

# Blogging

## Blogging for teachers and students

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### Learning Objectives

- Identify the basic technology skills needed to start and maintain a blog;
- Explore topics for blog posts and characteristics for good blog posts;
- Recognize dangers and establish guidelines for safe blog use;
- Understand motivational factors and benefits of blogging with students.

If you have ever thought of starting a blog, but wondered about its benefits, and what it would take to sustain one, you are not alone. Many of us who began blogging went through these stages at the beginning. We wrestled with the questions we cover in this chapter. Likely the questions that you may have yourself. The goal of this chapter is to give you the courage to start your own blog, and offer some helpful information and skills to get started on your own.

Additionally, bringing blogging into your classroom can bring unique challenges in regard to student safety and digital citizenship. We will discuss best-practice strategies for getting your students engaged in blogging and more importantly, blogging safely.

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Overall, blogging for both teachers and students can be beneficial because expressing one's thoughts, especially when it is in a personal area of interest can be uncomfortable for some. With blogging, teachers and students have a platform where they can put down their ideas, their questions, set personal goals, innovate and use their space as a guide for continued personal development. It becomes a tremendous resource for students to learn to reflect and to see their growth along the way, with the support of teachers in the process. Blogging is a safe space where students can simply write, reflect, and learn in more personalized and meaningful ways.

### Key Terms

#### [Blog](#)

an online tool, similar to a journal, where a user can write entries (called posts)

#### [Blog Post](#)

a single blog entry on a specific topic

#### [Blogging Platform](#)

an online site like Weebly or EduBlogs where blogs are hosted

#### [Digital Citizenship](#)

the skills and knowledge students need to fully participate in society via online tools, including safe and respectful use

## Blogging for Teachers

Think of a blog like an online journal. They are the perfect place to share ideas, post reflections, discuss upcoming lesson possibilities, and connect with other teachers, administrators, and K-12 stakeholders.

### Benefits of Blogging for Teachers

- Sharing your resources with others
- Reflecting on your lessons, classroom, school, etc.
- Staying on top of trends in your subject area

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- Sharing student work
- Directing your own professional development

### Questions to Ask Before Blogging

Will a blog be part of a school website? If so, what are some considerations to keep in mind? Do I need to use images/photographs that conform to district or school policy? Do I need to use a specific writing style? Will my posts need to be approved by a school or district administrator?

Starting your own 'independent' blog outside of your school. How much leeway do you have in terms of using school logo or digital material created in school or your class? Can you reference your school or classroom or do you need to keep your posts more anonymous?

### Purpose of the Blog

It's important to think about why you're starting this blog, who the audience will be, what you hope to accomplish, etc. It's usually best to start with one or two main goals for your blog, and always keep a specific audience in mind. This will help you keep your focus narrow, and you can always expand from there!

### Linking to Social Media

If you are an independent blogger, would your school let your posts be shared to their social media sites? How can you tell the story of your school in the most effective way? Conversely, how much approval would you need to link to (or embed) media created by your school/district?

### Platform for the Blog

Choosing a platform is just as important as deciding who your audience will be. Some options to consider are listed below:

Platform	Price	Features	Tutorials	Example Blog
<a href="#">Weebly</a>	<a href="#">\$0 - \$25 /month</a>	<a href="#">Feature List</a>	<a href="#">Beginner's Guide to Weebly</a>	<a href="#">www.edtechroundup.com</a>
<a href="#">Wordpress</a>	<a href="#">\$0 - \$25 /month</a>	<a href="#">Feature List</a>	<a href="#">Wordpress Blog Tutorial for Beginners</a>	<a href="#">www.rdene915.com</a>

### Technology Skills for Blogging

In general, you won't need a lot of advanced technology skills for creating and maintaining a blog. Most blogging platforms are designed to be user friendly so that even people who aren't as comfortable with technology can still create a blog. As long as you're comfortable with basic text editing features like changing fonts, inserting links, and things along those lines, you should be fine for most blogging tasks.

Plus, if there's ever anything you run into that you're not familiar with, YouTube has tons of wonderful tutorials. For example, [this tutorial](#) provides a great introduction to blogging and covers a lot of the basic terminology you might want to become familiar with. Overall though, don't let blogging be intimidating, even if you don't consider yourself a technology whiz!

### **Managing the Time Commitment for Teacher Blogging**

One of the biggest concerns teachers can understandably have when starting a blog is the time commitment. Teachers are already pressed for time, and adding a new task (especially if it's your first time blogging) can seem like an overwhelming task.

