

Using weblogs to promote critical reading, thinking, and writing

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Why bother with weblogs?

- Cons
 - Startup costs
 - Management issues
 - Grading
- Pros
 - Engages students with current events
 - Helps students see links between class content and current events
 - Encourages writing
 - Uses a medium students are comfortable with

Overview

- Types of weblogs
- My experience
- Things to consider
- Brainstorming class blog ideas
- Technical and other considerations

Types of weblogs

- Personal
 - A journal
 - Informal
 - Few links to outside sources
 - No claim to authority
- Pundit
 - Commentary on news
 - Not necessarily formal
 - Many links
 - Authority based on expertise
- Blogosphere
 - Community and dialogue is important
 - Nearly impossible to integrate individual blogs into existing community
 - Easier to create community within class

My experience—Contemporary Mexico

- 5 week summer study abroad course in Mexico
- 15 Georgia Tech students & 5 Tec de Monterrey students
- Two types of blog assignments
 - Group blog posts
 - Individual blog posts

Things to consider

- Class size
 - Large classes increase administration and grading demands
 - A mix of group and individual posts can create variation
- Class content
 - American government vs. political philosophy
 - Intro vs. upper division
- Student characteristics
 - Majors vs. non-majors
 - Class rank
- Your time and energy

Things to consider II

- Blogs should have regularly updated content
- Blogs should be current and relevant
- Students should be encouraged to comment on each other's posts
- Students will appreciate tie-in of posts to class discussions

Brainstorming class blog ideas

- Groups of 2-3
- Design outline of class blog assignment
 - Groups and/or individual posts?
 - Posts: How many? How long?
 - Organized around topics or open?
 - Which news sources would be most appropriate?
 - Will all posts be graded? Will comments be required?
 - Will you blog with your students?

Class blog ideas

Technical & other considerations

- Which blogging tool to use?
 - Blackboard Vista Enterprise and CE Enterprise have weblog/journal tools
 - Edublogs is designed for education
 - Blogger and Wordpress also offer free blogging tools

Technical & other considerations II

- Preparation
 - Set up blog before class
 - Enlist a student assistant to add "users"
 - Provide list of appropriate news sources
 - Discuss issues of "authority"
 - Provide examples of ideal blog posts (or blog with your students!)
 - Discuss issues of plagiarism & fair use of content

Technical & other considerations III

- Keeping the blog going
 - Mention posts in class
 - "Comment" on posts
 - Allow some class time to coordinate group posts
- Privacy concerns
 - FERPA
 - Edublogs option
 - Using a penname or alternative assignments

Technical & other considerations IV

- Grading
 - Posts can multiply or accumulate quickly
 - Grading/marking first post important for student feedback
 - Grading holistically can save time
 - Some use peer rating/grading
 - Writing surprisingly good—perhaps peer pressure?

Resources

- In your folder
 - Syllabus, sample instructions for students
- On my webpage

<http://www.prism.gatech.edu/~md177/blog-resources.html>

Additional concerns or questions?
