

BLOGS, A PRIMER

*A Guide to Weblogs in the Classroom and in Research
for Compositionists, Rhetoricians, Educators, &c.*

This *article* is an updated and expanded version of “[The Year of the Blog: Weblogs in the Writing Classroom](#)” (Spring 2003). In writing it, I want to make two arguments. The first, a largely implicit one, concerns the life cycle of online scholarship and is marked by my added emphasis on the word “article” in the opening sentence of this essay. My second argument, the explicit one, is about the value of blogging in the writing classroom.

The Life Cycle of Online Scholarship

As soon as "The Year of the Blog" was published, I started finding emails in my inbox from people who wanted me to add their particular blog resources to the collection (and, in fact, I received yet another such email while working on this essay). It became clear to me through these emails that this audience did not see the piece as an article, but as a Web site. Articles are archived; Web sites are updated. And so they wrote expecting I would update "The Year of the Blog," not realizing that as a published article it was too late—the piece had been archived at the very moment it appeared on the Web. At the same time, because of the pace of technological change and the ephemeral nature of the Web the resources in the original article became outdated, a point made in other emails I received which noted some of the broken links in "The Year of the Blog."

Taken together, these email responses from readers suggested a number of important questions about New Media scholarship:

- What is the audience for electronic forms of scholarship? Or, more properly, what are its audiences?
- How does this scholarship circulate within and outside of academic communities? How is that circulation different from traditional print scholarship?
- Is the function of scholarship to archive the knowledges of a historical moment, or is the function of scholarship more active, meant to impact our day to day lives and our teaching?
- Should articles on the Web be updated? Especially when some of the links begin to point to obsolete or possibly inappropriate (even pornographic) Web sites?

The very existence of this article provides some provisional answers to these questions and so just in writing this essay I am making an argument about one possible life cycle for New Media scholarship. Yet I want these questions to linger beyond this essay. While, clearly, I feel that scholarship should act pragmatically, circulate widely, and address audiences broadly, the questions raised still haunt my own thinking about the value of New Media scholarship. This essay, then, is only a partial answer, meant to prompt more questions than answers about the life cycle of online scholarship.

Another Year of the Blog

The second, more explicit argument of this essay has to do with blogs in the writing classroom. The technologies of blogging have changed, with new blogging tools and new developments such as RSS syndication, and blogging itself has risen even higher on the cultural landscape. In the original article, I noted several important events that marked 2003 as the “Year of the Blog,” but I might just as well declare 2004 the Year of the Blog. Witness these moments:

- In the summer of 2004, in an unprecedented move, bloggers were given press passes to first the Democratic and then the Republican National Conventions. These press passes, normally reserved for select journalists of the mainstream media, implicitly legitimized blogging as a form of journalism while simultaneously recognizing the power of popular blogs to shape public opinion.
- Throughout the year bloggers broke several important news stories. Perhaps chief among these was "Rathergate," in which bloggers raised questions about the authenticity of documents relating to President George W. Bush's service in the Texas Air National Guard. These documents, used by Dan Rather in a *60 Minutes Wednesday* segment, turned out to be forgeries—much to the embarrassment of Rather and CBS.
- In December, Merriam-Webster named "blog" the Word of the Year for 2004, meaning that it was the word most searched for in Merriam-Webster's online dictionary.
- Also in December, ABC News named bloggers, collectively, the People of the Year in recognition of the impact bloggers had on several news stories ranging from the election of 2004 to the South East Asia Tsunami.

Given these developments, these days I like to tell people that the only thing missing for blogs is a sweet romantic comedy starring Meg Ryan. On the web, in the academy, and throughout the world, blogs continue to make a name for themselves. And so, as in "The Year of the Blog," I provide these collected resources so that you can find a way into a blogging and a way to bring blogging into your writing classroom.

TOOLS AND TUTORIALS

*Introducing Tools for Reading and Creating Blogs,
So That You Might Find a Way Into the Blogosphere*

Introduction

It's called the Cambrian Explosion—the swift appearance of a dizzying array of life forms in the pre-dawn of time. The fossil record plods along for millions of years and then, suddenly, there's an eruption of diversity in animal life, all during the Cambrian Era. Within the Cambrian Explosion are all the lineages of the animals of our world.

The world we know was born in that time.

We might say that blogging tools today are undergoing their own “Cambian Explosion.” Once upon a time there were only a handful of tools with which to make blogs, but now there are [Wikis](#) and [Content Management Systems](#) and blogging tools both simple and complex, ranging from [America Online's Journals](#) to [Xanga](#). All of these have their adherents (some more fanatical than others) and all of these have their uses (some more useful than others). Many of these will die out, but some will survive.

Rather than overwhelm you with options from which to choose, I have chosen instead to focus in on the most common, most popular tools (this being a primer, after all). Of the many available, these are tested and true. And so, howsoever blogs may evolve, chances are the their future lies within these tools.

Experiencing Technical Difficulty (from "The Year of the Blog")

As with any use of technology, you might encounter problems in using these services or setting up your blog. Such problems are always frustrating, but I think they also provide interesting pedagogical moments. After all, it's when things fail that you best see how they work; when they work, they tend to be invisible. If you or your students have problems following the set-up instructions in these services, for example, then that's a great chance to discuss the assumptions about audience and literacy hidden within those instructions. If your blog fails at a crucial moment, then that's a chance to think about the limits of technology.

However, the good news is that blogs are not "bleeding edge" technologies. All of the

tools described below are very stable, with a large user base. If you do encounter problems, each provides a place to turn to for help.