However, once you get your blog set up and become familiar with the posting process, blogging rarely takes more time than it takes to write your post. In other words, as long as you have the time to write, you have the time to blog! Plus, as mentioned above, becoming a regular blogger can lead to all sorts of wonderful benefits that can help improve your classroom and your teaching practice.

For example, research suggests that reflecting on teaching practice can lead to improved lesson and learning quality within the classroom. Blog posts offer an excellent place to reflect on lessons, discuss what worked and what didn't, and to share these reflections with colleagues and peers. Plus, teachers can then get feedback on the lesson from others who have tried similar lessons or who might have ideas for improvement.

One tip that works well for some is to have a document open throughout the week, and as you have ideas (or a few free minutes) jot them down in the document. After a week of thinking about a particular idea, you'll likely have a solid start to a post, and only need a short amount of time to clean it up and finalize it.

It also helps to write about what you know. If you want to post about a lesson you recently implemented, or a new classroom management strategy you're trying, writing these types of topics will usually come easily and quickly since you're already deeply familiar with them from implementing those ideas in your own classroom. We'll talk about this more in the Content Creation section below.

In short, blogging can take as little or as much time as you'd like. Set a goal for how many posts you'd like to create over a week or a month, and go from there. Plus, like anything else, blogging will get easier and faster the more you do it, so stick with it!

### **Content Creation for Teacher Blogging**

Getting started with a blog sometimes brings many questions to mind such as: *What should I blog about? How do I come up with ideas? What do people look for in a blog? How often should I post and how long should my posts be?*

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Teachers have many ideas and experiences that can be shared in their educational community, and these experiences are beneficial to other educators looking for new ideas, strategies, or tools to use in their classroom. For example, Richard Byrne's blog, [Free Technology for Teachers](#) is an excellent place where teachers can explore new resources, ideas, and experiences that they could implement within their own classroom!

Getting started with a blog is the most difficult part. Where exactly do you begin coming up with content? Some recommendations are to simply think about some of the activities that you have been doing in your classroom that have been successful or perhaps even some which have not gone so well. Writing about either of these would make a great blog post because you are sharing your experiences which can always provide helpful information to others considering similar strategies or tools, or for someone who has tried to do the same thing you did, but didn't have the same result.

For preservice teachers, you could blog about a field experience you had, a lesson plan you designed, a book review you wrote, or discuss ideas for future classroom management plans. Any topic that you are interested, or that you cover in a class would be perfect for writing a blog post.

As educators, we are constantly learning and we benefit by sharing our experiences so that we can learn from each other and continue to grow. By opening up about our experiences, our successes, and even our failures, we help one another and we provide a good model for our students in the classroom.

As part of teaching, we have to be reflective in our practice and that can be done after each class that is taught, at the end of the school day, the end of a week, or even on a completely random basis. Reflecting over our practice helps us better understand what went well, and where improvements can be made moving forward. However, these reflections make great content for blog posts. People read blogs because they are looking for new ideas, trying to find someone who has the same questions, or folks who had a similar experience or a frustration. Authentic experiences that are shared, with examples or suggestions of how to move forward, to make changes, or to get started with something new are always welcome themes in blog posts.

### Example Teacher Blogs

- Kindergarten Teacher [Ms. Cassidy's Classroom](#)
- [Vicki Davis](#)
- 5th Grade Focus - [Life in the fifth grade](#)
- [Two Techie Teachers](#)
- [Teaching to Inspire with Jennifer Findley](#)

## **Blogging with Students**

There are endless benefits to having students blog in the classroom. Blogging is a great way to encourage students to express their ideas, be creative, develop confidence in writing, to communicate and collaborate with peers and the teacher. Blogging helps students to work on their online presence and become reflective in their learning as well.

Getting students started with blogging can sometimes be a challenge, as it may seem like a scary experience, or something totally different than simply writing on a piece of paper. However, once you share the purpose behind the use of blogs, how students will be assessed, and reassuring them that it is just a different manner of conveying information that can be done anywhere, using their device, students tend to feel more comfortable and look forward to the experience.

### **Getting Started with Student Blogging**

In order to get started, look at the various platforms available for blogging. There are some options that integrate with different learning management systems and other tools which have blogging features as part of their platform. Find one that will meet your students' level, content area, and especially their needs. Some possible options are Seesaw, Google Suite Blogger, Edublogs and Kidblog. Depending on your choice, there may be additional features available which will open up additional learning opportunities for your students. For example, integrating the blogs into a digital portfolio to track student growth over time.

