

ABSTRACT

HOLMES, ASHLEY JOYCE. Web Logs in the Post-Secondary Writing Classroom: A Study of Purposes. (Under the direction of Chris M. Anson.)

In the past few decades, education research has been thriving in the areas of computers and new technologies. Often, teachers turn to what is popular in the technological world for new ideas to use in their classrooms. One such technology that has become extremely popular in Web culture is Web logs, now most often referred to as “weblogs,” or simply “blogs.” The present work seeks to further research on weblogs in education by identifying the various ways in which current post-secondary writing course teachers are using them in their courses. This definitional study attempts to answer the question: for what educational, or non-educational, purposes are weblogs in post-secondary writing courses being used? The study looks at the way educators claim to be using weblogs in their courses based on how they explain their blog assignments to students (either on a course syllabus or course blog posting). Adding depth to the analysis, the study also explores survey responses from thirty-two college writing teachers across the country. The eleven main uses for weblogs in writing courses that this study identifies are as follows: 1) as a public space with a broad audience, 2) to post student work, 3) as a journal, 4) to reflect on course-related assignments, 5) for student discussion and interaction, 6) to explore and share ideas, as well as brainstorm, 7) to engage with and respond to assigned readings, 8) for collaborative projects, 9) to link to Web materials, 10) to ask and answer questions related to the course, and 11) to discuss topics not necessarily related to the course. After compiling data as to these current uses of weblogs in college writing courses, this researcher explores the implications of these uses, offering suggestions and drawing conclusions as to how the new technology of weblogs has impacted and will impact college level writing courses.

**WEB LOGS IN THE POST-SECONDARY WRITING CLASSROOM:
A STUDY OF PURPOSES**

by

ASHLEY JOYCE HOLMES

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APPROVED BY:

Dr. Ruie J. Pritchard

Dr. Michael P. Carter

Dr. Chris M. Anson, Chair of Advisory Committee

Dedication

For my parents and Dan, with love and gratitude

Biography

Ashley Martin-Holmes was raised in Jacksonville, North Carolina. She received her Bachelor's of Arts degree in English Education, with a minor in Social Work, from North Carolina State University in 2003. In the fall of 2003, Ashley began her Master's work at NC State as a Teaching Assistant. After working as a graduate consultant with the Campus Writing and Speaking Program, she focused her concentration of Rhetoric and Composition on the teaching of writing. While working towards her Master's in English, Ashley also took classes through the College of Education and received an advanced license to teach high school English. Ashley has recently accepted a full-time lecturer position at Elon University, and she plans to begin teaching there in August 2005.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank all of the college writing teachers across the United States who were so helpful in sharing their experiences for my research. Without their thoughtful responses to my questions, I would not have been able to complete this work. I would also like to especially thank Charlie Lowe for encouraging me to post the survey to the *CCCC's* special interest group listserv on blogging; the responses from that group comprised a large portion of the sample here.

I would also like to thank my committee for all of their hard work in helping me frame and shape my research, as well as guide me through revisions. Their encouragement and support is truly appreciated, and my work would not be as it is now without their comments. Dr. Mike Carter and Dr. Ruie Pritchard were especially helpful in the early and late stages of my research, and I thank them for their input and thoughtful notes. Dr. Pritchard offered suggestions specifically coming from her area of expertise in education, and I appreciated her review and support throughout this process. Dr. Chris Anson provided feedback throughout the drafting process, giving me excellent suggestions for improvement and praise when I needed it. I sincerely thank all of you for your time, dedication, and commitment to my research.

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Introduction

We are being pummeled by a deluge of data and unless we create time and spaces in which to reflect, we will be left with only our reactions. I strongly believe in the power of weblogs to transform both writers and readers from “audience” to “public” and from “consumer” to “creator.”

- Rebecca Blood

In the past few decades, education research has been thriving in the areas of computers and new technologies. Increased attention to and support for technology on many campuses are encouraging greater instructional reliance on technology. Students are being asked to conduct Web-quests, search for electronic sources, use email and Instant Messenger, create Websites, etc. The possibilities for using computers and the Internet in the classroom are nearly endless, offering students and teachers various opportunities for educational work and research. Often, teachers turn to what is popular in the technological world for new ideas to use in their classrooms. One such technology that has become extremely popular in Web culture is Web logs, now most often referred to as “weblogs,” or simply “blogs.”

The rapidly growing popularity of weblogs in the past few years is undeniable. Jeffrey Henning’s data, based on a 2003 survey, show that the creation of new blogs increased by more than six hundred percent between 2000 and 2001; he also projected that there would be over ten million blogs by the end of 2004. And more recently, Merriam-Webster named “blog” as one of its “Words of the Year 2004.” Merriam-Webster’s newly acquired definition is as follows: “Blog *noun* [short for *Weblog*] (1999): a Web site that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by the writer.” Carolyn Miller and Dawn Shepherd, in their work on weblogs as a genre, offer a similar, though more detailed and academic, definition that attempts to define

weblogs based on their generic forms and features; they note that though “Blogs take many forms,” most have “dated entries, starting with the most recent, and a majority use external links. Blogs are composed of ‘posts,’ which include a date...and a permalink and often include a link for commentary and the author’s name.” These “posts” are an essential part of blogs, and can string together a record of a person’s life, research, experiences, interests, or opinions, among other uses.

With the creation of Will Richardson’s *Weblogg-ed*, the Bay Area Writing Project’s Educational Blogger’s Network, and *SchoolBlog.com* - just to name a few - it seems clear that weblogs are gaining popularity among educators. Because most weblog software is offered free and is user-friendly, innovative teachers are beginning to use weblogs as tools to further cultivate student interaction and learning. Weblogs used in educational settings are often called “edublogs” or “schoolblogs.” Rachel Abrams notes the new phenomenon in her short article on edublogs: “Recently, the technology [weblogs] has cast its net over students, educators, and parents, redefining the infrastructure of education.” The publication of numerous articles on edublogs, and weblogs in general, in the past few years reveals the need for researchers, like myself, to understand just how this new technology is “redefining the infrastructure of education” (Abrams) and our society.

As Richardson claims, “Web logs are as diverse as their creators,” and there is no exception to this for how educators use weblogs in their classrooms. Teachers at all levels, from elementary through college, and across many disciplines are using this new technology in a number of ways. English teachers have found weblogs to be an invaluable source for students to engage in discussions, conduct research, post their work, etc. The blog has emerged as a particularly useful resource for writing instructors who seek a public audience

for their students' work. Richardson and other edublog researchers are claiming that there are nearly endless uses for weblogs in the classroom. But how are educators actually using them *now*?

The present work seeks to further research on weblogs in education by identifying the various ways in which current post-secondary writing course teachers are using them in their courses. This definitional study attempts to answer the question: for what educational, or non-educational, purposes are weblogs in post-secondary writing courses being used? The study looks at the way educators claim to be using weblogs in their courses based on how they explain their blog assignments to students (either on a course syllabus or course blog posting). Adding depth to the analysis, the study also explores survey responses, eleven multiple choice and three open-ended questions, from thirty-two college writing teachers across the country. These survey responses pertain to the educators' usage of blogs in their writing classrooms. The first eleven questions are analyzed using quantitative procedures, and the open-ended questions are reviewed using the qualitative procedure of constant comparative analysis. After compiling data as to the current uses of weblogs in these courses, this researcher explores the implications of these uses, offering suggestions and drawing conclusions as to how the new technology of weblogs has impacted and will impact college level writing courses.

Chapter 1

Background

But what bloggers do is completely new - and cannot be replicated on any other medium. It's somewhere in between writing a column and talk radio. It's genuinely new. And it harnesses the web's real genius - its ability to empower anyone to do what only a few in the past could genuinely pull off... It's a new medium finally finding a unique voice. Stay tuned as that voice gets louder and louder.

- Andrew Sullivan

Though their history may be short, weblogs have blossomed quite a bit within the last ten years. From the invention of the first weblog by Tim Berners-Lee in the early nineties, weblogs have grown exponentially along with the Internet boom during the mid to late nineties (Paquet). Their evolution has been closely followed by bloggers, many of whom have posted a “history of weblogs” to their personal blogs. Using several of these posted histories by well-known early bloggers, such as Rebecca Blood, Sebastien Paquet, and Tim Winer, the following pages will trace the progression of this new Web technology. In the next section, I will attempt to develop a working definition of weblogs by identifying their common forms and features, referencing current research on weblogs as a genre. Finally, the last sections will explore the more recent introduction of weblogs into the classroom and provide a brief overview of why teachers have been drawn to this new technology. Educators involved with supporting weblog use in the classroom, such as Will Richardson, Anne Davis, and Aaron Campbell, have also kept track of the ways in which blogs have affected pedagogical practices. Their accounts constitute the record of weblogs in the classroom.

1.1 A History of Weblogs

Researchers of weblogs generally agree that the first ones can be traced back to the mid nineties. As Rebecca Blood explains in her history of weblogs: “In 1998 there were just a handful of sites of the type that are now identified as weblogs (so named by Jorn Barger in 1997).” In 1999, the popularity of weblogs (or “blogs” as they were beginning to be called) increased as free blog software, such as *Pitas* and *Blogger*, began being offered (Blood). With the release of free and user-friendly software, nearly anyone with computer skills could “publish” his or her own writing to the Web within minutes.

Early weblogs are characterized as having a filter-style¹. The very earliest, by Web designers such as Tim Berners-Lee, Marc Andreessen, Dave Winer, Jorn Barger, and Cameron Barrett, were often simply a listing of newly developed websites (Paquet). For example, the first blog posting on Winer’s *Scripting News* is pictured in *Figure 1* below.

