

BLOG WORKSHOP
Adrian Miles 21.10.04

What is a blog?

A blog is quite a few things:

- an online epistolary genre.
- a Content Management System (CMS)
- a discourse community
- a reflective critical space
- a public writing and thinking
- a slow conversation
- a fast writing

In the context of this workshop we are only dealing with blogs in educational contexts.

What makes up a blog?

There is no simple definition of a blog, and there are lots of different sorts of blogs. There are political blogs, war blogs, probably hate blogs, identity politics blogs, even diet blogs. They were originally about personal expression but are now being used by all sorts of institutions to publish, distribute, and manage content that benefits from regular publication.

In the context we're using them they are explicit reflective journals, notebooks, or 'eportfolios'.

They usually consist of:

- regular writing (including images, sound, video)
- noting or documenting (through commentary and links) other online resources
- noting (through commentary and links) and blogs
- writing 'out' of ideas, problems, solutions
- engagement with ideas internally through reflection
- engagement with ideas externally through what others have written

What a blog isn't

A blog is not the same as a diary or a journal because they are:

- public
- networked
- process orientated
- 'designerly'

Why use a blog?

Different people blog for quite different reasons. An education blog documents your ideas, your experiences and activities. It is informal, but by writing out your ideas you give them more purchase. It also helps you to form communities of interest, locates you within an emergent community of peers, and promotes 'network literacies'.

What are network literacies?

Just as we have a print literacy (how to read and write, how to use a book, find books, the elements that make up books, brochures, letters, and so on), there is a network literacy. This is about understanding something about contemporary information networks, how to participate and represent yourself in these.

Blogs allow and are an expression of the multilinear, polyvocal, networked ecology that students use. It allows them to become producers and active agents in these systems.

The workshop

In this workshop everyone will log into a new blog, learn how to make entries, edit entries, add categories, and write links to other blog entries. Depending on time we may also learn how it is possible to customise your blog, add a blogroll,

Rules of engagement

Please don't click or do something until you've been asked to do so, unless you're happy and comfortable with diving in and back out again! The blogs that have been set up will be kept online until Wednesday October 27. Until then you can continue to add to your blogs, show them to others, and play and break them.

What blog system is this?

There are many different blog systems available. This is using Movable Type. It is available from <http://www.movabletype.org>

What others are there?

Dozens with new ones seeming to appear everyweek. Blogger.com remains the biggest, and is hosted on their own server. At the moment WordPress (<http://www.wordpress.org/>) is popular. (In fact this is changing so fast that I will probably move my own blog to WordPress shortly.)



RMIT University
Lab.3000
School of Applied Communication

BLOG WORKSHOP

Adrian Miles 21.10.04

NUTS & BOLTS PART ONE

Logging in

To log in to your blog to make an entry you visit:
<http://hypertext.rmit.edu.au/~workshop/mt/mt.cgi>
You log in to administer all of your blog stuff. This is to post, edit, redesign, and so on. This is NOT the public URL of your blog.

Your profile

EDIT YOUR PROFILE allows you to change your username and password. You can do this if you like, however make sure you use a username and password that you are going to remember!

Managing your blog

All of the administration and editing of your blog is done within this system. Select **Manage Weblog** to begin to administer your blog.

The window

Once you've logged in to your blog there are several menus to worry about. On the left is where most of the general settings options are located. But there is also a top menu within the browser page that details help, lets you log out, view your site, and returns you to the top level page of the blog system.

Help

If you click the **HELP** icon at the top of the browser window (top of the webpage) you have access to very extensive help, though you need to know what you're looking for. The **(?)** that appears in lots of the windows in Movable Type will provide a pop up window with context specific help. This generally tells you all you need to know.

Making entries

Once you've logged in you can select **New Entry** to make an entry. An entry can be posted publicly, or written and saved but not yet public (draft). Only you can see draft entries.

There are quite a few options and selections to make when making an entry.

Each entry has a **Title**

You can assign a Category (more about this later)

Entry Body is where you write your blog post. If you want to write a lot and have the entry truncated on the blog front page then put the rest of your entry in **Extended Entry**.

Post Status determines whether the entry will be published or

kept in draft mode. **Allow Comments** is reasonably self evident, but in this version of Movable Type spam is an issue.

Allow Pings is something that needs to be discussed, and **Text Formatting** means two carriage returns equals a paragraph in your entry. Clicking **Save** means your entry is done.

Make an entry

So, off you go... Then at the top of the page click the **VIEW SITE** button and there you go.

The blog front page

A blog front page is made up of quite a lot of information. It contains your posts, date and time stamps, the title, author name, comment and trackback information, a calendar, the name of your blog, archive links, category links, and whatever else you've put there.