Factors to Consider

There are a number of factors to take into account when selecting a blogging system. And, even after you’ve chosen one, you might find that circumstances change and you’ll be choosing another tool some other time. I myself have used, at various times and for various reasons, Blogger, LiveJournal, and [Greymatter](#). In each case, I considered:

- **Purpose:** *What do you want to do with your blog?*
The first thing to consider is the purpose of your blog. Different systems have distinct advantages depending on whether you are creating the blog for yourself, or for a class, or for students to create blogs of their own.
- **Hosting:** *Do you want to host the blog yourself, or do you need the blog to be hosted for you?*
Some blog services will host your blog for you. That means that they provide space on the Web to store the actual pages that make your blog. Most often, this storage is free, which makes those services particularly appealing to someone with limited Web space or design skills. On the other hand, if you already have a site—no matter how large or small—you might want to keep your blog on your server.
- **Cost:** *How much are you willing to pay, if anything, for a blog tool?*
While, arguably, some of the best and most popular blogging services are free, there are some that require a small investment. This usually translates into advanced features, so you may decide you want to pay the price. If you’re just starting out in blogging, though, you might as well do it for free.
- **Complexity:** *How much do you want your blog to do, and how much do you want to learn?*
All blogs have the basic ability to write and publish posts; all blogs will order these posts in reverse chronological order, with the most recent post first; all blogs will have some sort of archive for posts. But blogs can do a lot more if you want them to, though the more they do the more you (generally speaking) have to learn. Don’t let that discourage you from blogs with a bit more complexity. You might find yourself wanting features like a post category system, and that might mean a slightly more complex and robust blogging tool.

Tools for Writing Blogs

Collected here are the blogging tools most commonly used both inside and outside the academic community. Does that mean they are the best, or the best for you? Hard to say. But many things on the Web exhibit what we might call a “Google

effect.” One of the reasons Google is such a good search engine is that it assumes the page you’re looking for is the page others have gone to when using your search terms. Similarly, chances are one of these tools is the one you’re looking for, too, because it’s the tool others in your position have decided to use.

- **Blogger** (<http://www.blogger.com>)

Purpose: Personal blog, research blog, class blog, student blog.

Hosting: Hosted for you or you can host it on your own Web site.

Cost: Free, both for the service and for hosting. There used to be an enhanced hosting service for a fee, though I can find no mention of that now.

Complexity: Basic features are easy to use and offers some advanced features (such as the ability to design your own templates to customize the look of your blog).

Comment system used to be very shoddy, but it’s gotten a recent upgrade and is now vastly improved.

Features: Templates, comments, partial integration with Google browser bar.

If you want to try blogging, Blogger is a great place to start: it’s simple, easy, and free. This tool is perfect for a personal blog and, because a single blog can have multiple authors, it’s good for class or collaborative blogs as well. Inviting additional contributors to a blog is as easy as providing email addresses; Blogger sends an email invitation and recipients need only click the embedded link and create an account. Because it’s free and easy both to set up and use, Blogger is also a fine choice for having students create blogs of their own.

- **LiveJournal** (<http://www.livejournal.com>)

Purpose: Personal blog.

Hosting: Hosted by LiveJournal, or you can embed it in your own Web site, though not easily.

Cost: Free version is available, but has some limitations. Cost for premium version is \$25 for one year’s service, but comes with many bonus features.

Complexity: Simple to create and use, but at the same time has some nice robust features, including a stellar commenting system.

Features: Templates (limited selection), comments, mood icons, “listening to,” user icons.

LiveJournal is a popular blogging service because it has a number of well-designed features, though you will have to get a paid account to access some of them. It’s also unique in the way that it tends to spawn communities and networks of blogs. In part, this effect is a legacy of LiveJournal’s early days, in which one of the primary means of getting an account was getting an activation code from someone who already had an account, meaning that

blogs were created with a kind of built-in community. Since LiveJournal has moved to a free-for-basic/pay-for-premium service, it's much easier to start a blog with this service (no more activation codes), but because so many of its tools are geared towards this interlinking, it's not the best choice for class or student blogs since any blog created here will inevitably bleed into related blogs.

At the same time, if you ask your students about blogging, chances are that some of them write or read LiveJournals. Being familiar with this service yourself would thus provide a way for you to bridge nonacademic and academic uses of blogs by providing a means of discussing blogs and their features in ways students may already understand.

- **Movable Type** (<http://www.sixapart.com/movabletype/>) and **TypePad** (<http://www.sixapart.com/typepad/>)
Purpose: Personal blog, research blog, class blog, student blog.
Hosting: Movable Type requires hosting; TypePad is a hosted version of Movable Type.
Cost: Personal Movable Type license is \$69.95; educational pricing for a single classroom is \$39.95. Basic TypePad service is \$4.95/month or \$49.50/year.
Complexity: Both Movable Type and TypePad are robust systems, with a number of powerful features. That may make them worth the cost.
Features: Search engine, TrackBack, comments, plug-ins, templates.

For a long time, Movable Type was the darling of the academic bloggerati. Its clean interface, powerful robustness, and array of features made it the choice of those bloggers who wanted a blog service they could run and host on their own site. With the emergence of TypePad, the power of Movable Type was extended to those who didn't have the skills to install Web scripts on their server and who didn't have Web space to host their blogs.

Both tools offer some strong features such as TrackBack (which allows a kind of conversation between blogs), categories for posts, a built in search engine, and commenting. Both, too, will allow you to customize the look of your blog. Movable Type is written in Perl, so you'll need to have that installed on your Web server (some institutions won't allow the installation of Perl scripts, only those written in the more secure scripting language PHP) and you'll also need to know how to install Perl scripts.