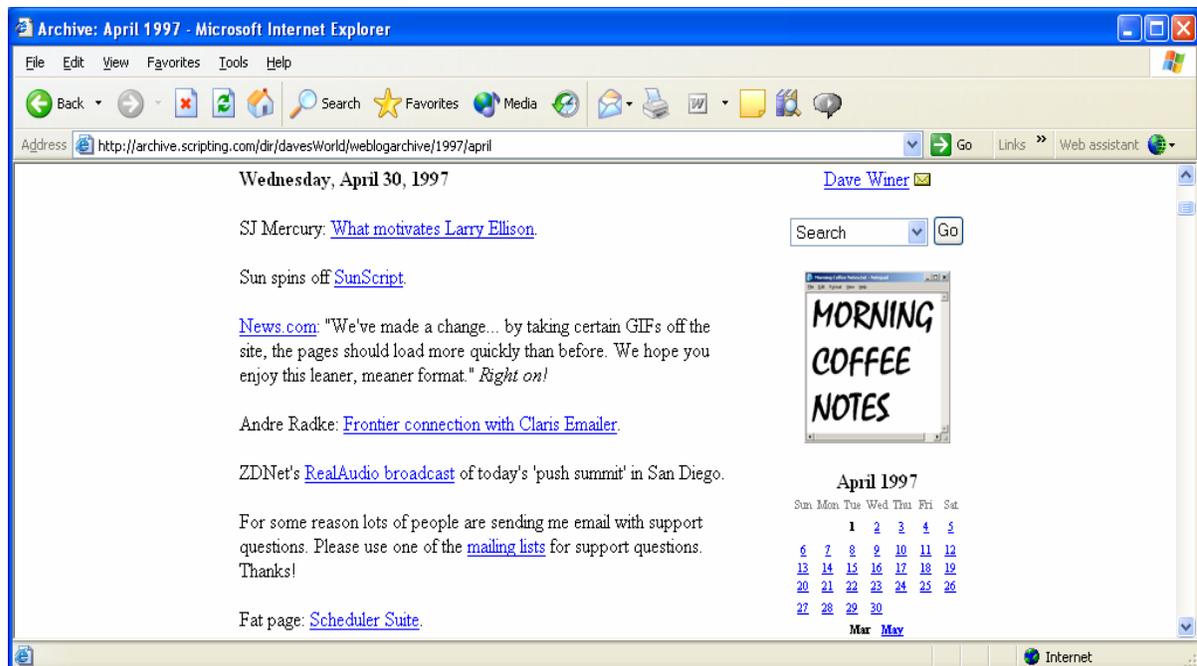


Figure 1: Dave Winer’s Blog, 04/30/97

¹ According to Blood, filter-style weblogs are ones that are link-driven, containing a mixture of hyperlinks to Web material and commentary on that material. Essentially, the blog (through the chosen links of the blog editor or owner) serves as a filter for the Web, directing readers to different sites of interest.

As you can see, the posting for a filter-style blog seems to be a list of items with hyperlinks (underlined words in blue) to newly created Websites or to Web materials that Winer wanted to archive and draw attention to. The background is very plain and contains no images (the “Morning Coffee Notes” image, calendar, and search function are from his current blog), but if you were able to scroll down you would see that the posts are in reverse chronological order, a key component of weblogs. The major features of blogs, such as the archives, will be further explored in the next section.

Blood explains how these early sites, such as the one in *Figure 1*, were “link-driven sites.” As more Web designers began using weblogs, more entries contained a “mixture in unique proportions of links, commentary, and personal thoughts and essays.” So, instead of a simple listing of links, similar to *Figure 1*, bloggers began adding their own responses to these links, evaluating the material at the Web sites. The primary function of these earlier types were for weblog editors to “Out of the myriad web pages slung through cyberspace...pick out the most mind-boggling, the most stupid, the most compelling” (Blood). Sebastien Paquet supports Blood’s claim, noting how earlier link-driven blogs with personal commentary “built sizable followings [over time] because they provided a unique selection of fresh content.” Within the next few years, blogs developed quite a bit. For example, *Figure 2* below shows a later blog entry from Dave Winer’s *Scripting News*. The entry in *Figure 2* is from September 2002. Though it still contains several links (underlined words in blue), Winer provides much more commentary in 2002 than in his 1997 entry.

Scripting News
Dave Winer's [weblog](#) about scripting and stuff like that. ☺

Updates:
[DaveNet](#)
[Radio](#)
[Outliners](#)
[Radio C.S.](#)
[Directory](#)
[Frontier](#)
[Weblogs](#)
[Mentia](#)
[Mail Pages](#)
[BlogTree](#)
[Tara Sue](#)
[Elogistan](#)
[Halley](#)
[Megron](#)
[Kortike](#)
[Kariba](#)

Wednesday, September 04, 2002

Hey Europe, couldn't sleep, howya doin? I'll just post a few things and then go watch [Victor/Victoria](#) again. Maybe it's time to get a big screen for the living room. #

[One more step](#) down the road to oblivion for Napster. I suppose it's still not *totally* too late for the RIAA to come to its senses. #

Last year on this day I had a [strange technical dream](#). "In a critical piece of code that's executed a lot, they found that C, the speed of light, was being saved, squared, then the code would execute, and before returning, the original value was restored." Wes offered a [theory](#) that might explain the phenomenon. #

On this day in 1997 Doc Searls wrote his world-famous [ode to Steve Jobs](#). He totally nailed it. "Steve's art has always been first class, and priced accordingly." #

Last night I added [two new](#) elements to [RSS 0.94](#) based on suggestions from Brent Simmons and Eric Thauvin. They're the top two items on the [change notes](#) page. Still grappling with a connection between RSS and instant messaging. Brent, who has written a widely hailed application

Last update: Wednesday, September 04, 2002 at 3:25 AM Pacific.

September 2002

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

Aug **Oct**

On This Day In
[2001](#) [2000](#) [1999](#) [1998](#) [1997](#)

Radio USERLAND

XML

XML

Figure 2: Dave Winer's Blog, 09/04/02

Winer's entry above has more commentary on links than his entry from five years earlier (Figure 1), and the visual aspects changed quite a bit as well with the addition of images, a calendar of archives, and logos in the margins. Though the content and visual aspects of blogs changed between 2002 than in 1997, both of Winer's styles would be considered part of the earlier movement because they are largely link-driven. Blood explains how early blog editors would "sometimes contextualize an article by juxtaposing it with an article on a related subject; each article [might] draw the reader to conclusions contrary to the implicit aim of each." In this way, early "weblog editors beg[a]n to redefine media as a public, participatory endeavor" (Blood). However, Blood claims that all of this changed around 1999; she holds the *Blogger* software particularly responsible.

As Blood and Paquet explain, free software really started the "blog boom." Again, as software such as *Pitas*, *Blogger*, and *LiveJournal* were introduced, there was a "spectacular

growth in the number of weblogs.... As using these systems required little technical knowledge” (Paquet). These new blog software systems did not place specific restrictions on what was posted, as earlier programs did (Blood); in other words, earlier programs included a text box for posting a link and a separate one for commentary, whereas the newer ones included only a box for general text. With this offer of a general text box to new bloggers, the emphasis on link-driven blogs declined. Blood argues that “in the post-Blogger explosion increasing numbers of weblogs eschewed th[e] focus on the web-at-large in favor of a sort of short form journal.” Blood describes the newer, journal-style blogs: “These blogs, often updated several times a day, were...a record of the blogger's thoughts: something noticed on the way to work, notes about the weekend, a quick reflection on some subject or another.” So, both Paquet and Blood noted the shift away from filter-style blogs, link-driven with commentary, to mostly blogger commentary on personal issues (often having nothing to do with the Web). Along with this shift towards journal-style blogs came an increased sense of community among bloggers. Though blogs originally had small followings, the interconnectedness of blog communities and groups increased even further as they gained more popularity among a wider audience.

One of the major indicators of the shift from earlier to later types of blogs, in Paquet’s opinion, was that “weblogs became a conversational medium.” Blood observes how in the newer blog communities, “Full-blown conversations were carried on between three or five blogs, each referencing the other in their agreement or rebuttal of the other’s positions.” Paquet also notes how “blog-rolls” became popular because of this increased sense of blog community; these are lists, usually on the left or right side margin, of links to other blogs by

bloggers involved in the same community. According to Paquet, “A unique aspect of these link lists is that they make explicit the social connections that exist among webloggers.”

This history shows the evolution of blogs toward more social usages. However, their expansion, as we will see, has led to a large number of personal, journal-style blogs, and many researchers believe the number of these is on the rise (Herring et al., Blood). A genre study completed by Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, and Wright revealed that the purpose for weblogs by the general public is “overwhelmingly of the personal journal type”; 70.4% of their sampled blogs were determined to have a journal-style, with the filter blog at 12.6% and the K-log (Knowledge-log) at 3.0% (6). Other recently published works have explored a preference for the journal-style blog as well.

In their article “Remediation, Genre, and Motivation: Key Concepts for Teaching with Weblogs,” Kevin Brooks, Cindy Nichols, and Sybil Priebe noted a student preference for journal type blogs, based on student surveys. Brooks, Nichols, and Priebe found that their students preferred a journal type blog (63%), much more than the notebook (13%) or filter (12%) style blogs. Though researchers suggest a general trend towards more journal-style blogs, Blood notes that many other kinds of blogs, including filter and journal, do still exist. And since their use has increased significantly in the last five years, blogs have gained popularity among several groups of people and professions, each using the technology for slightly different purposes. Paquet characterizes the current blog environment: “Apart from software developers and web designers, the most well-represented professions in the ‘blogosphere’ are information architects, journalists...librarians, lawyers, and education specialists.”