Once you decide on the blogging platform, first set up the class blog page. Personalize the page by selecting a unique theme, perhaps even involve students in deciding on the theme for the class. Spend time familiarizing yourself with the settings and specific features offered in the platform, learn how to access student blogs and their account information, and how students will create their accounts and log-in. One other idea is to set up a student account for yourself, so that you better understand the student experience and will be prepared to answer any questions the students may have when they are starting to create their blogs.

It can also be helpful to create a handout to share with students. A handout or other instruction should be offered that will explain the uses of blogging, include a list of expectations and guidelines, directions for how students will join the class, and some example blog posts that perhaps you have created. Sharing this information with students and showing them what to expect that can be helpful for building student comfort and confidence for the new experience.

It may even be helpful to have students write their first blog post in the classroom, so that the teacher could help with editing, and making sure the content is appropriate prior to posting. Before starting, spend some time talking about possible prompts, how often they will blog, who the audience will be, length and requirements for posts, etc. Let's go over

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these in a bit more detail.

### **Frequency of Blogging**

How often should your students blog? Ask students to discuss how often would they like to visit a blog and read up something that is important to them. Typically readers might like to see something new every few days, so writing a blog post more than once a week would be a good idea. Some topics might lend themselves to greater frequency, such as science and school activities.

Give them a scenario to brainstorm. If a Student Council member had a blog, what activities would he/she blog about? If the school's Yearbook editors had a blog what would they like to communicate, or highlight through the year?

Students enjoy the chance to be creative and have choices, and will probably be excited about having options for choosing their own themes, fonts, and more, which will help build some motivation to write. Move around the classroom, facilitate while the students set up their account, personalize their page and begin their writing.

### **Writing for a Specific Audience**

This is an area often overlooked, because there are many bloggers that 'rant' with no consideration for what the reader might be interested in. Get students to come up with a list of who their readers might be. Ask them to go beyond general descriptions such 'Parents' and 'Friends.' Would the 'parents' be 'Parents of students who are new to the school?'

Make them understand that the tone of voice of their blog post should be respectful and relevant to their target audience. Would a post containing inside jokes, snide comments, or emojis inspire an older reader (say a parent or a teacher) to return to the blog? Just like the tone of voice, the language and writing style needs to keep in mind the reader.

### **Headlines**

As in any story, a blog post needs a strong title or headline. When you provide your prompt, as students decide on what angle to write about, ask them to consider an interesting title to their blog post. A title that would grab the attention of their Target Audience.

Students may not often have writing experience, or some 'media' background. Find a sample of blog posts and news stories, and analyze how the headline was crafted. What words grab their attention? What word combinations stand out? Some headlines use questions, some use declarative and somewhat shocking statements. A strong headline gives the content of a blog post plenty of potential.

### **Blogging for the First Time**

One way to have students start their writing in class is through the use of prompt responses. At the beginning, start small by instructing students how to join the class and have them begin responding to the teacher posts with meaningful discussion points. If you have time in class to do this, it is beneficial for their progress as the year moves forward.

Even before having the students enter their blogs on the platform, have them use pen and paper, provide a prompt and give maybe 10 minutes for writing. Giving students this opportunity to first practice on paper helps them become more comfortable with writing before publishing posts for a more public audience.

When you give them the prompt, briefly discuss the Target Audience, and remind them at this time to keep in mind who they are writing for. Once they have written, help them to learn to evaluate their work and reflect on their writing. It will also help to reinforce the value in blogging as well as help the students to feel comfortable and confident in expressing their ideas. Perhaps even have students share their posts with a classmate and offer feedback to one another.

Once the responses have been written, give the students some time to use this writing as their first entry on the blogging site. By creating the first draft on paper, and then entering it as a blog post, they will have an opportunity to process the experience, to think, reflect and become familiar with how the activity will be.

Once you get the students set up and hopefully excited for blogging, it will be a continuous work in progress. Students will continue to express concerns, but we need to just provide the support, and emphasize that it is okay to take risks, and accept challenges, and work through. Blogging is a tremendous benefit for many critical skills for students. Through blogging, students develop their online presence and digital citizenship skills, it promotes communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking. It enables students to build comfort and confidence in a safe space, for sharing their ideas. By having students read peers' blogs, it can help to build relationships within the classroom. It helps educators to better understand the student needs and interests and will enhance the communication that takes place.