Though MT, as it is shorthanded, still has its fans, people have begun to embrace Drupal more (see below). One of the primary reasons for the flight to Drupal is the increasing appearance of "comment spam," in which bots add

spam comments to a blog. Recent discussion on the TechRhet mailing list suggests that MT continues to have problems with comment spam.

It's also worth noting that one company now owns and operates Movable Type, TypePad, and LiveJournal. The future of these services, then, is intertwined.

- **Drupal** (<http://www.drupal.org/>)
Purpose: Personal blog, research blog, class blog, student blog.
Hosting: Drupal requires that you have your own hosting.
Cost: Free.
Complexity: Drupal is more than a blog; it's an entire Content Management System, capable of running complex community-driven sites (such as *Kairosnews* (<http://www.kairosnews.org/>)).
Features: Multi-user system, modules, forums, permalinks.

Drupal is the *new* darling of the academic bloggerati. It's free, open-source, robust, and has a number of optional modules that can be added to extend the features of your blog/site. While Drupal is useful for all sorts of blogs, it is perhaps best for creating a class Web site, since its Content Management System (CMS) nature allows for more than simple blogging. It's really a community-driven system, with integrated abilities for new users to register and participate in discussions or comments on blogs. These features, as you might suspect, make it ideal for classroom usage.

Because Drupal is such a potent CMS, it does take some skills to install and set-up for use. However, Charles Lowe of Kairosnews has created an education distribution of Drupal that's fairly well constructed for a class/course Web site (see <http://kairosnews.org/node/3790>).

Other Tools for Writing Blogs

While the tools covered above are the most popular, there are any number of other tools you might choose to use. Indeed, the universe of blogging tools is expanding so rapidly that it would be difficult to present an exhaustive list here; so, instead, I offer these additional links for you to explore:

- **Blog Software Breakdown**
(<http://www.asymptomatic.net/blogbreakdown.htm>)
Although this site isn't designed for easy readability, it does provide a chart to compare the features of a number of blogging systems. This analysis includes user-installed blogging tools and CMS only, so while it does cover Movable Type, it does not cover Blogger.

- **The CMS Matrix** (<http://www.cmsmatrix.org/>)
As its name would suggest, this site is wholly devoted to full-blown CMS. However, as the line between blogging tools and CMS comes to be blurred, this site provides a great analysis of all the CMS packages available.
- **Webuser Reviews**
(http://www.webuser.co.uk/products/Weblog_tools_478_index.html)
Good, detailed reviews of some popular blogging services, including both Blogger and LiveJournal.
- **How To Blog** (http://blogging.typepad.com/how_to_blog/)
Use the categories on the left to reach analyses of popular blogging tools in comparison. However, given that the site is created through TypePad, you might expect some bias.
- **Choosing a Blogging Package for Students**
(<http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/wlg/1894>)
Though this article on choosing a blogging service for students is brief, be sure to check through the comments as well, which provide additional insights.
- **Choosing a Weblogging Service**
(http://www.bloggerme.co.uk/the_uk_web_log_forum/5_choosing_a_weblogging_service_/)
Another nice, brief overview of some of the major blogging systems.

Tools for Reading Blogs

With the continued rapid growth of the blogosphere (the universe formed by the sum total of blogs), and with more and more people trying to read more and more blogs, a variety of tools have emerged to make it easier to keep up with a broad range of blogs.

These tools tend to rely on Really Simple Syndication, or RSS (also sometimes taken to mean "Rich Site Summary"). RSS is an Extensible Markup Language (XML) format that specifies how all sorts of content items should be shared on the Web. RSS "feeds" include news stories from the online sites of traditional media such as newspapers and magazines, but they're also increasingly used to syndicate the content of blogs.

To syndicate your own blog, you'll need to create the RSS feed, which is a small file specifying the structure of your content. Many blogging tools will create this file for you, including Blogger, LiveJournal, Movable Type, and Drupal.

To use RSS to read blogs, you need to first find RSS feeds and then use an aggregator service to collect these subscribed feeds in one central location.

Finding RSS Feeds

The best way to collect feeds is at the source; that is, when you find a blog you enjoy check to see if the author has enabled an RSS feed. If there is one, you can subscribe to it. But there are also several sites that let you locate RSS feeds:

- **Feedster** (<http://www.feedster.com>)
Feedster is a popular search engine for locating RSS feeds from blogs and other sources. If you want to search for feeds from blogs exclusively, use <http://blogs.feedster.com/>. Feedster also features a built-in aggregator for subscribing to these feeds.
- **Technorati** (<http://www.technorati.com/>)
Technorati is perhaps better described as a search engine for blogs; however, if you become a member (at no cost) you can create RSS watchlists.
- **Blogdigger** (<http://www.blogdigger.com>)
Like Technorati, Blogdigger acts as both a weblog search engine and a tool for finding RSS feeds.