Journalists (both professional and independent) have been using weblogs as a way to report news, often, though not always, in a way that is more subjective. With bloggers such as Chris Matthews (MSNBC), Eric Alterman (MSNBC), Ward Harkavy (*Village Voice*), and Noah Schactman (*New York Times*) – just to name a few – the blog space has become an important forum for journalists (*Cyberjournalist.net*). For example, *Figure 3* below shows the blog home page of Noah Schactman. On this particular story, Schactman is reporting about a robot recently created by the Pentagon.

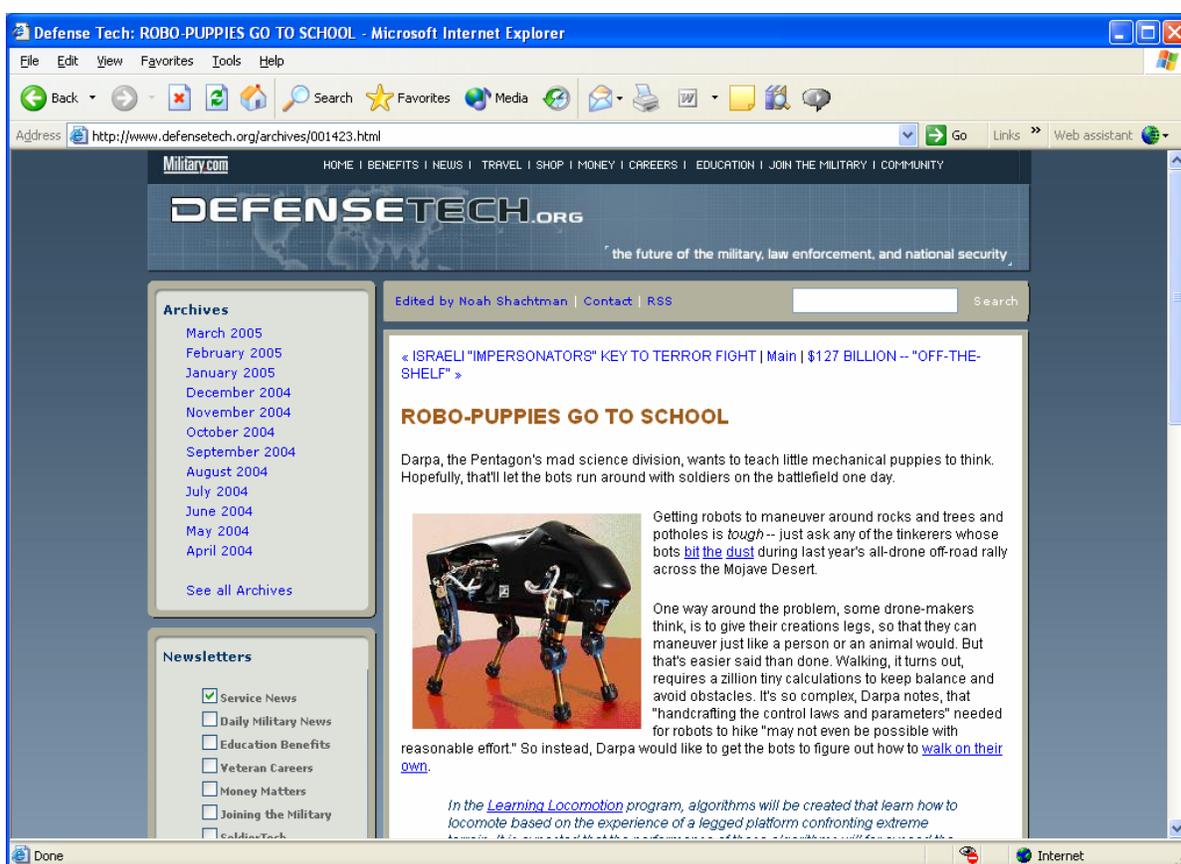


Figure 3: Noah Schactman's Defense Tech, Sample Journalist Blog

In the viewable portion above, Schactman, who writes in *The New York Times* about defense technology and how it shapes our culture, provides an informative and unbiased explanation of the new robot technology. However, later in this piece Schactman takes a more informal tone – common in the blog space – adding personal commentary on the situation. Towards

the end of the entry, Schactman writes “There’s More: Oh this rules,” providing a hyperlink to an article about a teenage girl beating a robotic arm in a wrestling match. Schactman, and other blogging journalists, are reshaping news sources.

Also, with the hotly debated 2004 Presidential election, political blogs became an important space for partisan groups to express their views on candidates and issues. For example, blogs exist on the Iraq war (*Baghdad Burning*), grassroots organizations (*Free Republic*), and general political commentary (*InstaPundit*). Most of these blogs are well known and have large readerships. Below is an example of a posting from the political blog *InstaPundit*. On this particular occasion, Glenn Reynolds – the blog’s creator – has posted about the “aesthetics” of the 2004 Presidential campaign, pulling examples from recently released bumper stickers. The one for John Kerry is pictured at the bottom of the posting, and several others from both campaigns are pictured further down in the posting.

INSTAPUNDIT.COM

ABOUT ME | PDA | BACKUP | EXTRA | OTHER WRITINGS | PRINT | XML | ARCHIVES | FAQ | TERMS

« [SEPTEMBER 12, 2004 - SEPTEMBER 18, 2004](#) | [MAIN](#) | [SEPTEMBER 26, 2004 - OCTOBER 02, 2004](#) »

SEPTEMBER 25, 2004

CINEMOCRACY writes that I'm not paying enough attention to aesthetics:

Reynolds is missing an essential part of the debate - he doesn't appear to embrace the realities of the political image, unless he's exposing media bias or scorning Hollywood. We find this is odd, because Reynolds is a photographer by hobby, and there is no other art form that is more tuned towards selecting something from the real world and manipulating its qualities (framing, contrast, pose, etc.) in an image designed by the artist to inspire in a desired effect.

That's probably true. So let me look at one aesthetic aspect of this campaign -- the bumper stickers. I think it's important, and so does **John Kerry!**

[H]e spent four weeks mulling the design of his campaign logo, consulting associates about what font it should use and whether it should include an American flag. (It does.)

So what hath Kerry wrought? I think it's a winner:



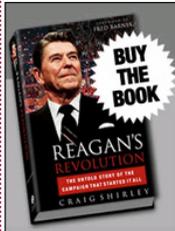
It's got a very nice retro-look, somehow reminiscent of the New Frontiers era. Smart move, since that's the last time a Democrat ran convincingly as strong on national defense, and there's that whole JFK-parallel thing going, too. The flag was a nice addition, and certainly strengthens that effect.

It's especially notable by comparison to this earlier Kerry logo, which by contrast reeks of the 1970s,

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Blogads 2nd slot

Reagan's Revolution



"If you want to understand the roots of Republican domination in Washington today, read this masterful account."
- Howard Fineman

"An exhilarating story of political daring"
- George F. Will

"Superbly written and meticulously researched"
- Senator Zell Miller

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If you've got a modem,

Figure 4: Glenn Reynolds' InstaPundit, Sample Political Blog

In addition to political and journalist weblogs, professional weblogs for organizations are also gaining popularity. Kathleen Yancey, chair of College Composition and Communication (CCC's), posts announcements to a professional blog for the organization. In *Figure 5* below, you can see that Yancey has recently posted an announcement concerning a "call for nominations" for an award given by her organization. In a centralized, easily updatable space, Yancey can post important information for the CCC's.

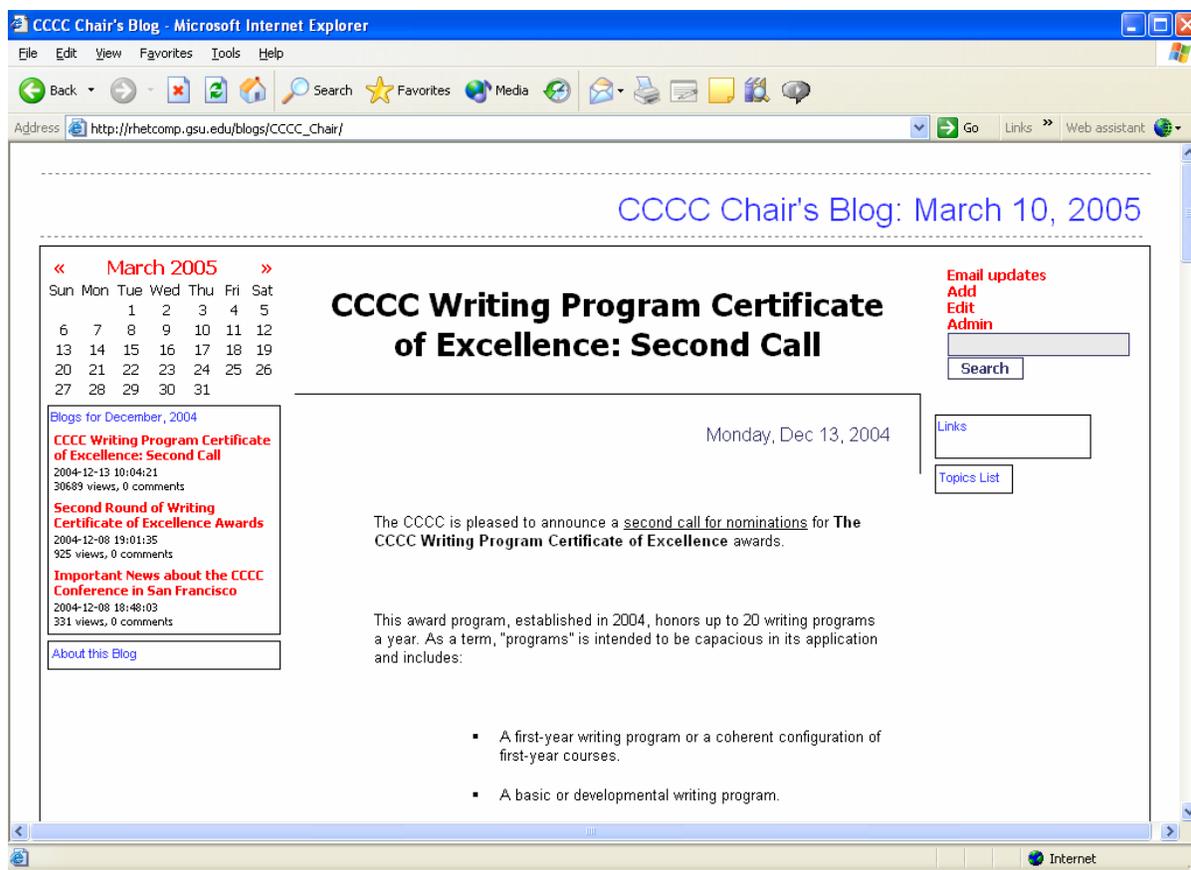


Figure 5: Kathleen Yancey's CCCC's Blog, Professional Example

Other bloggers have begun taking advantage of the audio-visual capacities of weblogs to showcase art and video works. For example, Adrian Miles, an Australian artist, has created what he calls a “vog” or video-blog. On the home-page, Miles explains what a “vog” is:

