

# Connect

Blogs  
Guide



a place of mind  
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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# WHAT IS AN BLOG?

A weblog, or “blog”, is really just a website. Weblogs cover as many different topics, and express as many opinions, as there are people writing them. Some blogs are highly influential, some have enormous readership, some are university course websites, while others are mainly intended for a close circle of family and friends. It is common for people to write blogs to describe their work, their hobbies, their pets, social and political issues, or news and current events. And while blogs are typically the work of one individual, blogs combining contributions of several people, ‘group blogs’, are also popular.

Connect Blogs exists within Connect and serve as an open communications tool for students to share their thoughts.

A Blog consists of:

- **Blog Entries:** Text, images, links, multimedia, Mashups, and attachments posted by Students and open for Comments.
- **Comments:** Remarks or responses to Blog Entries made by others. Students can delete Comments, if the Instructor allows.

There are three different types of Blogs:

1. **Course Blogs:** All enrolled users are able to post Blog Entries. All enrolled users can post Comments to Blog Entries.
2. **Individual Blogs:** Only the owner of the Blog is able to post Blog Entries. All other users enrolled in the Course are able to view and add Comments.
3. **Group Blogs:** If the Instructor enables the Blog tool for the Group, all Group members can post Blog Entries and make comments on Blog entries. Any Course member can view Group Blogs, but can only add Comments.

*Note: The Instructor can edit and delete entries in any of the three Blog types and delete any use Comments.*

# WHY CHOOSE A BLOG?

Blogs in Connect are more akin to a web journal and is presented chronologically. Since it is a more personable way to keep a communication channel open with students, you could use the blog to really give your course a human component and to give students a deeper perspective. Hopefully, with that perspective, it will help inspire and interest them further in their studies when often grades and good results are the only focus for many.

As students, there are times when the anxiety and stress of the workload makes students forget the real purpose of their education. Having a space for students to reflect and think deeply about their studies can be beneficial. That being said, be considerate in how you will mark this piece of work. If it is mandatory, some students will simply put in the words without meaning or thought. If it is not marked and optional, when push comes to shove, students will not complete this piece if they have tests, assignments and more important things to complete.

# HOW TO RESOURCES

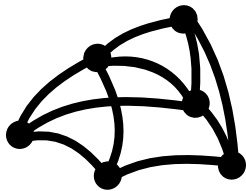
Explore Blogs Resources and more at:  
[elearning.ubc.ca/connect/resources/](http://elearning.ubc.ca/connect/resources/)  
Create a Blog  
Working with Entries  
Grading Blogs

# STRATEGIES

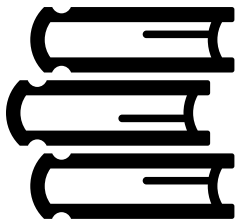
## Strategy

### #1

## Giving students preparation



Hosting a blog allows you to have a regular stream of information to your students. By sharing the organization of each lecture, lab or discussion, students can organize their knowledge as they are learning. For example, you could have regular posts before each class and provide an outline, agenda, or visual representation of each lecture, lab or discussion session. This can give students a framework for organizing information they will learn in the time they will interact with the material. It is essential to capture the critical concepts or principles that students should use as their focal point around which they should organize their knowledge. Ambrose suggests to use an agenda that includes headings such as **Introduction**, **Lecture**, **Discussion**, and **Recap** rather than an agenda such as “Three rules to guide ethnographic fieldwork, the reasons for these rules, and a discussion of their limitations.” (Ambrose 61)



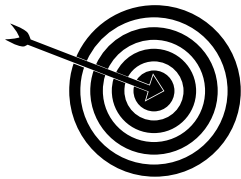
Because students can come into your course with varying states of knowledge, or even completely irrelevant knowledge. After you have “[identified] the prior knowledge you expect from students, you can put this in detail on a blog post at the beginning of term. Make sure you “differentiate declarative (knowing what and knowing why) from procedural knowledge (knowing how and knowing when)” (Ambrose 34). Students can know facts and concepts but the correct application and procedures on why they should be using it could be unclear to them. Explaining this in detail perhaps in a blog post can help clarify this knowledge to them.