Aggregating RSS Feeds

RSS feed aggregators can be online tools or standalone software applications:

- **Bloglines** (<http://www.bloglines.com/>)
Bloglines is probably the most popular online RSS aggregator. Registration is free and simple, and you can search for RSS feeds through Bloglines as well. "Notifiers" are available for download; these small programs will notify you as soon as any of your feeds are updated.
- **NewsIsFree** (<http://www.newsisfree.com/>)
NewsIsFree focuses not on blogs but on more general news sources such as CNN, *Newsweek*, and *The Washington Post*. Not only does this provide a central location for you to read all the day's news, but it can also become a useful portal for assembling content to bring into your classroom.
- **Firefox** (<http://www.mozilla.org/products/firefox/>)
Firefox, the browser of choice for more and more Web surfers (this author included), includes a light version of an RSS aggregator. When you surf to a site with an RSS feed, an orange icon will appear in the lower right corner of the browser window. Clicking on this icon will allow you to subscribe to the site's feed using Firefox's "Live Bookmarks" feature. Though not a true aggregator, feed readers (such as Sage (<http://sage.mozdev.org/>)) are available as plug-ins for the browser.
- **RSS Readers** (<http://blogspace.com/rss/readers>)
If you think you would like a software/desktop feed reader, this site offers the top picks for a range of platforms, as well as additional selections through

"runners-up."

Using RSS Feeds in Teaching

The most obvious application of RSS feeds and readers in the writing classroom involves aggregating the feeds of your students' blogs to make commenting or grading easier. However, there are other applications for these blog reading tools in education:

- **RSS: A Quick Start Guide for Educators**
(<http://static.hcrhs.k12.nj.us/gems/edtech/RSSQuickstartGuideForEducato.pdf>)
Will Richardson of [Weblogg-ed](http://www.weblogg-ed.com) provides an excellent introduction for teachers interested in using RSS in their classrooms. Richardson covers the basics of what RSS is, how to find feeds, and what to do with them in teaching.
- **Creating Courses** (http://www.ibritt.com/resources/wp_rss.htm)
A great link resource, with a broad range of sites covering all aspects of RSS, with an emphasis on using this tool in the classroom. Instructors may be especially interested in the links on incorporating RSS feeds in WebCT.

Blog Tutorials

If you feel like you might need some help in creating your blog, there are a number of tutorials available. Many of these focus on Blogger, which reflects its popularity:

- **Samizdata.net Glossary** (from "*The Year of the Blog*")
(<http://www.samizdata.net/blog/glossary.html>)
A great resource for learning the language of blogs, from "advocacy blog" to "whoring (for hits)." Not only does this glossary provide a grounding in the blogging subculture, but it would make an interesting document to use in a class to analyze the language of blogging or trace its emergence.
- **Getting Started with Blogger** (<http://feedster.com/tutorials/bloggerbasics/>)
A tutorial on setting up a Blogger, offered by Feedster. This tutorial has nice, large screen shots to show you each step needed to make your blog.
- **Blog Basics** (<http://www.blogbasics.com/>)
This site is wholly developed to helping you choose a blogging system and then helping you create your blog with that system. In testing this site, I encountered some strange requests for a user name and password, but the content remains accessible and useful.
- **Blogplates: Tutorials** (from "*The Year of the Blog*")
(<http://blogplates.net/tutorials.html>)
Offers links to tutorials for Blogger as well as to the installation guides for Greymatter and Movable Type. It also has links to installing templates for all

- these services as well as links to various forums for more support.
- **Tool-specific help**
Each of the various blogging systems has its own help system:
<http://help.blogger.com/>, <http://www.livejournal.com/support/>,
<http://www.sixapart.com/movabletype/docs/mtmanual>,
<http://help.typepad.com/home/>, and <http://drupal.org/handbook>.

WRITING PRACTICE

*Using Blogs as a Tool for Writing,
Personally and Pedagogically*

Introduction (from "*The Year of the Blog*")

Blogs can be more than either a semi-public/semi-private diary or rich source material for academic study. The ability to publish and share text on the Web quickly, simply, and with a minimum of technical knowledge opens up a number of new possibilities for the classroom as well. Here are some strategies you might consider for using blogs in your classroom.

For all of these suggested activities, you will probably want to use an RSS aggregator (explained in the [tools section](#)) to "collect" the writing assignments.

Why Blogs?

You'll notice that there's nothing special or especially blog-specific about many of the strategies listed here. After all, you can use a number of electronic tools for discussion outside the classroom, and you certainly don't need any electronic tools for something like peer revision.

So why blog?

I think each academic who blogs now would have a different answer to that question, but here are some of the reasons I would offer for using blogs as a writing practice in the classroom:

1. It promotes literate skills with technology.
2. It helps students, many of whom are already blogging, distinguish between formal and informal electronic writing, along with the kinds of ethos involved in each.
3. It's addictive. Students don't tend to write unless they have to. Blogs are one way to change that. My students never keep using an asynchronous discussion board once my class has ended, but students may maintain their blogs or start new ones. Introducing students to blogging gets them writing and may keep them writing.

There are, of course, many other possible answers to the question, but these are

three in operation when I use blogs.

Blogs as Journals (*from "The Year of the Blog"*)

If you've ever used journalling in your classes, a blog is a great way to move this pedagogical practice online. Students can complete the same sort of journal assignments you might ordinarily give, but placing their responses online gives you ready access to these journals. It also allows other students to see what their classmates have written in response to the assignments. This solidifies classroom community and implicitly creates collaborative learning. Blogs with a commenting feature allow you and other students to respond to journal postings, which only enhances the kinds of collaboration possible.

Blogs and Voice/Ethos

If you've asked students to blog throughout the semester, have them reflect on their development at the end of the course. For a final assignment, have students write about their blogs, noting the places in which their voice and ethos changed.

Blogs and Collaboration (*from "The Year of the Blog"*)

Many blog services allow multiple authors to contribute to a blog. Several students can work together on a blog centered on a single topic or assignment. At the same time, the blog records the process of collaboration, allowing teachers to observe, comment, and intervene as needed while allowing students to reflect on the process at the end of the assignment.