A vog respects bandwidth. A vog is not streaming video (this is not the reinvention of television). A vog uses performative video and/or audio. A vog is personal.... A vog lies between writing and the televisual. A vog explores the proximate distance of words and moving media... A vog is a video blog where video in a blog must be more than video in a blog. (Miles)

From Miles' quote here, it seems that he wants to use the blog space to explore the relationships between video, audio, and visual, on the virtual space of the blog. He clearly

has aspirations for the space to be “more than video in a blog”; he hopes that the “vog” will become a new type of technology and space in its own right. On his “vog,” Miles has nothing but links to movies he has created with titles below them, such as “Mist,” “Yarra Flood,” “In the Driver’s Seat,” and “Canberra Mall.” Miles includes no commentary on the videos he has posted. Other artists use blogs to post art pieces or photography, such as the Italian “photo-blogger,” Silvia Ganora.

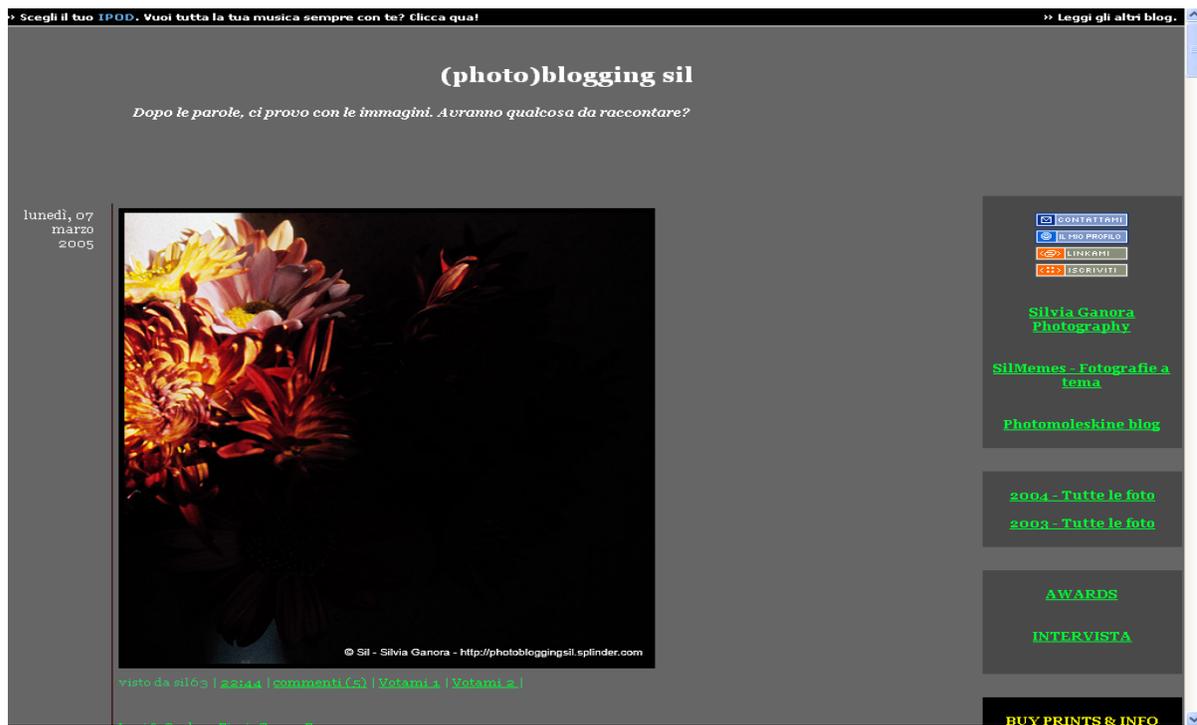


Figure 6: Silvia Ganora’s Photo Blog, Artist Sample

As you can see in *Figure 6* above, Silvia includes her photographs as postings to her blog. Like Miles, she does not include any commentary, rather lets the art speak for itself. The entire blog is composed of photographs posted by date.

Teenagers represent another group of current bloggers on the rise. Although they have yet to enter the academic world of college students, weblogs are very popular in the highly social context of teenagers in general. *Figure 7* shows the home page of a teen girl,

Cathy, from California. Based on her profile in the left column, we can tell that Cathy is sixteen years old.

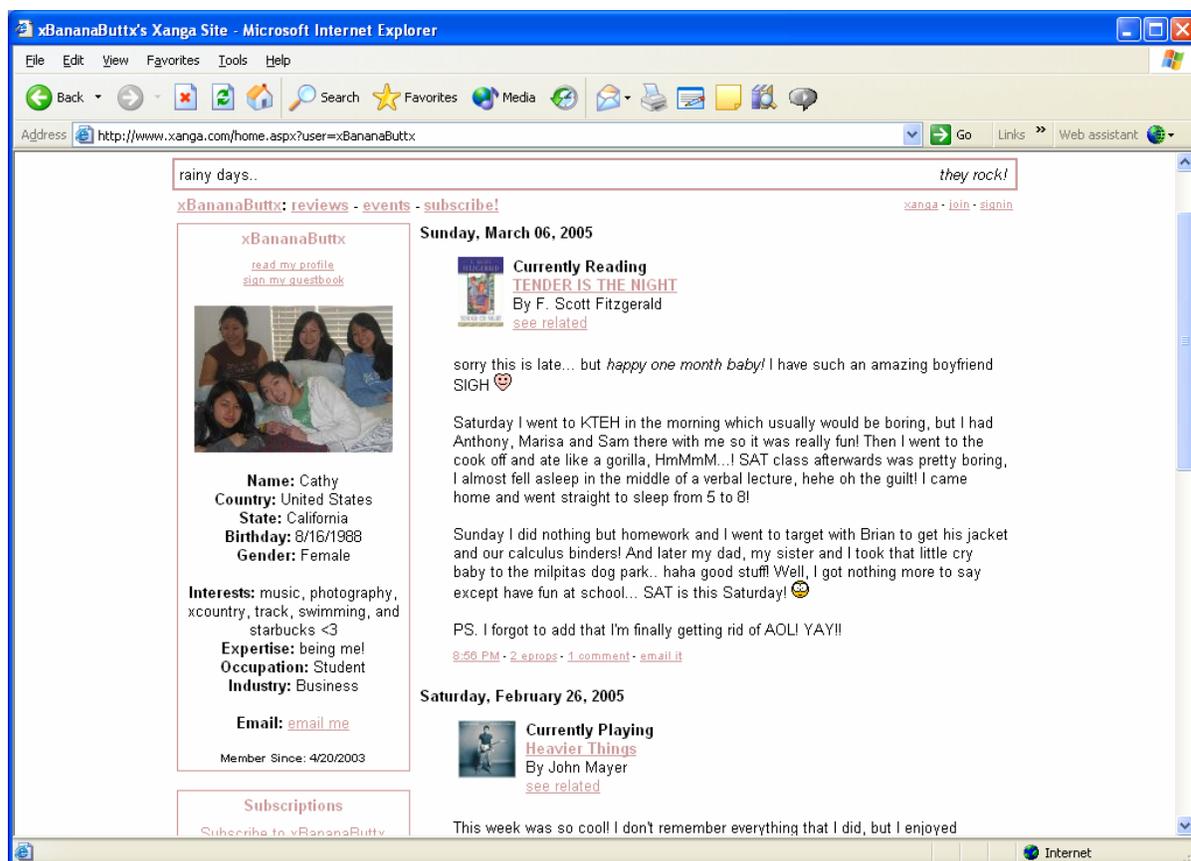


Figure 7: Sample Teen Blog

In Cathy's March 6th entry, she posted what book she is "currently reading," *Tender is the Night*, and on February 26th she posted what type of music she was listening to, John Mayer's *Heavier Things*. Much like the art, video, and photography blogs, teens will often take advantage of the audio-visual aspects easily available on the blog space. Cathy has posted a picture of her with her friends (or at least we can assume that is who is pictured), and she has also used images to represent books and music. The content of her March 6th posting seems fairly typical for a teenager. Cathy is celebrating her one month anniversary with her boyfriend, using a heart symbol similar to what one might see in Instant Messenger postings. The blog space is offering teens a new medium, besides Instant Messenger, the traditional

Website, or even paper-based journal, to post their thoughts, ideas, opinions, and experiences. Cathy's entries read very much like a diary or journal; she tells us what she's done on Saturday and Sunday: classes she's taking, homework she has to do, when she went to sleep, etc. Teenagers are very much drawn to the journal-style of blogging for personal use, but they are also often involved in "blog-rings." "Blog-rings" are communities of bloggers, similar to having a "blog-roll" with links to other blogs or an Instant Messenger "friends" list. The fact that young people are drawn to the possibilities of new weblog technology has implications for their use in the classroom.