### **Blogging Activities for Student Buy-In**

#### **Storytelling with Blogging**

Blogging can be a good way to learn about students and become familiar with one's peers. It takes the first few weeks of school to get to know one another and become comfortable in the classroom. An idea for a different way to start the year is by using blogging as a way to learn about student backgrounds, interests, and learning needs. It is also a good way to develop an understanding of student skills in writing.



### Starting Prompt Examples

One way to get to know students is through “icebreakers.” However, not everyone is a fan of doing the traditional icebreakers, so perhaps trying something a little different might help. At the beginning of the year, sharing a survey with students or having them write about themselves on paper, without writing their name, and then having classmates guess, can also be a fun way to foster classroom relationships.

Another idea is to focus on a particular concept or create a prompt as a means of reviewing content material covered from the previous school year. A prompt done in this way can be very informative for determining the content that needs to be reviewed, and offer insight as to how to provide individualized instruction for each student.

Blogging provides a highly interactive way for teachers and students to convey information and show understanding. It promotes student voice and encourages students to feel comfortable in expressing their ideas in a safe learning environment.

### E-penpals with Blogging

Another great activity to get students excited about blogging is connecting with an e-penpal through a site like [ePals](#) or through a teacher you know at another school. When students know that their blogs will be read by peers outside of their own school, they typically become more excited and engaged in the blogging process. This can be particularly engaging when you give students freedom to choose what they can write about from a variety topics.

While having a digital penpal can be great, you’ll also want to make sure your students are familiar with the basic of digital citizenship (outlined below) so that they know how to appropriately and respectfully interact with their digital peers. Using a site like [Kidblog](#) can also be beneficial because it allows the teacher to approve every blog post and comment that is submitted before it can be posted online for others to see.

### Student Privacy Concerns

Any time your students post anything online, there are serious considerations that must be taken. If students (particularly K-8) are posting in a public location, they should never be posting personally identifiable information that could allow a stranger online to find out who they are.

Additionally, teachers should always take time to provide lessons and instruction on online safety prior to an internet-based activity. Many times, teachers assume that because students grew up with digital devices, they are familiar with online safety. However, this is often not the case, and the responsibility can sometimes fall on the classroom teacher to be the primary source of information on online safety for many students.

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When teaching students about online privacy, [Common Sense Media](#) has a wonderful collection of resources for K-12 teachers. These lessons can be used to introduce students to the ideas of online safety, and can help make sure that students are ready for activities like blogging.

### **Blogging and Digital Citizenship**

There are always concerns with digital citizenship when technology is involved and students are going to be creating and sharing content in the classroom. With the 9 elements of digital citizenship, there are several which are directly related to blogging and should be addressed at the beginning as well as on a continued basis to reinforce the expectations throughout the year.

As educators we want to promote digital literacy for the students and make sure that students understand how to use the technology, how to access their blogs and cite information they use in their posts. There should be a focus on digital etiquette and how to properly interact with others, what is considered appropriate behavior and communication in the online learning environment. It is important to spend enough time setting up the expectations and guidelines to make sure that students are interacting in ways which promote digital citizenship.

Students need to learn to respect others and also to think about the information that they are sharing about themselves, to respect privacy of others and to represent themselves in an appropriate manner online. Providing examples of how to create strong passwords, maintain security and to be safe online are very important parts of lessons on digital citizenship that should be included when starting to blog in the classroom.

### **Academic Benefits of Blogging**

There are many academic and personal benefits to blogging. In terms of the “21st century skills”, blogging promotes critical thinking, collaboration, communication and creativity. When used in the classroom, blogging provides opportunities for students to work on these and the 5th “C” content, and publish their ideas for authentic audiences.

As a blogger, a student has the benefit of improving their communicative skills, expanding vocabulary, becoming better with grammar, for a few examples. Depending on the content area, blogging is helpful for students to learn to write in a specific way whether it be persuasive text or a narrative for example.

Blogging and providing opportunities for students to read and provide feedback to one another, opens up the communication and collaboration in the classroom, leading to greater student confidence and building a supportive learning environment. Students can share ideas and experiences, learning more from each other. Blogging enables you to write freely about your ideas and thoughts, and you can choose to share them or you can keep them private, but the end result is that you have a way to express yourself, be creative and can

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then use it as a means for personal growth and reflection. In addition to these benefits, it promotes student autonomy in learning and can lead to higher student engagement.

### Working with Young Students (K-3)

#### Age Specific Considerations

Blogging with students in the primary grades requires a different approach. While many of the academic goals are the same, younger students require scaffolds that older students may not. Students in this age group need help with organizing and producing their posts. They may also need technical assistance. These extra steps may sound complicated, but as with many things in this age group the key is in managing student routines.