Blogs and Group Discussion

If you maintain a single blog for your class, you can use it to prompt class discussion of readings or assignments. Make a posting with the discussion questions and then have students use the commenting feature of the blog tool to respond (and, even, to respond to other students' responses). With this strategy you can either continue a discussion started in class or have students come to class with a discussion already underway.

Blogs and Peer Review

Because so many blogging tools now have integrated commenting systems, blogs can be useful tools for peer revision. Students can post brainstorming ideas, paragraphs, or whole assignments to their blogs and peers can then respond to the work through comments.

Blogs and Research (*from "The Year of the Blog"*)

Some academics have already started using a blog to keep notes of their research. Blogs would be a useful addition to any research writing course, particular as students turn increasingly to the Web to perform their research. Students can use

the blog to record their reflections on various sources, sketch out their emerging arguments, or point to links that relate to their topic. The visibility of blogs records this research process for evaluation, comment, and review while peer participation through commenting can help students determine the validity and reliability of Web sources by asking students to comment on the various sources listed in the research blogs.

Blogs on a Particular Topic

Blogs can be used to create a more sustained research assignment as well. Have students create blogs centered on a single topic or issue. Students will need to perform frequent Web searches to keep abreast of the topic, which stresses the importance of continual, up-to-date research, while also giving them additional practice evaluating Web sources.

Class Blogs (from "*The Year of the Blog*")

Instead of asking students to start blogs of their own, you might also consider creating a blog for the class, a strategy used by many academic bloggers already. A class blog is a quick and easy way to create a homepage for the class, one that will allow you to post important reminders and notices, reflections or summaries of class discussion, and links that reflect and inform the class readings.

CLASS CONTENT

*An Introduction to Using Blogs as Content in the Writing Classroom,
with an Examination of Issues Ranging from Audience to Remediation*

Introduction

The blogosphere is a vast field of ever-expanding, often-updated writing. As such, blogs represent a rich source of content that can be used in the classroom. Even if you don't decide to blog yourself or to have your students blog, these texts can be used successfully in the classroom to examine a variety of writing issues.

Blogs and Audience

I frequently use blogs to help students consider questions of audience in writing. One way to accomplish this goal is to pair a blog written by a celebrity with a randomly selected blog. Reading a selection of posts from each blog helps students see how audiences are imagined differently for the authors of the blogs. For example, Wil Wheaton, known to Trekkies as Wesley Crusher, has a popular blog at <http://www.wilwheaton.net/> (and there's also a [link collection](#) of celebrity blogs you can use); blogs can be found randomly using the next blog link on Blogger (http://www.blogger.com/redirect/next_blog.pyra). Students read a week or two of posts from both blogs in preparation for class discussion.

Blogs and the Remediation of Genres

Blogs are clearly connected to print genres such as the diary. Thus, students can explore issues of remediation by looking at this emerging electronic genre in relation to earlier forms of diary writing. I've used excerpts from *The Journal of Madame Knight*, written by Sarah Kemble Knight in the early 18th century, alongside a randomly chosen blog to explore questions of remediation.

If you'd like some readings to open a more general discussion of blogs as a genre, consider these links from "The Year of the Blog":

- Meg Hourihan's "[What We're Doing When We Blog](#)": Hourihan is the person behind Megnut, and one of the developers of the Blogger service. In this brief article, she argues that what binds bloggers together is the format, implicitly making an argument for blogs as a distinct genre of electronic writing.
- John M. Grohol's "[Psychology of Weblogs: 2002](#)" and "[Psychology of Weblogs: Everything Old is New Again](#)": Grohol provides an interesting

counterpoint to Hourihan. He argues that there's nothing special about blogging, replying directly to Hourihan's article to claim that the unique features she find in blogs are a part of older forms of electronic writing such as USENET posts.

You may also want to use Kevin Brooks, Cindy Nichols, and Sybil Priebe's "Remediation, Genre, and Motivation: Key Concepts for Teaching with Weblogs" (http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/remediation_genre.html), which more directly engages the question of remediation.

Blogs and Online Communities

Blogs often form communities. In many blogs, this community is represented by a list of links to other blogs, called a "blog roll." But LiveJournal blogs are more interesting for mapping community, since user profiles list both interests and friends and mutual friends. Students can explore online community by clicking through a LiveJournal network. You might even have student draw maps of these communities to see the relationships formed. LiveJournal, like Blogger, has a link for selecting random blogs: <http://www.livejournal.com/random.bml>.

Blogs and Voice/Ethos

By selecting one blog and reading it in depth, students can see how authors develop voice and ethos. Select a random blog and then have students read a series of posts starting with the first and then continuing at intervals to the most current one. Ask students to locate specific posts where they can see the voice of the author changing or developing.

Blogs, Disciplines, and the Public Sphere

Blogs often comment on current events. Sampling blogs on issues like the South East Asia Tsunami, recent elections, or the continuing war in Iraq can give students access to rhetoric in action. This sampling can be useful to contextualize readings in class or to consider how issues examined in class play out in the "real world." Finding blogs on a topic is relatively easy: just pop a topic and "blog" into Google., or use one of the blog search engines such as BlogPulse (<http://www.blogpulse.com/>) or Bloogz (<http://www.bloogz.com/>). Ari Paparo has assembled a fairly complete list of blog search engines you might try at <http://www.aripaparo.com/archive/000632.html>.

Blogging is also influencing disciplines, most notably journalism. One way to have students consider the relation between blogs and disciplines is to examine some of the many blogs maintained by journalist. CyberJournalist.net maintains a list of "j-bloggers" (as the site calls them) at

<http://www.cyberjournalist.net/cyberjournalists.php>.