Based on the information from the present study, as well as recently published articles and research, we know that weblogs are now found in educational settings. Research on weblogs in the classroom has been concerned with the effects such a new technology could have on teaching and student learning. Clearly blogs are finding their way into many communicative contexts, including political, professional, and personal arenas. Considering the ways in which Internet-based technologies are burgeoning, those just learning about them may be confused as to how they differ from other Web-based communicative modes and genres. The next section provides a definition of weblogs based on their generic forms and features.

1.2 Defining a Weblog: Forms and Features

Researchers and weblog enthusiasts have had trouble pinning down one clear definition of weblogs that everyone can agree on. As noted in the introduction, Webster's Online Dictionary has come up with its own definition, but I'm sure many bloggers would find it lacking. One of the best ways to define something is to look at its generic conventions, including forms and features. Several features are unique to weblogs,

distinguishing them from personal websites and message boards. The following pages will explore these features based on recent genre studies of the weblog.

Two notable genre studies are the previously mentioned works by Miller and Shepherd: “Blogging as Social Action: A Genre Analysis of the Weblog,” and Herring et al.’s: “Bridging the Gap: A Genre Analysis of Weblogs.” Both of these studies attempt to define the generic conventions of weblogs based on their rhetorical forms and features. Miller and Shepherd’s article addresses several rhetorical issues concerning weblogs, including the public/private issue, exigency, and forms and features. Herring et al.’s work focuses mostly on the generic forms and features of blogs, looking at characteristics such as purpose, temporal measures, and structural characteristics. In order to situate the current study in previous research on weblogs, I offer some background and introduction to weblogs, while briefly reviewing the findings from these works.

One of the advantages to weblogs over personal web pages is the ease of use. Bloggers do not need to know Web design codes such as HTML code to access and post to their blogs, and publishing to the Web can be done within seconds. Most weblog hosting sites, such as *Blogger*, *Movable Type*, and *LiveJournal*, allow bloggers to choose a template, making the design process simple. However, as in the case with *Blogger*, hosting sites often allow more experienced blog users to “hack” into the design code to make advanced additions to their blog space. The ready-made templates, though, often contain similar features based on the unique character of blogs. Part of what defines a blog is its format, which is largely consistent across all software types and personal styles. Below is an example of the home page of a student’s blog; I will use this sample to explain the major forms and features of most weblogs.

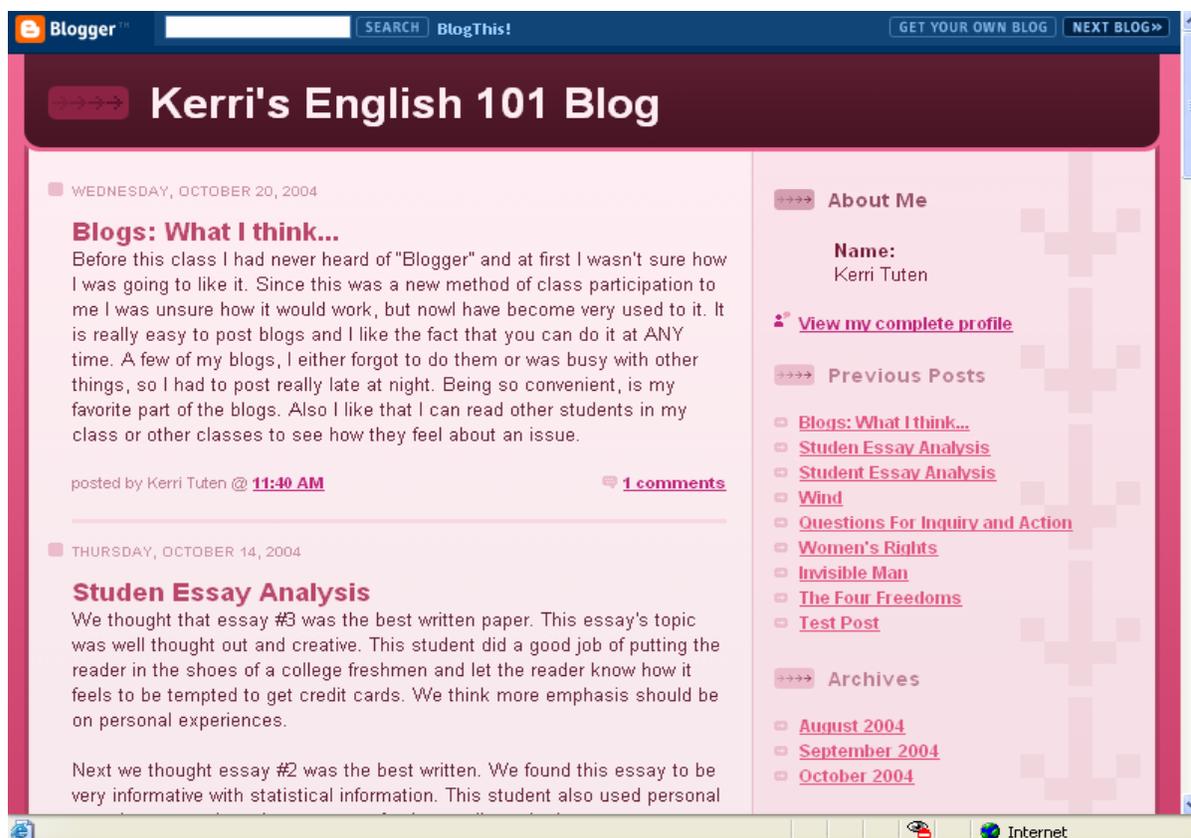


Figure 8: Sample Blog, Forms and Features

Figure 8 displays a student's blog made with one of *Blogger's* templates (*Kerri's English 101 Blog*). Many of the features unique to blogs are preset in a template, such as the time and date stamps, a list of links to previous posts, and archives. In terms of the overall blog structure and format, Kerri's blog in *Figure 8* is fairly typical. The title, "Kerri's English 101 Blog," is at the top; some templates provide the option of adding a brief blog description below the title, though Kerri's does not have this. Along the right-hand side of the blog runs a column that contains links to important Web material, blog-rolls, archives, etc. At the top of this column is an "About Me" area, listing the blog owner's name and providing a link to "View my complete profile" to read more information about the blogger. Though many weblogs have descriptive information, or an image, in the top right-hand corner, the "About Me" section is a unique feature of *Blogger* templates. On Kerri's blog,

below the “About Me” section is a list of links to “Previous Posts.” Many (though not all) blogs contain a list of recent posts, like Kerri’s, with links to five to ten posts. Below this feature is the listing of “Archives,” a very important characteristic of weblogs. The dating of archives varies among blog templates; it could be archived monthly - as Kerri’s is in *Figure 8* – or weekly, yearly, etc. Though the sample blog in *Figure 8* does not contain any more information in the right-hand side bar, other common features in this area are blog-rolls (links to other weblogs), links to Web material, images, tags identifying the blogger’s affiliation with certain groups such as *The Educational Blogger’s* network, etc.

In terms of the blog entries, *Figure 8* contains a typical format. As you can see at the top of the entry, the date “Wednesday, October 20, 2004” is listed, followed by the title of the entry “Blogs: What I Think....” Then, the text of Kerri’s posting is displayed, followed by “posted by Kerri Tuten,” to identify her authorship, and the time stamp of “11:40 AM.” In the bottom right-hand corner of the first blog entry is a place where readers can click to post comments in reference to Kerri’s response. At this time, Kerri had one comment to her post, hence the “1 comment” showing. Below the entry for October 20th is the second most recently posted entry; Kerri’s “Student Essay Analysis” was posted on “Thursday, October 14, 2004.” This highlights the reverse chronology of blog postings, a unique feature. If the full blog were viewable, we would see several other blog postings (usually five to ten showing at a time) by scrolling down; again, these entries would be in reverse chronological order. This blog appears to conform to certain genre features described on the current research by Miller and Shepherd, as well as Herring et al.

From Miller and Shepherd’s previously quoted definition and the example in *Figure 8*, the following formal features are present in most weblogs: dated entries which include the

time and author's name (or pseudonym), reverse chronological order, and external links. Herring et al.'s work supports these same categories used by Miller and Shepherd, adding a few more categories specific to their sample. Based on the structural characteristics they considered in 203 randomly selected blogs in 2003, Herring et al. found that 73.5% of their sampled blogs contained archives, an important feature of weblogs (7). The archive feature appeals to many bloggers who want to keep a record of their experiences (like a journal), their ideas (like a knowledge-log or k-log), and/or important Web links (like a filter blog). Herring et al. also found that 53.7% of their sampled blogs contained links to other Websites from the home page of the blog, and 51.2% to other blogs (7). Both of these findings support Miller and Shepherd's feature of blogs containing "external links." Finally, Herring et al. found, based on the most recent entry of the sampled blogs, formal features in the header and footer of the entry, including the date, a title, the time, the author's name (or pseudonym), and a link for comments (8). The software program type (such as *Blogger* or *LiveJournal*) automatically establishes most of this information in the header and footer. Herring et al.'s findings revealed that in the header of the entry 93.6% of the sampled blogs contained the date, 44.7% contained a title, 16.0% contained the time, and 11.2% contained the author's name (8). In the footer of the entry, Herring et al. found the time was listed in 78.7% of the entries, the author's name in 64.4% of the entries, comments in 32.4% of the entries, and the date in 10.6% of the entries (8). Again, the works of Herring et al., Miller, and Shepherd reveal that blogs contain formal features that are fairly consistent and unique.

