading and student engagement; third, they help to build up an esprit de corps amongst the students – they see in an inclusive, non-confrontational format what others think about a topic; fourth, they help to develop transferable skills in that students are expressing themselves in ways that are more like the forms of writing they are likely to go on to do; and finally, they give me insights into what students are thinking and what they're interested in, which helps in terms of organising seminars and pitching lectures, as well as reflecting on the course as a whole. All in all: it's a winner!'

See the Appendix for the IR321 guidelines for students.



## Blogging as assessment

### Feedback

A tutor should state how often they will be reading the blogs, if they will read all student entries, and when and how feedback will be offered. Reading all blog entries is a large time commitment, and peer reading may be a useful alternative. However, if a student believes their work has been read by an academic, they may persist in mistakes.

If feedback is offered through the comments on a blog, students can also respond to it there, encouraging feedback dialogue (Gordon, Hughes and McKenna, 2015).

Peer comments (as described above) function as an additional form of feedback for students on their work.

### Sample marking criteria

Assessment criteria devised for use in AN300:

Dr Harry Walker from Anthropology received funding under LTI's [SPARK! scheme](#) to use student blogs in summative assessment for 'AN300 Advanced Theory of Social Anthropology'. AN300 students study six long Anthropological texts in detail over the academic year. Blogging was introduced to help students keep abreast of the reading, develop their original ideas, and create a body of ideas and resources to draw on when writing their final essays.

Blogs are individual, but students are encouraged to treat the blogs as a collaborative endeavor. To this end, the final week of studying each text is devoted to commenting on the posts of other students (at least four comments are expected from each student).

Students are provided with support documents on Moodle, and a specific training session on blogging and commenting.

On the next page you can see a table suggesting ratings levels for assessment use:

Rating	Characteristics
4	<i>Exceptional.</i> The blog post is focused and develops an interesting idea clearly and cogently. The entry reflects in-depth engagement with the topic and, as appropriate, includes insightful explanations or analysis, a synthesis of different material, and/or considers multiple perspectives.
3	<i>Satisfactory.</i> The blog post is reasonably focused. Fewer connections are made to other ideas or literatures, and though new insights may be offered, they are not very developed. The post reflects moderate engagement with the topic.
2	<i>Underdeveloped.</i> The blog post is mostly description or summary, without evidence of original thought or critical engagement. Few connections are made between ideas. The post reflects passing engagement with the topic.
1	<i>Limited.</i> The blog post is unfocused, or simply rehashes previous comments, and displays no evidence of student engagement with the topic.
0	<i>No Credit.</i> The blog post is missing or consists of one or two disconnected sentences.

## Technology for blogging

[Learning Technology and Innovation at LSE](#) can advise on issues including:

- What platforms are available and suit your purposes
- How to ensure the blog cannot be changed during the process of assessment, and how to check for plagiarism
- What precautions to take in the event of interruptions to service
- Student technical queries – are there online resources, and can they self-teach or peer support one another?

If a tutor specifies a single platform to use, it is likely to be unfamiliar to the majority of students. This means there will be a learning curve for students, and possibly frustration and resistance. Weller, Pegler and Mason 2005 (surveying MA students) found the compulsory blogging was not popular at the start of the course (although they describe all but one student as being 'won over' by writing, and reading their peers' blogs). Blogs and permissions can also be time-consuming to set up.

### Support

Please contact the [Teaching and Learning Centre adviser](#) and [Learning Technology and Innovation](#) to discuss the use of blogging on your course.



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## Appendix: IR 321 Guidelines

### IR321: 'Revolutions and World Politics'

Course Blog – Guidelines

January 2016

#### **Background**

The course Moodle site will host a blog that everyone will contribute to each week. Your contributions to the blog will be worth 10% of your final mark. Please note that the first two contributions of the term will not count as part of the final mark. That way, everyone will get a chance to practice before we move into assessment mode.

If you are not familiar with blogs, these are a few sites that should be helpful as background:

- 'The Duck of Minerva' is a collective venture established by a youngish crowd of IR scholars: <http://duckofminerva.blogspot.com/>
- 'e-IR' is a solid, student-friendly site: <http://www.e-ir.info/>
- 'Justice in Conflict' (<http://justiceinconflict.org>): has a focus on international law, combining contemporary analysis with thematic debates.
- '[LSE Undergraduate Political Review](#)': a wide-ranging site written and staffed by LSE undergrads.

#### **Process**

Starting in week 2, on the Monday of each week, I will post a blog that introduces a set of themes and links these themes to events taking place in world politics.

You are welcome to submit your weekly contributions at any point after my initial post. The final deadline for posting is 1pm on Friday of each week. Posts should be no longer than 200 words. They should engage with the weekly themes. And they should make reference, wherever possible, to each other's contributions, both from that week and previous weeks.

I will look over the blog entries on the Friday of each week and provide short interventions if required.

### Things to think about

Writing for a blog is not the same as writing academic essays. Here are a few things to consider:

#### *Content*

- Each post should have a short title and *at least* two hyperlinks to other resources, e.g. newspaper or academic articles, visual aids (maps or graphs), and relevant websites. As noted above, try and respond to other people's posts. But avoid any online denunciations – be respectful of other people's ideas and viewpoints.
- Think carefully about the structure of the post. A blog post is not a murder-mystery in which you only find out who the killer is at the end of the book. Nor is it an academic essay that speaks through a voice of objectivity. Rather, a blog post is an 'inverted pyramid' in which you *start* by telling the reader what the argument is and *then* substantiate this argument (e.g. through links to online resources).
- Feel free to be more opinionated and speculative than you would be in an academic essay. But, as noted above, do think about ways to back up your argument. No rants! And no SHOUTING!

#### *Style*

Use short punchy sentences. And short punchy paragraphs. Like this.

With only 200 words to play with, you need to be concise and to the point. There is no need for footnotes or references.

### Grading

I am happy to meet people during the term to discuss their contributions. And I will make (often short) comments on each blog by email each week. Formal feedback on your portfolio as a whole will come at the end of the course. Your final mark will depend on the following:

- *Content*: analytical quality; interaction with peers; links to weekly themes and questions; links to online resources.
- *Style*: clarity of expression; punchy sentences; easy-to-follow structure; conversational tone.