Blogs as Design Inspiration (*from "The Year of the Blog"*)

I've also used blogs in my Web authoring class as a source of valuable design inspiration. Surfing through the blogs at Blogger in particular can give students a multitude of sites to look at while thinking about design issues like layout, graphics, and color. You might also have students look at blog templates at a site such as blogskins.com to find sample color palettes and layouts.

Blogs and Visual Argument (*from "The Year of the Blog"*)

Because blogs are Web-based, issues of visual design are foregrounded. You might ask students to consider the relation between the content of a blog and its design: how does the design reinforce the identity being inscribed in a blog? How does it undercut, challenge, or complicate it? These questions are useful in any design-oriented class, but are also valuable in a class that asks students to consider aspects of visual argument, particularly as it relates to written argument.

One interesting aspect of design to consider in relation to blogs is the way they inherently privilege vertical space. Blogs typically have a columns of links and a column with the text of the blog. How does this vertical orientation influence the overall argument of the blog? Although we tend to encourage students to "chunk" text when writing for the Web, popular blogs such as Instapundit tend to scroll on and on. Why do readers seem to accept this in a blog and not in a homepage?

RESERACHING BLOGS

*Suggestions on Entry Points for Researching Blogs and Blogging,
With Attention to Rhetoricians, Compositionists, &c.*

Introduction

In some ways, the literature on blogging has yet to spring onto the critical landscape in the way that blogging itself has sprung onto the cultural landscape. While I suspect that there are at this moment both articles and books in the print pipeline that examine blogging from theoretical and pedagogical standpoints, for now there are a few key resources for academics interested in studying or writing about blogs and blogging.

Critical Works

While critical literature on blogging remains largely nascent, there are some resources for academics interested in researching blogs:

- *Into the Blogosphere* (<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/>)
This collection currently stands as the definitive critical work on blogging. Not only is it a great collection that examines blogs from a number of theoretical approaches, but it "practices what it preaches"—readers are invited to comment on the articles as one would to a blog posting. The collection, in fact, was created using Movable Type.
- **A collection of articles about blogging & RSS in the library world** (http://www.blogwithoutalibrary.net/?page_id=93)
Though not created with the field of Composition and Rhetoric in mind, this list of the work done on blogging in library science might provide an interesting entry point to compositionists wanting to study blogs.
- **"Push-Button Publishing for the People': The Blogosphere and the Public Sphere,"** by Clancy Ratliff (<http://culturecat.net/node/402>)
Ratliff reproduces a conference paper on blogging and, appropriately enough, she reproduces it in her blog. The paper includes links to and engagement with essays from *Into the Blogosphere*.

General Works

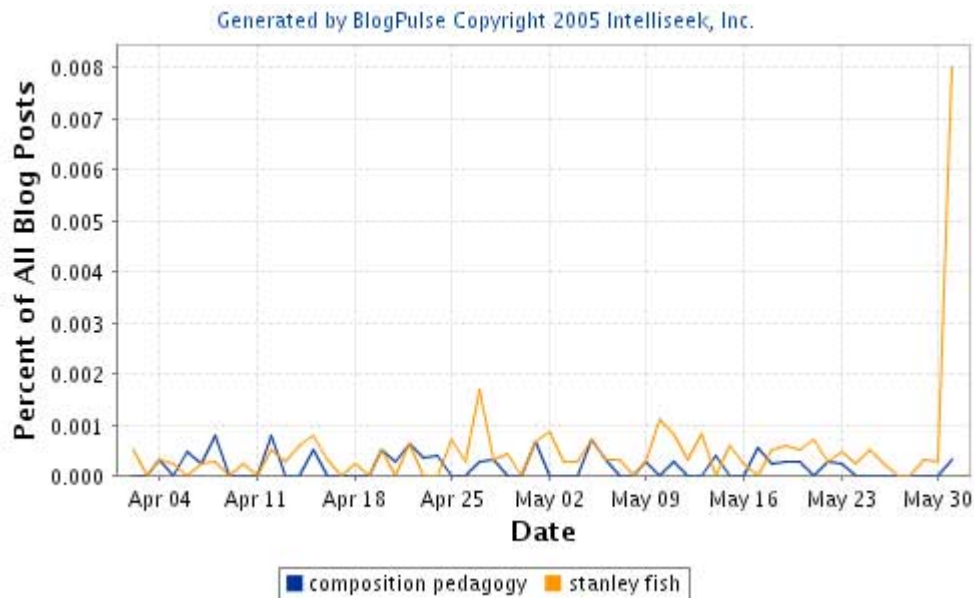
While very little critical literature exists on blogging, a great deal has been written about the practice more generally:

- **A Weblog Bibliography** (<http://kairosnews.org/blogbib>)
Charles Lowe has assembled an extensive Web-based bibliography of online articles and essays on blogging.
- **EServer TC Library** (<http://tc.eserver.org/dir/Blog>)
This site hosts another directory of Web-based texts on blogging. Though not as extensive as the one hosted at Kairosnews, this list does allow you to sort the collection in a number of ways, including by year published, by author, and by user rating.

Primary Research

There are a number of ways to find blogs to use in primary research. One could, for example, use the random links provided by Blogger or LiveJournal or the many blog rolls available on sites across the Web. However, a number of blog search engines exist to help you locate blogs.