Another important characteristic of weblogs, besides their form and features, is their content and purpose; as Miller and Shepherd note, content is extremely important to bloggers. Many researchers, including Herring et al., and blog enthusiasts/historians, such as

Rebecca Blood and Sebastien Paquet, have claimed that the content and context of weblogs have made a noticeable shift from link-driven to personal commentary, as described in section 1.1 of this chapter. We'll explore how this shift has affected weblogs in education in later sections. Now, to fully gain perspective on the current situation of weblogs in college courses, it is necessary to trace the ways in which they were first introduced in to the classroom.

1.3 Weblogs in the Classroom: The Introduction of Edublogs

No one, as of yet, has traced the history of weblogs in the classroom in quite the same way as Blood and Paquet have done for blogs in general. However, edublogs and schoolblogs, as they are often referred to when used in an educational setting, are being used by more and more educators in the past few years. Just as general weblog usage has grown with the introduction of free software, so has the use of blogs in classrooms. In his article on educational blogging, Stephen Downes notes that "The Web is by now a familiar piece of the educational landscape, and for those sites where personal publishing or chronologically ordered content would be useful, blogs have stepped to the fore" (18). The edublog has emerged as a unique tool that offers educators an endless line of possibilities to enhance their pedagogical practices.

Much of the blog craze in education started with educators who are themselves personal bloggers. *ECOLE*, a world-wide group of educators using ITC (Instructional Technology and Communications), explains how teachers may find edublogs beneficial in their professional work; they describe how teachers could use a filter style blog: "Edublogs can be a useful resource for educators to find information related to their particular discipline or interests. In effect the blog allows colleagues to act as filters or judges of content from

many sources and to allow as many editors as they like.” Educators have also been using weblogs for personal use, following the more recently popular journal-style. As teachers began to see the personal satisfaction and multiple uses of weblogs, they considered ways in which this new technology could be useful for their students, and they shared these ideas with their colleagues. Then came the creation of weblog sites for teachers using weblogs in their classrooms. These blog sites offered resources and networking for educators wanting to introduce this new technology into their pedagogy, and the success stories of edublogs have spread through educational communities ever since.

One such edublog support site is the *Educational Blogger’s Network (eBN)*, started by the Bay Area Writing Project; it provides a support system for teachers who use, or want to begin using, weblogs in their classes. In the site’s mission statement, *eBN* claims “Its purpose is to help its members, kindergarten through university, to access and use weblog technology for the teaching of writing and reading across the disciplines.” With similar goals, Will Richardson’s *Weblogg-ed* is also a blog set up for educators who use new technologies in their classrooms. Richardson explains that “This site is dedicated to discussions and reflections on the use of Weblogs...and other Internet-related technologies in the K-12 classroom.” These two edublog communities reveal the growing number of educators interested and using weblogs in their classrooms. Richardson, who has been compiling a collection of links to edublogs, claims that he often cannot keep up with the volume of new sites he receives.

As both Richardson and *eBN*’s mission statements reveal, weblogs are being used in all different types of classrooms, from elementary through college. A question that arises in response to this edublog boom is why? Why use weblogs in the classroom? Several edublog

advocates, including Richardson, have addressed this question by describing and documenting the benefits of using weblogs in the classroom. *ECOLE* claims that “In education, the Weblog is becoming the favoured Web-presence; educators and students alike are taken by the blog’s advantages over the traditional Website.” Since weblogs are becoming, as *ECOLE* suggests, “the favoured Web-presence” researchers have been tracking why educators find this new technology beneficial and how they are using it.

1.4 The Benefits and Possibilities of Edublogs

One of the most appealing aspects of using weblogs in the classroom is their ease of use; and this corresponds to general bloggers’ satisfaction with user-friendly blog software. As Richardson explains, “Gone are the days of coding Web pages in HTML and configuring FTP clients to get content online. Web log software has made the whole process...simple.” *SchoolBlogs*, another blog site advocating and offering resources for edubloggers, explains why the new and simple technology of weblogs is so beneficial in the classroom:

Their emergence as a component in the two-way flow of information on the web has opened up exciting new avenues for the educational community.... Often dismissed as merely ‘vanity’ websites, critics slate their simplicity. Yet it is precisely these two factors that are the keys to their potential. Children are vain, just like adults. They desire and require an audience for their thoughts and achievements.... The simple intuitive nature of *SchoolBlogs* is precisely what is required to allow students to express themselves *on their own terms*. (*SchoolBlogs*)

As stated in the above passage, edublogs are appealing because of their simplicity for both students and teachers. The software is easy to use and access, allowing bloggers to “publish” to the Web within only a few seconds. In a conference piece on Webpublishing

and weblogs, Sebastian Fiedler claims that the many “lightweight, cost-efficient systems and tools [that] have emerged...offer a new and powerful toolkit for the support of collaborative and individual learning that adheres to...learning outside of formal educational settings.” Educators are continuing to explore the possibilities of this “new and powerful toolkit,” only to find more magical blog tools with nearly endless uses.

In order to try to grasp these nearly endless uses, edublog researchers have begun making lists and catalogues defining the possibilities for blogs in the classroom. In his article on educational blogging, Stephen Downes refers to a blog posting by Henry Farrell in which he “identifies five major uses for blogs in education” (Downes 18). Following Farrell’s list, Downes states that “First, teachers use blogs to replace the standard class Web page” (18). In Farrell’s entry, he notes how much easier it can be for teachers to create a class blog with links to syllabi and assignments, as compared to creating a full-blown website which can be much more time consuming (*Crooked Timber*). Farrell also comments on how websites usually contain a “few static pieces of information - class times and rules, links to the syllabus, etc. - and a few dynamic - cancellation of office hours, announcements of essay topics and the like” (*Crooked Timber*); Farrell claims that weblogs also offer these two types of information, but, again, in an easily updatable format.

Continuing to follow Farrell’s list, Downes explains the second major use of blogs in the classroom: “instructors begin to link to Internet items that relate to their course” (18). Anne Davis and Sandy Peters, who set up the website *Weblogs: The Possibilities are Limitless!*, also note a similar use for weblogs in the classroom; under a bulleted list they offer the possibility of “directing students to curriculum websites.” In this way, the course

weblog would be functioning as similar to a filter blog, where the teacher acts as Web editor offering links with commentary for students.

Third, according to Farrell, blogs are being used for the “organization of in-class discussion” (*Crooked Timber*). Educators are using blogs as a place to jump-start in-class discussions by asking students to post before class, or students might be asked to follow up by posting after class discussions. Some instructors are using the blog space as the forum for class discussion, requiring students to post original responses as well as comment on their peers’ postings. Again, Davis and Peters list similar uses for blogs; they claim edublogs can be used to “create a literature circle...foster book discussions in the form of an online book club...[have students] discuss activities they did in class and tell what they think about them...” (*Weblogs: The Possibilities*). As will be explained later in this study, many teachers using blogs in college writing courses include fostering class discussion and interaction as one of the main goals of their edublogs.

Fourth on Farrell’s list of edublog uses is intensive seminars; he claims that “students...provide weekly summaries of readings” with this type of usage (*Crooked Timber*). Davis and Peters make a similar claim, though they do not limit the use of summary to just intensive seminars. They state the blogs can be used to “post a daily/weekly synopsis of the curriculum taught... invite one student a day to post a summary of and their reflections on the day's learning...let student write short reviews of books they are enjoying reading...” (*Weblogs: The Possibilities*). When teachers ask students to complete summaries on the blog, they are giving students a chance to further engage with texts for the course, and they have an easily accessible record of the student’s work on these assignments.

Finally, Farrell notes that educators are beginning to “requir[e] students to write their own blogs as part of their grade” (*Crooked Timber*). Farrell, here, is noting one of the ways in which edublog usage is changing. Basically, teachers using weblogs in their classrooms have a few different options concerning how they will set up the blog network and system. Most educators use one, or a combination, of the following set ups: 1) one blog for the entire course to which only the teacher posts, 2) one blog for the entire course to which teacher and students post, 3) one blog for each student to which each posts individually, with the possibility of commenting on other students’ individual blogs (depending on teacher purpose), and 4) collaborative student blogs in which a group of students (usually three to five) share a blog space. It is important to note that when teachers have students set up individual blogs, they are often linked from either a Website or a weblog (which I call the home-base weblog).

The extent to which educators encourage or require interaction in the blog space varies quite a bit, ranging from requiring personal blogs with no interaction to very public blog spaces in which students, as well as students from other courses or the general public, are encouraged (sometimes required for a grade) to comment. Farrell’s final use alludes to the fact that many educators are now asking their students to create individual blogs, which may be presenting a shift from earlier use that relied mostly on teacher production (such as in Farrell’s first use for blogs replacing course Websites). Indeed, Davis and Peters also note the various breakdowns for blog set up, including different possibilities for a blog created by the teacher and those created by students.

The range of possibilities for blog organization in the course is another benefit for instructors. Depending on how comfortable the teacher is with blogs and technology, he or

she can choose an organizational structure that allows more teacher control (such as the organization of one blog for the course) or less teacher control (such as individual student blogs). Many composition teachers find both visual and verbal aspects of blogs attractive, because they offer ways to introduce visual rhetoric and basic Web design into their writing courses (depending on the software and students' computer competencies). Ultimately, one of the most appealing aspects of using blogs in the classroom is the possibility it gives educators to create innovative pedagogical uses. Teachers can use the technology to fit their needs, as well as those of their students, tailoring a variety of assignments to fit with any number of courses.

Although Farrell's list of five purposes for edublogs represents a first attempt to explore this unique electronic tool, it does not fully capture the many social, pragmatic, and educational uses to which blogs are being used and might be used in classroom settings. This study attempts to expand upon the current research, defining and cataloguing all the ways in which post-secondary writing teachers are using weblogs in the classroom. In the following chapter, the sample used for this study will be explained, as well as the methods used for collecting edublogs and conducting the weblog survey.