In order to reduce technical challenges, consider using [Easyblog.org](http://Easyblog.org) as your blogging platform. The set up is straightforward and the interface is easy for young students to navigate. The free platform also has an iPad app that can be used to facilitate blogging in a situation with limited access, such as the one iPad classroom. Signing into the blog by choosing your picture is something that even the youngest students can do.

Help students to organize their writing by providing [graphic organizers](#) or blog post templates. A fill in the blank template may be the difference between getting a blog post from a young writer or a group of words. At this age the audience for most posts would be family members, so remind students that their posts should say what they did, show what they know, and share how they feel. In this way they will stay on track when writing and will also inform their families about class activities.

While writing is a creative process, one cannot escape the fact that our youngest students may not yet have mastered the mechanics letter formation. They will need assistance in order to produce a blog post. Blogging would be a great activity for parent volunteers or peer tutors from an intermediate grade to help with. Also, consider enabling speech recognition on student devices or voice typing in Google Docs to allow students to draft their posts.

How technical, organizational and production challenges are resolved may be impacted by a number of factors. Grade level, available technology and class routines will each affect how blogging is set up in a primary grade classroom.

#### Implementation Ideas

There are many ways to implement blogging in the primary grades. Some may choose to use blogging as a morning warm up or as a center activity. In grades K or 1, consider composing a post together as part of your morning routine. Fill in a graphic organizer or post template as a group and the teacher can post it on a class blog. In a third grade class, the “student of the day” might be responsible to compose and post to the class blog.

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Blogging could also be used as a review activity for any curricular subject. For reading, students can share vocabulary words they have learned, responses to reading selections, or even reading comprehension exercise such as an illustrated sentence. Mathematics applications can be equally simple: illustrated word problems, observations about patterns and shapes or explanations about data sets. Science allows for posts on seasons and other cycles or class experiments and observations. Holidays and other celebrations, important people and even geography would all be appropriate social studies content to base blog posts on.

Differentiation should also be a part of the plan when setting up your blog. You may choose to create a [choice menu](#) for blog posts to allow students of differing abilities to represent themselves at their best. Perhaps a blog posts does not need to be typed, but could be recorded via [vocaroo](#) or [soundcloud](#) allowing for the occasional audio post or podcast. A student might be allowed to create a slideshow from images submitted by their classmates to accompany their blog post rather than use their own art.

## Conclusion

Now that you're familiar with the blogging basics, you're ready for the next step! If you're a teacher who is planning on creating a blog for yourself, start thinking about your audience, your content, and the type of platform you'd like to use. If you're ready to introduce blogging to your students, check and see if any other teachers in your school have already started a blogging program so you can see what's working for them. You can also check out these great resources to find additional ideas and support on your blogging journey!

## Additional Resources

- [Edutopia - Blogging in the 21st-Century Classroom](#)
- [TeachHub - A Beginner's Guide to Student Blogging](#)

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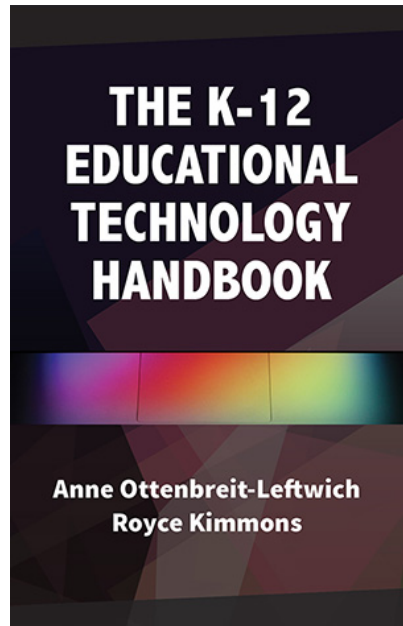
Ruth Okoye is the Director of K12 Initiatives at The Source for Learning, the parent company of the TeachersFirst community. Okoye has over 20 years of experience using technology in the classroom and served as the Technology Resource Teacher for Elementary Language Arts in Portsmouth, VA. She holds several teaching endorsements, including Computer Science, Reading Specialist, and PreK-12 Administration and Supervision. Okoye is a Google Educator, Edmodo Certified Trainer, and Microsoft Innovative Educator Trainer. She is a member of the leadership team for the ISTE Ed Tech Coaches PLN, and she promotes classroom technology integration as a presenter at local, state, and national conferences.

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