

Why Blogs?

Bloggging — a phenomenon that has captured most people in this online world of networking — offers many pedagogical benefits. Blogs have been used by many people to share their thoughts and a myriad of experiences (personal, professional, and public). Blogging is a process of:

- **Reading/Listening** to thoughts, views, experiences
- **Reflecting** on thoughts, views, experiences
 - **Analyzing**
 - **Questioning**
 - **Critiquing**
 - **Reacting**
 - **Agreeing/Disagreeing**
- **Writing/Recording** your reflection
- **Sharing** your reflection

A typical blog structure consists of posts and related comments, where posts are arranged in a chronological order (latest post at the top), allowing the readers to easily access the latest information. The posts are archived monthly, making it easy for the readers to search for a post from a particular month. There are different types of blogs — **personal, professional, public** — that you can choose from, based on your requirements.

You can have a **personal blog** and maintain your daily/weekly/monthly diary. In this blog, you can record your experiences and maintain your photo album; you can also upload an audio file so that your family members can hear your voice. It is your personal online journal where you can record and store your experiences in different formats such as text, images, audio, and video. Next time you plan for a trip, have your own blog ready to record your wonderful experiences and share it with your family, friends, or colleagues. You can also share your views or critique on someone else's views in your blog. Do you feel curious to try out a blog of your own; what are you waiting for? You never know, there are many people you can relate to and share same views, thoughts, and likings.

You can have a **professional (educational or corporate)** blog. An educational blog can be of different types — a student blog, a class blog, a faculty blog, an institutional blog — at different levels. There are two main reasons that should encourage you to use blogs in your educational setting — first, blogs are very easy to create and use, and second, you might want to use the technical skills already possessed by today's tech-savvy learners. Blogs offer many benefits for your students. Mainly, it helps to enhance the following skills:

- **Sharing** — thoughts, concepts, experiences, knowledge
- **Analyzing**
- **Reflecting** — **Critiquing, Writing, Questioning, Reacting**
- **Reading**

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- **Communication**
- **Record keeping** — thoughts, concepts, and experiences
- **Collaboration** — with peers, people (experts, students) around the world

Do these benefits entice you to try out blogging? If your answer is “Not yet”, there are many other advantages that a blog has on its plate to offer. Apart from the two most popular communication methods, e-mail and chats, blogging provides a new interaction opportunity and an easy means to reach out to people. It opens a new door to share and access information from around the world. It is a wide sharing space, where anyone can share his/her thoughts. There might be many students in your class whose hesitant nature might act as a barrier to share thoughts in the class. Guess what? You can offer blogging as a solution to them — you just need to wait and watch; information will flow from their minds instantaneously. If you do not want to use blogging in a classroom setting, you can have an institutional or a faculty blog. Using this blog, you can gather information from everyone in your faculty or institute, for instance, you can collect pre and post conference views from the participants. If you are into research, you can create a blog and collect information from the research participants or experts. The best feature of blogs is archiving that allows to store information for each month. If you are in a corporate setting, you can have a corporate blog. Using this blog, you can gather information from your employees about the newly introduced corporate policies, about a plan, or anything that you want to know from your employees. You can also have blogs for each department in your organization. For example, create a blog for web developers where they can share their experiences (new knowledge they have acquired, new Web site they have come across that they would like to share with other web developers). Imagine a situation where a web developer is facing a problem and he posts his problem in a blog. Other web developers or any other employees who know the solution can leave a comment on the post, or other web developers from around the world could suggest a solution. You never know, that post could generate multiple solutions to the same problem from different employees. The HR department can later collect these posts (available in an archive) and create a FAQ document or a solution repository for the employees.

A **public blog** or a community blog can be used to discuss public issues — critique a news, political views, and so on. An NGO can set up a blog to raise funds, to gather information, or to build contacts from around the world. Read some article in the newspaper about the hottest issue? Is that article bothering you? Do you feel like grabbing someone and sharing your opinions about the issue? You wished you were a journalist or a reporter? Are you getting nightmares about the issues and the next steps that the government is planning to take? Do you feel like telling the authorities to speak to you before taking any further step? Go out and create a public blog and share your feelings and thoughts. Feel free to question and critique the decisions; however, be careful while using the tone and language (you might not want to use unfriendly tone that might offend someone). A public blog gives you the opportunity to become a journalist, a reporter, an author, and a publisher.

There are many benefits that a blog can offer — it is up to us, how we plan to exploit this new tool for ourselves.

If this article tempts you to try out blogging; do it. Creating and managing a blog is very easy. There are many free, web-based blog providers. You just need to register with one of them and start your blog. Don't let the technology intimidate you. Visit any of the following Web sites; create your account; start writing in your blog:

- <http://www.blogger.com>
- <http://edublogs.org>
- <http://www.wordpress.org>
- <http://www.livejournal.com>
- <http://www.typepad.com>
- <http://www.sixapart.com/movabletype>

Now, each blog comes with an RSS feed — a URL that can be used to subscribe to your blog and get automatic notifications of new posts.