Chapter 2

Methodology

The ideas for this inquiry stemmed from my own interests in how to improve the teaching of writing. As an instructor for a freshman composition course, I am constantly looking for new ways to improve my pedagogy and engage my students, and I believe incorporating new technologies – like weblogs – is an excellent way to refresh one’s teaching. As I considered how weblogs might be used in a writing course, I began researching for examples of educators already using weblogs in their classes. After finding weblogs linked from university course Websites, I was able to delve further into the edublogging community, making connections with college writing teachers across the United States. The following pages will explore in more detail the methodology and sample for the present study.

2.1 Purpose

The present work is a qualitative survey study. It has the broad goal of furthering research in the areas of computers and composition, specifically the use of weblogs. This work has the more specific goal of defining and cataloguing the ways in which post-secondary writing instructors are using weblogs in their courses. Therefore, one of the major methodological tasks was establishing a population of writing course weblogs to be examined for purposes. Once these course blogs were found, other data, including course syllabi and assignments, were obtained. In order to enhance the previously mentioned data, several writing instructors from the sample were contacted and asked to complete an online survey (See Appendix B), created by the researcher, asking about blog use in their

classrooms. Thirty-two responses to this survey were received, and the information obtained from them, as well as the course blogs, syllabi, and assignments have become the sample studied in this work.

2.2 Sample

Population

The population for this study began in the broadest sense with any post-secondary writing teacher (in an English speaking country) using course-related weblogs. It is important to note that the writing courses for the inquiry were not limited to first year composition courses; rather the sample was open to any type of college writing course, including first year, creative, professional, advanced, technical, Web publishing, special topics, etc., as long as the course used blogs in some way.

Participant Selection

The sample of 32 writing teachers, representing 15 institutions in 15 states, and 45 weblogs for writing courses was selected by conducting online research, following references in recently published articles, and consulting professionals in the field of compositional studies. As previously mentioned, the search for writing course blogs began by exploring the Web. When I found educators' blogs, often linked through edublogging communities or university websites, one of the main items I looked for was access to the educator's purposes for the blog(s), because much of this information would be helpful in comprising the data for the present study. This purpose was usually found either in the "About" section of the weblog, through a link to the course syllabus or website in which the instructor explained the purpose of the blog, or through tracking back to the first blog posting where the instructor explained the purpose. If I could not identify the purpose of the blog, I eliminated it from

this study. Once I found course blogs that gave (or linked to) a sufficient amount of information for me to understand the purpose, I then attempted to find contact information for the instructor. I used this contact information to send out the aforementioned weblog surveys. Before explaining the methodology in more detail, I will briefly explain how I found many of the blogs for this study.

Conducting research on the Internet led me to several writing teachers using blogs. I was able to find a professor at Elon University, for example, who is using weblogs in her writing class. Dr. Paula Rosinski, the head of the writing program at Elon, had each student create a personal blog. Students posted reflections to these blogs during the last ten to fifteen minutes of each class period.

Another way that I found weblogs for the sample was from professional list-serves and recommendations by faculty. For example, a member from the Writing Program Administration (WPA), a national organization for college and university writing program directors, sent an email asking how, and if, writing teachers affiliated with the WPA were using weblogs in their courses. The responses to this post led me to several weblogs used in this study, including blogs in writing classes at Purdue University and the University of South Carolina at Aiken. The USC Aiken blog acted as a home-base blog for writing courses, with links to eighty-three individual student blogs. The USC Aiken blog was created jointly between two professors, Karl Fornes and Lynne Rhodes, who brought together five sections of first year writing courses to create an interactive blogging community. Many of the writing course blogs from Purdue were from Master's and Doctoral students teaching while receiving their degrees; many of them were encouraged to use

weblogs based on their teacher training. Most of the teachers at Purdue set up one course blog for all of their students to post to.

I also found writing course blogs by Charlie Lowe (formerly at Florida State University and now at the University of Purdue) linked from the Rhetoric and Composition site *Kairosnews: A Weblog for Discussing Rhetoric, Technology and Pedagogy*. I contacted Professor Lowe to inquire further about his course blogs. He encouraged me to post the link to my survey to a listserv created by a CCCC's (Conference on College Composition and Communication) special topics committee on weblogs. I received several responses from this group of edubloggers, and many were eager for me to share the results from my research. From the CCCC's special topics listserv, I received responses from Scott Rogers at Weber State University, Deborah Gussman at Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, Robert Milde at Eastern Kentucky University, Spencer Schaffner from the University of Washington, Mike Edwards from the University of Massachusetts, and Bradley Bleck from Spokane Community College. Many of these professors are at the fore of weblog research, some using them in their courses for over three years; I was grateful to have their participation in my study.

In Chapter 1, I mentioned the website *Weblogs: The Possibilities are Limitless*, by Anne Davis and Sandy Peters. From their site, I accessed a link to "College and University Weblogs" where I was able to use writing course blogs from Barbara Ganley at Middlebury College, another well-known blog researcher, as well as other blogs from Purdue University. These instructors organized one blog for each of their courses to which students posted.

I also found writing course weblogs based on references to them in articles I read as I researched. For instance, after reading the article "Moving to the Public: Weblogs in the

Writing Classroom,” by Charlie Lowe and Terra Williams, I was able to follow links from their work to weblogs such as *Jerz’s Literacy Weblog* from Seton Hill University, which is one of the longest running educational weblogs. *Jerz’s* has links to classes that Dr. Dennis Jerz teaches, and from there I found links to the blogs he set up for each of his courses. Jerz has his students create individual blogs, which he links from the home-base blog. Also, in the previously mentioned article by Kevin Brooks, Cindy Nichols, and Sybil Priebe, links are provided to their course weblogs at North Dakota State University. Professors at NDSU, much like at Purdue, have been greatly involved in the current research on weblogs; they are in the process of creating a blog software program and server that are run through the university’s system (much like Blackboard or WebCT).

Once a large list of writing course weblogs had accumulated, I contacted as many professors as possible through email, asking them to respond to a weblog survey. Of the teachers on this list, thirty-two responded, thus comprising the sample for the present qualitative survey study. Many of the responses from the teachers permitted access and links to blogs (either created by the teacher and/or his/her students) for different courses. The sample has a collection of blogs from forty-five courses total, though some are simply different sections of the same course. All of the weblogs used in this sample are for writing courses in post-secondary institutions. General data about the sample are presented in *Table 1* below.

Table 1: Sample

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Number in Sample</u>
Institutions Represented	15
Sections / Courses	45
Instructors Surveyed	32

The fifteen institutions represented in the sample include a diverse group. The sample contains higher education institutions from nearly all of the Carnegie classifications, spanning from small community colleges to large, research-based universities. *Table 2* shows a more specific breakdown of college representation based on the Carnegie classifications.

Table 2: Institutions Represented

<u>Carnegie Classification</u>	<u>Institutions in Sample</u>
<u>Doctoral/Research Universities – Extensive</u>	Arizona State University Colorado State University Purdue University University of Massachusetts University of Washington
<u>Doctoral/Research Universities – Intensive</u>	North Dakota State University
<u>Master’s Colleges and Universities – I</u>	Eastern Kentucky University Elon University
<u>Master’s Colleges and Universities – II</u>	Weber State University
<u>Baccalaureate Colleges – Liberal Arts</u>	Middlebury College Richard Stockton University of New Jersey Seton Hill University
<u>Baccalaureate Colleges – General</u>	University of South Carolina Aiken
<u>Associate’s Colleges</u>	De Anza College Spokane Community College

Though I have been able to access many blogs for this study, it would be a large feat - nearly impossible - to track down *every* blog being used in post-secondary writing courses, especially since access is often open only to blog members. However, I would like to emphasize that, based on the Carnegie classifications and the geographical diversity of the institutions, the present sample is fairly representative. Though I am not claiming that the

present findings are generalizable to all weblogs in education, or to all weblogs in writing courses, the study does serve as an illustration of how many writing teachers - across a diverse group of institutions – are currently using weblogs.

Data Sources

Three major data sources provide the foundation for this qualitative study. They are as follows: 1) texts from course weblogs, 2) teacher instructions and course information, and 3) responses to the survey. The first of these categories, course weblogs, can be divided into more specific data sources as follows: 1) home-base weblogs to which the teacher posts instructions, announcements, assignments, etc., 2) home-base weblogs to which teachers post various items and students also post items (questions, comments, announcements, work, etc.), 3) individual student blogs, to which students post various items, including writing at various process stages, timelines, summaries, analyses, questions, comments, etc. (and to which other students may or may not respond using the blog’s “comment” feature), and 4) blogs maintained by small groups of students, usually 3 to 5, to be used for process steps and/or product presentation of collaborative projects. The purposes listed above for each of the categories are explained in broad terms here, but will be broken down more specifically in Chapter 3.

Teacher instructions and course information comprise the second data source. These items include the following: 1) course syllabi, 2) specific project assignments that relate to course blog use, 3) instructions and assignments posted by the teacher to the course blog, 4) course information published in the “About” section of the course blog, and 5) course information published in one of the first few postings to the course blog. From these sources, I was able to access the specific ways in which teachers explain their expectations,

requirements, and purposes for the course weblog. In this way, I was able to analyze the particular phrasings they used to explain and describe the blog space to students.

The final data include the 32 survey responses. The survey data contain both the quantifiable information from multiple choice responses (eleven questions) and qualitative data from the open-ended questions (four). Procedures for creation, distribution, and analysis concerning the survey data will be explored in the following section, and results will be described in Chapter 4.