Permalinks

Once an entry has been made it has what is called a permalink. This is the url for the permanent location of that post. Remember that a blog frontpage constantly changes, so the permanent location of any entry is actually in the archive, not the front page. The link that is associated with every entry (usually at the bottom) is to the entry's permalink.

Editing entries

Any previous entry, no matter how old, can be edited from the Edit Entry icon (on the left). You can edit text, the date and time of publication, trackbacks, pings and comments.

Write and publish a second entry, and then select **EDITING ENTRIES**. You can edit, delete and generally change any previous entry from here.

Categories

Any entry can have categories attached to it. Entries with categories are automatically collected and published to individual web pages. You can define categories using the Categories tab (on the left) or you can add new categories when you make a new entry.

Make a new entry and then under **Primary Category** make a new category. Save and publish this entry then view your site. You'll notice that the category now appears.

What are trackbacks?

If someone in another blog writes about something in your blog, then their blog sends your blog a message. The entry that they are referring to tracks this information and includes it with your post. This lets you see (and read) who has specifically written about something you've written.

What are pings?

Pings are what one blog sends to another blog to let that other blog know that some information relevant to it exists at the first blog. (Got that?) It also can be your blog sending information to

another computer about something relevant about your blog (for example that you've just updated your blog).

What are comments?

Anyone can add comments to your blog. This can be good, it can be bad. There are spammers who now spam blog comments. But it does mean that others can leave comments.

Preferences

All of these things are controlled by you. You can set default preferences for things like comments and trackbacks, and you can also edit any existing comments at any time.

All of these are available via the **WEBLOG CONFIG** menu. Lets visit that now to make some simple changes.

On the first configuration screen you can rename your blog. Give it a new name, click Save at the bottom of the page. Then click **Preferences** up near the top of the window.

Under **Description** write a brief description about your blog. Here is where you also set defaults for things like comments and the like. We're not going to worry about that today. At the bottom of this screen click the **Save** button.

We have just changed the name and given your blog a description. Sometimes when you change these sorts of things you have to **REBUILD** your **SITE** to force the blog database to republish with your new changes. Select **REBUILD SITE** from the left menu and rebuild everything. When it is finished **VIEW SITE** again and you'll see the new name and your description.

Changing my design?

There are two major ways. You can edit the template pages (click the Templates tab to find them), and you can customise the presentation of material as much as you like. There is extensive discussion of what Movable Type tags are available and how you use them, simply click the HELP tab at the top of the page. This is NOT for those who know nothing about how to write HTML code.

If you are more interested in changing colours etc, then editing the CSS template lets you control these things. If you try this and stuff things up then the Movable Type web site has copies of the original templates and shows you how to restore them. They also have some other designs and show you how you can use them.

However people have developed a few generic designs for Movable Type so if you visit <http://www.movabletype.org/help/> you can find Default Styles and Default Templates for version 2.6 of Movable Type (this is the version we're using today).

Decide on a style that you like. Copy all of the CSS code. Then in your blog click on **TEMPLATES**. In the window that opens select **Stylesheet** and select all of the code. Delete it. Then paste in your new stylesheet. Click Save at the bottom. **REBUILD SITE**, then **VIEW SITE**. You should now see your new design realised.

More things

By this point you should have a pretty good idea that there is a lot you can do from this administrative interface. Rather than document the rest I will list some other tasks which you might want to be able to do:

- adding images to a blog post
- backing up your blog
- adding more categories
- adding categories to existing entries
- how do you find blogs?
- how do you assess blogs?
- how do you use them in class?
- syndication (the really big thing we haven't discussed)

I'd suggest making a list of other things that you might want to ask about, or try to do, and we'll see what we can do.

Useful URLs

This document is available from
http://hypertext.rmit.edu.au/vog/vlog/vlog_archive/000489.html

Other urls:

Hypertext RMIT

<http://hypertext.rmit.edu.au>

My research blog

<http://hypertext.rmit.edu.au/vog/vlog/>

First year Media Studies student blogs via:

<http://media.rmit.edu.au/teaching/networkmedia/>

Educational Weblogs portal:

<http://educational.blogs.com>

EduBlog

<http://www.edublognews.com>

Sebastian Fiedler (webpublishing for learning and education)

<http://seblogging.cognitivearchitects.com>

James Farmer (Deakin)

<http://incsub.org/blog>

Globe of Blogs

<http://globeofblogs.com>

Blogdex

<http://blogdex.net>

Bloglines

<http://www.bloglines.com>

Wordpress

<http://www.wordpress.org>

Blogger.com

<http://www.blogger.com>

Notes, questions & problems