- **BlogPulse** (<http://www.blogpulse.com/>)
BlogPulse indexes just over 11 million blogs (at the time of this writing). But there's more than just a search engine on this site. Using the BlogPulse Trend Tool you can map out the occurrence of terms and phrases in the blogosphere across time. For example, I used this tool to map out "composition pedagogy" and "Stanley Fish." The tool returned:



The graph shows the huge spike in blogging about Stanley Fish just after his Op-Ed piece in *The New York Times* on May 31, 2005. Clicking on the points of the graph returns the actual search results, so not only can you see that a

lot of people are suddenly blogging about Stanley Fish, but you can see what they're saying as well.

The BlogPulse Trend Tool is only one tool developed to utilize BlogPulse's search index. Visit the Showcase (<http://www.blogpulse.com/showcase.html>) for other examples, including an analysis of blogging during the 2004 election and in the wake of the South East Asia Tsunami.

- **Weblogs.Com** (<http://www.weblogs.com/>)
Weblogs.Com keeps a continually current list of recently updated weblogs, which might help in selecting blogs to read or study.
- **blogdex** (<http://blogdex.net/>)
Blogdex tracks the spread of information through the blogosphere, using a contagion model for how information moves between blogs.

PODCASTING

*A Consideration of a Possible Evolution of the Blog,
with Some Discussion of Using This Tool in Teaching*

Introduction

"Podcasting," a recent development in online genres, is the term used to describe online "radio" broadcasts created by news sources or, more commonly, by individual amateur content creators. Users can subscribe to, download, and listen to podcasts. I include podcasting in this primer because it's often seen as a kind of audio blog or as the next step in blogging.

Podcasting lies at the intersection of several technological and cultural trends. In terms of technology, the ubiquity of the MP3 file format for audio has created a broad cross-platform standard for audio files; the emergence of RSS (described in the section on [tools](#)) has established a standard means for subscribing to and aggregating a variety of content; and the spread of broadband internet connections has made downloading the often large files feasible for a broad spectrum of users. In terms of culture, the popularity of Digital Video Recorders (DVRs) such as Tivo has led to a familiarity with time-shifted content consumption; the tremendous spread of MP3 players using hard drives and, in particular, Apple's Ipod, has not only provided a portable solution with memory enough to store and play these files but has in fact created a culture that seeks out audio content and expects automatic synchronization of new content with the MP3 player; and, of course, blogging has fostered a large and diverse community of individual content producers (and, here, we might recall Blogger's original motto: "Push-button publishing for the people").

While it remains to be seen what applications podcasting will have for the writing classroom, Duke University's pilot Ipod program, which distributed Ipods to all incoming freshman, certainly suggests that institutions are willing to consider the pedagogical applications of tools that deliver content through audio files.

General Resources

Despite the short history of podcasting, there are already a broad range of resources for understanding what a podcast is and how it works:

- **Wikipedia entry** (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podcasting>)
Wikipedia, a collaboratively constructed encyclopedia on the Web and itself

an interesting object for study, contains a detailed entry on podcasting, including information on the origin of the term.

- **Ipodder.org History** (<http://www.ipodder.org/history>)
Ipodder is the original application for subscribing to podcasts. Adam Curry, former MTV VJ, describes how he came up with the idea of the podcast and how Ipodder was developed.

Making Podcasts

As with the RSS feeds for blogs discussed elsewhere in this article, there are two parts to podcasts. As a podcaster, you must create content and the RSS file that will tag that content (thus creating the RSS "feed"). As a podcast listener, you must find podcasts of interest to you and then use a program to subscribe to these feeds. In this section, I will provide resources for both making and listening to podcasts:

- **How-To: Podcasting** (<http://www.engadget.com/entry/5843952395227141/>)
Engadget provides details on all parts of the podcasting process, both subscribing to podcasts and making podcasts of your own. The information on creating podcasts is directed to users of Apple computers exclusively.
- **Create Podcasts Using Your PC**
(http://www.windowsdevcenter.com/pub/a/windows/2005/04/05/create_podcasts_with_pc.html)
Because the original Ipodder script was written on an Apple computer, and because podcasting is so closely associated with the Ipod, many of the tutorials on creating podcasts are written with an Apple computer in mind. This tutorial provides instead information on making a podcast on a computer running Windows.
- **Ipodder** (<http://www.ipodder.org>)
Ipodder is a central resource for podcasting, allowing you to find podcasts as well as providing the original software for subscribing to them.
- **Podcast Alley** (<http://www.podcastalley.com>)
Another popular site for locating podcasts of interest. You might start with one of the top podcasts listed on the main page; otherwise, podcasts are sorted by categories to make it easier to find one that matches your interests.

Podcasts in the Classroom

Educators have already started thinking about how podcasts can be used in the classroom:

- **Podcasting for Education**
(<http://www.darcynorman.net/2004/10/30/podcasting-for-education>)
D'Arcy Norman provides several excellent suggestions on how to use podcasting in education, primarily connected to archiving oral performances

such as lectures and interviews.

- **Education Podcasting Network** (<http://epnweb.org/>)
This site not only provides an introduction to the uses of podcasting across a range of educational institutions but also provides a directory of podcasts that might be of interest to teachers.
- **E-Learning Centre: Podcasting** (<http://www.e-learningcentre.co.uk/eclipse/Resources/podcasting.htm>)
The E-Learning Centre provides a series of links related to podcasting in education, ordered in reverse chronological order so that you can find the most recent resources first.