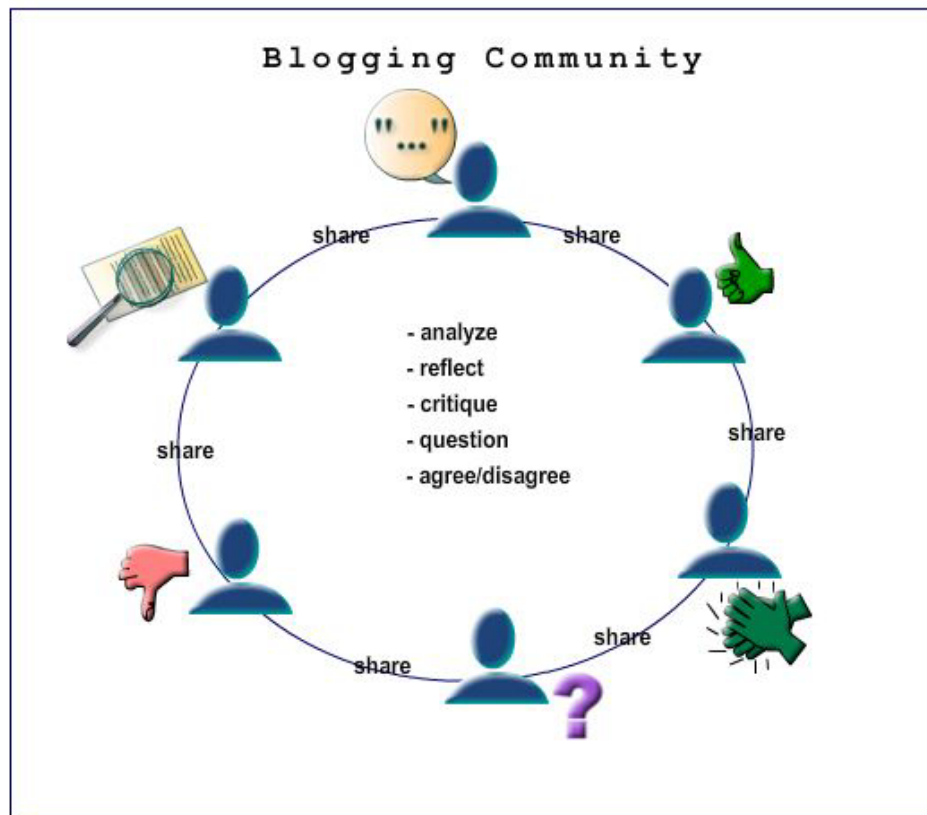
While you were reading this article many questions (uncertainty, apprehensions, confusion, and so on) — challenging the features and pedagogical benefits of blogs — must have cropped up in your mind. Before getting started with a blog, you might want to skim through the following potential issues:

- Assessment/evaluation methodologies — try using a rubric similar to the one used for a discussion forum.
- Off track discussions — you can act as a moderator or you can assign the task to a student to moderate the discussions. The two major tasks of the moderator would be to channel the discussion and to ensure the blog posts are clean (do not contain offending language, use clean language).
- Plagiarism and copyright issues — depending on the discussion content and context, you can give clear instructions on writing a post. You can also use some of the procedures that you use to assess other written material of your students.
- Inappropriate language and tone — blogs tend to generate a writing freedom; however you need to make clear to your students about clean writing. A moderator will play a crucial role to control the language used in posts. The moderator has full rights to approve or disapprove a post. Blogs are accessed around the world; clean writing will help your students and you keep away from the future complications.
- A form of discussion forum — if blogs are similar to discussion forums then why do you need to invest your time learning a new technology? Usually, discussion forums are hosted on an LMS (Learning Management System) that is protected by the institute's firewall. If you are using an LMS, people from around the world cannot access the discussion posts; this might keep the discussions away from some experts who are

willing to contribute. Blogs are a mode of communication and collaboration where discussions are mostly focused on the issues that can be of interest to other people and that you want to share with others.

- Content privacy — you might prefer to have a blog (course blog or a corporate blog) protected from the outside world. Instead of using a free, web-based blogging service, you can install blogging software in your organization. Blogging software will be hosted within your organization and can be used only by the people you allow access permission.
- Learning curve — blogs are easy to use and simple to manage. Most of the students today are tech-savvy; you might want to invest a few hours getting used to the new technology and leverage it to the already existing skills of your students.
- Unanswered questions — if there are still some unanswered questions left in your mind, contact the author at prachi_p_1999@yahoo.com

Be careful! By the time you realize it, you will be a part of a blogging community.



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