# STRATEGIES (CONTINUED)

## Strategy

## #2

## Practice and Feedback



Students who are stretched thin between courses can find it hard to become true masters at a subject. Opting to complete the minimally required work, and not completing targeted, focused practice at the areas they are weak in.

When providing practice and assignments, try to assign problems and requirements that allow students to vividly and concretely see how their work is relevant and of value to the real world. Analyzing real world events in an economics class can provide a context for understanding how economic theories apply to the current situation. In a computer science course, the instructor could provide an opportunity for students to build a database for an actual client that could be deployed in the community (ie: for pro bono or open source). These tasks allow students to interact with real world constraints, resources, clients while inspiring interest and experience in future internship position or jobs.

Using a blog can provide students with a space to constantly refer to and reflect upon their challenges. For example, after an assignment, if there was a common area that students can work on, you can write about and describe in full detail what part didn't meet your expectations. Your blog can be also used to provide students with more opportunities to practice their skill. For example, you can suggest areas where you observe students could use more polish with exercises and practice problems to reinforce the learning objectives.

It is important to note that directed practice is not enough alone. You must have a portion of directed feedback (through assignment returns, etc) to give students the greatest learning gains.

# STRATEGIES (CONTINUED)

## Strategy

#3

## Student Motivation



Motivation in a course generates excitement, directs and sustains the energy that students have in what they do and how they learn. If the environment in the course is perceived to be supportive and that end goal of the course is valued and expected results of these goals are positive, then students will be intrinsically motivated. However, the reverse can happen if students do not feel that those values are met.

Having a blog can connect the material to students' interests. Speak about how your material has a relevance in today's world, perhaps how the technology can better enrich lives, or perhaps how your work is making an impact in the field.

Students often experience a disconnect between their academic lives and their career goals. Chemistry students may not see the relevance in taking an English course because they do not realize that the experience and the thinking processes acquired will serve them well in academic writing in the future. As an expert in your field and having walked a path similar to students you have the knowledge and the insight into the value and the connections between the content of other courses. Demonstrate the relevance of your course between this and real life scenarios and how courses you did not find relevant previously to have been useful in your life. "For example, students often complain about being graded on the quality of their writing in lab reports, failing to recognize the importance of written communication skills in a wide range of professions. We can help motivate students by explaining how various skills will serve them more broadly in their professional lives" (Ambrose 84).

Furthermore, showing your own passion and enthusiasm for the discipline can be powerful and even contagious. Even if students are not initially attracted or even interested in your subject (because of the course being a graduation requirement or prerequisite to another course, your enthusiasm may raise questions and curiosity that students have. This engagement can allow students to lead them more into the topic than they had initially planned and dismissed.

# TIPS FOR AN EFFECTIVE BLOG

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A blog is easy to start! It doesn't have to be a time consuming process but it does require some time every now and then to make it truly an effective tool for students and you. Here are some tips that will maximize your time starting a blog for the class.

#1

## Be Active!

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A blog without posts is not very useful! Try to post several times a week, with content that is useful or valuable to students. You can give students advance notice about class activities and homework. You can even schedule blog posts in advance should you not be able to release at the exact moment you wish to release the post.

#2

## Comments

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Consider whether you prefer to interact with your students directly on the blog, or through other channels of communication. Blog comments can be useful for students and yourself to interact directly on the page, however, it may also deter students from posting at all. Consider offering alternative forms of communication as well.

Furthermore, there may be vandals to add comments to your blog post. While it is an uncommon event, there is that risk. If this becomes an issue, consider turning off comments and referring students to other means of communication (ie:/ directly on the Connect Discussion Board, etc).



# TIPS FOR AN EFFECTIVE BLOG (CONTINUED)

#3

## Give students an opportunity to reflect

It is important to give students an opportunity to reflect on assignments. Facilitating their reflection with specific questions can help structure the process to support motivation. For example, asking students “What did you learn from this assignment?” or “What was the most valuable feature of this project?” helps them identify the value of their work. Asking students “What did you do to prepare for this assignment/exam? What skills do you need to work on? How would you prepare differently or approach the assignment differently if you were doing it in the future?” can help to identify specific strategies that leverage their strengths and overcome their weaknesses, thus bolstering their expectations for future success.

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