A Final Note

In considering how you might use podcasts in your writing classroom (as compositional practice or as class content) it's important to keep in mind what is and what isn't a podcast. According to the definition of podcasting at the Evil Genius Chronicles, there are three essential features of a podcast:

- Must be a discrete and downloadable media file
- Published in an RSS 2.0 enclosure feed
- Handled automatically on the receiver end, downloaded and moved to where it needs to be and put in the playlists for your playback device
(<http://www.evilgeniuschronicles.org/wordpress/2004/09/29>)

So, creating an audio library of all the texts from your freshman composition reader isn't a podcast. Using RSS to tag these files would make them podcasts.

MORE RESOURCES

*Additional Information on Blogging,
with Some Details on This Web Design*

Academic Bloggers

In "The Year of the Blog" I provided a partial list of academics who blogged. Since then, blogging in academia has grown so much that rather than offering a list of academic bloggers, I want to provide instead some key entry points for exploring blogging in an academic context:

- **Culture Cat** (<http://www.culturecat.net/index.php>)
Culture Cat, the weblog of Clancy Ratliff, a PhD student at the University of Minnesota, touches on feminism, rhetoric, intellectual property, and more; it thus serves as a good example of how compositionists are using blogs. More importantly, its blogroll offers access to a circle of blogging compositions, including Charlie Lowe, vitia, Dennis Jerz, Jenny Edbauer, Jeff Rice, This Public Address, Arete, and more. Taken together, these blogs form an interesting and intellectually active community. But, of course, each link in Ratliff's blog roll leads to blogs with their own blog rolls, so this single entry point allows you to explore a wide range of blogs connected to Rhetoric and Composition.
- **Dr. B's Blog** (<http://joe.english.purdue.edu/blog/>)
Samantha Blackmon's blog at Purdue offers the additional advantage of illustrating how blogs can be used as class homepages (see, for example, links to past classes down on the right of the page).
- **Kairosnews** (<http://www.kairosnews.org>)
Kairosnews is a central resource for compositionists interested in blogging. Visitors can register with this site to participate in the discussions or to post an entry themselves and it too has a blog roll to explore. Kairosnews also has information on the mailing list for the Blogging SIG at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (http://kairosnews.org/mailman/listinfo/blogs_kairosnews.org).

More Resources for Teachers (from "The Year of the Blog")

Blogs have spawned a number of articles, forums, and conference. Here's a sampling:

- [Weblogg-ed](#): Not only is this site a rich blog, but it also has extensive links to other education bloggers, weblog resources, and best practices.
- [Teaching and Technology](#): "A weblog for participants in the Conference on Teaching and Technology, held under the auspices of the Wabash Center." Apparently no longer updated, however the blog entries include a number of links connected to teaching and technology.
- [Blogging](#): An article from LEARN NC, the North Carolina Teacher's Network, that suggests the multiple ways in which blogs can be used in education. The piece is a good basic introduction to some of the uses of blogs in education.
- [Teaching with a Weblog](#): *Please note that this is a Microsoft Word document.* Timothy Johnston's paper submitted to the *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal*. The paper provides an overview to the benefits of using a blog in teaching .
- ["Blogs: A Disruptive Technology Coming of Age?"](#): An article from *Syllabus* by Phillip Long that introduces the concept of blogs and basic information on classroom uses and blog creation.
- [School Blogs](#): A free blog service created expressly with educators in mind. The blogs are hosted by School Blogs.

About This Site

The design of this site is intended to reflect the argument I am making, both about blogs and about New Media scholarship. It engages the design of "The Year of the Blog" in a number of ways. First, the color coding used in that original article is duplicated here, with new colors added for new sections. Second, in that design, graphical elements focused on various technologies of writing. This design is intended to invoke, more specifically, the Victorian era and its practice of diary writing. You might consider this my attempt at a sort of visual remediation.

The site was designed in Dreamweaver MX 2004 on a computer running Windows XP. It has been optimized for a screen resolution of 1024 x 768 and the Firefox browser; however, it is viewable in screen resolutions ranging from 800 x 600 to 1600 x 1200. In addition, it has been tested on the following browsers running on Windows XP:

- Firefox 1.0.4
- Mozilla 1.7.8
- Internet Explorer 6
- Netscape Navigator 6-8.X

Because it uses standards-compliant CSS, this site will not display properly in Netscape Navigator 4.X. The design has also been tested on the following browsers under Mac OS 10.3:

- Safari 1.2.4
- Internet Explorer 5.2
- Mozilla 1.7.2
- Netscape Navigator 7.1

Internet Explorer will not display the semi-transparent backgrounds for the content tables, though the site is otherwise viewable.

The use of semi-transparent content tables is another way I have tried to engage the original article from which this piece emerged. In "The Year of the Blog," I achieved the semi-transparent effect through a complicated kluge using multiple nested tables. While the simplest solution to this effect remains using PNG graphics, the fact that Internet Explorer still does not support this format has necessitated the use of other methods. In this version, CSS properties are used to achieve the effect. Using the "-moz-opacity," "filter:alpha" and "opacity" properties all at once creates semi-transparency across a range of browsers.

The look of this site was also inspired by the Wordpress Web site (<http://wordpress.org/>) which led me to the amazing pattern collection at squidfingers (<http://www.squidfingers.com/patterns/>). I instantly fell in love with these patterns, which are lush and rich and reminiscent of Victorian fabrics and wallpapers. At the same time, when enlarged in a program like Photoshop, these patterns turn out to be simple arrangements of pixels. That interplay between the jaggedness of pixellation and the richness of the resulting pattern is also an attempt at visual remediation.

The fonts specified in the style sheet are "Palatino, Palatino Linotype, Book Antiqua, serif." The goal was to use a serif font common to all Windows machines and common to Macs as well. The font used for page titles is Mailart Rubberstamp.