2.3 Procedures

Collecting the Purposes for Weblog Use

This study encompasses data sources appearing on the Web from September 2004 through February 2005. During this time, tentative purpose categories were being developed based on the acquired course blog samples. A file was created for each educator, with separate sections for each of his/her writing courses (if more than one). When possible, links to course blogs, syllabi, and assignment sheets were added to this file. In addition to this, specific phrasings from blog assignments and descriptions were taken directly from the original material and added to the teacher's file. These phrasings were grouped based on similarities for each educator and then labeled with a tentative purpose. These purpose categories remained tentative, however, until data from the weblog survey had been received.

Using the constant comparative analysis (Erlandson et al.), analysis began with the first weblog I studied. I classified the information on the weblog according to various purposes, initially including reflection, student interaction, personal journal, and public audience. As each new weblog was explored, I added new categories defining the instructional purpose(s) of the weblogs. If a category was developed, and only one weblog

illustrated that category, it was defined as “unique” rather than “common.” In the end, if a use of a weblog appeared in at least 12 of the 45 blogs (25%) I considered it to be “common.” At this point in the process, I was only able to derive these purposes from the information available on the course blog or any information linked from the blog (a syllabus or assignment sheet, for example); I waited for information from the weblog survey to confirm and add to these initial categories.

A survey was then developed, with aid from a university writing instructor, in the last week of January 2005. On February 8th and 9th, the survey was distributed via email to educators from the list of weblog examples whose contact information was traceable. In other words, it was necessary for the blog to state either the educators’ full name, college affiliation (from which I could search the university’s staff directory and course offerings), or to have a link to the course syllabus containing information about the instructor. In addition to sending individual emails to educators whose blogs I had already viewed or contacted, a survey request email was posted to a *CCCC*’s special topics listserv related to educational blog use. Within the email requesting a survey response, educators were asked to submit the survey online as soon as possible, but no later than February 16, 2005. After the 16th had passed, follow-up emails with gentle reminders were sent to eight of the teachers who had yet to respond; five of these submitted within twenty-four hours of the reminder. At this point, thirty-two survey responses had been received, comprising a major part of the data and sample for the present qualitative study. The survey responses were then analyzed for trends pertaining to blog use in writing courses. The analysis process was conducted from February 18th through 28th, and will be explained in further detail in the upcoming analysis section.

Let me offer a brief disclaimer and explanation. I am aware that although educators intend for students to use weblogs in a certain way, based on the texts I found, students did not always use them in that prescribed way. For example, though educators assigned students to respond critically to a reading, many students gave a personal opinion, thus not fulfilling the original purpose. However, the present study does not seek to inquire into whether, and how effectively, students follow instructions. In Chapter 3, I will provide examples of how students carried out assignments.

Also, though educators claim to use weblogs in one way based on their explained purposes, they may end up using them in other ways. For example, the instructors at USC Aiken started the weblog for one project, but expanded it to encompass much more by the end of the semester. Again, the present study is not able to account for all these shifts in purpose, but the responses to the survey have illuminated many of these issues and a further exploration of them will be addressed later in this work.

Instrument

One of the major tasks for conducting this research was creating and distributing the weblog survey. The weblog survey (See Appendix B) was created in order to add depth to and enrich the information gathered concerning educators' purposes (based on "About" sections, blog postings, syllabi, etc.). The survey was developed in consultation with a university writing instructor who helped formulate and organize the questions. The survey was kept brief, so that data would be manageable, and so as to not consume too much of the respondent's time. The survey contained ten questions to which teachers responded by clicking a radio buttoned choice, (e.g. yes/no, rate from 1-5, etc.). After this set of ten

multiple choice questions were three open-ended questions and a space for “any other comments.”

A main goal of the survey was to inquire further as to educators’ thoughts and opinions concerning blog use in their writing courses. This type of information was not available from only viewing the course blog. Some of the multiple choice questions were developed to find more information about the teacher (personal blog, edu-blogging community, comfort with technology, etc.). Other multiple choice questions inquired specifically about course blog use currently and in the past (how long, how organized, students graded, students required to interact), and one question asked teachers to think about if they would use blogs again in the future. The final multiple choice question, asking respondents to rate their overall satisfaction with blog use, was intended to serve as the foundation for the following open-ended question, which inquired as to whether the educator’s goals were met. The second open-ended question, which asked for the most beneficial use/aspect, was intended to specifically inform the analysis of purposes for blogs in writing courses. In the final question, respondents were asked to state any future modifications they would make; this question was intended to shed light on the changes educators have made and plan to make, which would inform future studies and suggestions for usage.

After creating the survey, the next task was distribution. As explained in the “Sample” section, I was able to track down contact information from several writing instructors using weblogs in their courses. I sent approximately thirty personalized emails to instructors, explaining my research and providing a link to the online survey I created. I also, as mentioned previously, posted the same explanation and link to the *CCCC*’s special topics

listserv and received several responses from this group. After a week, I had collected thirty-two survey responses from college writing instructors across the country. Again, a file was created for each of these educators, containing at least a survey response, but also as much of the following as possible: links to course blog(s), syllabi, assignments, and student work. The explanation of how these survey responses were analyzed will be explained in the following section. The results from the ten multiple choice questions will be given in Chapter 4, and the results from the open-ended questions will be interspersed throughout Chapters 3 and 4.

2.4 Analysis

Weblogs

Another major task for this study involved the collection of educators' purposes for using weblogs in their post-secondary composition courses based on the actual course blog(s) themselves. Unlike Herring et al.'s study, I did not determine the purpose based on the blog itself. I was hoping to develop more specific categories for the purposes of writing course blogs than simply "journal," "filter," or "k-log," as Herring et al. used. Therefore, I looked at educators' own explanations of how they intended for their students to use the individual weblogs and/or combined course weblog, rather than determining the purpose based on the final product. As previously stated, this information was obtained by exploring the "about" section of the weblog, tracking back to the first post on the weblog, or linking to the course syllabus. The explanation of these data (the texts of the instructors) will be one component used to explore how writing teachers are currently using edublogs.

As mentioned in the "Collecting of Purposes from Weblogs" section, a tentative list of purposes was developed early in the research process. Again, once an example of blog use

had been found, a file was created for that educator listing links to blogs, syllabi, and assignments, as they were available. After receiving the weblog survey responses, I narrowed the file of educators to only those who responded to the survey. Those educators who had not responded to the survey were excluded from the sample of files, and those respondents who did not previously have a file (most of these respondents were from the special topics listserv) were added.

Once the files had been created, I was able to research and track down the university/college affiliation for each respondent, adding that information to the file. And, again, when possible, I included information from blogs and syllabi. Not all thirty-two of the respondents provided information about how to access their course weblogs and syllabi, but I was able to access the majority of them.

Survey

The number of responses for each of the multiple choice questions on the survey were tallied, comprising the data for the “Results” section in Chapter 4. The open-ended responses were read and analyzed using the qualitative procedure of constant comparative analysis (Erlandson et al.). Based on an earlier work by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen define constant comparative analysis “as a means for deriving (grounding) theory in the analysis process. From the categories, grounded theories – that is, theories that follow from data rather than preceding them – were developed” (112); this is the same style of methodology used in the present study. The qualitative responses from the open-ended questions were analyzed and highlighted for trends and recurring themes. This analysis took place over approximately two weeks, during which other “critical friends,” including three university faculty, reviewed the data, ensuring unbiased conclusions.

Categories were identified for classifying both the survey responses and the previously mentioned course blogs. Themes were developed related to common ways in which writing teachers explained and used weblogs in their courses. Information concerning these categories of purposes was gained through multiple sources, including course blogs, syllabi, assignments, survey responses, and student work.

Three types of procedures were used to analyze the data; these were based on Norman K. Denzin's qualitative research model: triangulation across collection methods (document analysis of weblogs and teacher materials, and survey responses), across data sources (course blogs, teacher assignments and information, student work), and across investigators (the researcher and three "critical friends"). A coding system was used to develop the final list of purpose categories. While analyzing open-ended survey responses, letter codes were used in the margins when teacher responses corresponded to a particular category. For example, if a respondent stated that the most beneficial aspect of using blogs was so that students had a broad sense of audience, the code "AU" would be written in the margin to designate a comment about audience. The following codes and corresponding categories were used during the analysis process: SI (Student Interaction), EI (Explore Ideas), ER (Engage with Readings), SD (Student Discussion), SUM (Summary Assignment), NON-D (Non-Course-Related Discussion), REF (Reflection), QU (Questions), LINK (Link materials to blog), POST (Post work/writing to the blog), PUB (blog as a public space), JOUR (Journal), COL (Collaboration). Some of these categories were joined, such as SI and SD, in the final list of eleven purposes.

Once the ways in which writing teachers use weblogs in their courses were determined, I examined student contributions to the blog for those courses whose blogs were

accessible. Though I was not able to read every student's entries, I did read several from each course to gain a sense of how they were responding to assignments. I classified student responses using the same coding system explained previously (SI, EI, ER, etc.). I also noted instances where student responses did not exemplify the uses identified, but which added an interesting dimension to the data presented in this study. Several sample student blog responses will be discussed in Chapter 3.

As Susan R. Hutchinson explains, though, in her article "Survey Research," there are a few limitations and criticism of using surveys in research. In relation to the present study, the largest potential limitation arises from the "reliance on self report" (Hutchinson 299). Hutchinson describes how "the validity of conclusions drawn from surveys is dependent on the integrity of the responses," but she questions "how can one be certain that respondents are asking truthfully or accurately?" (299). When using survey research, this is a question that must be considered, as it was in the present study. The population for a survey may tell the researcher a great deal as to how likely they will answer truthfully and accurately. For example, students may not answer truthfully because they do not care or are afraid of repercussions. However, in this study, the sample was comprised of college and university instructors, many of whom are very involved in current composition research themselves; therefore, it was concluded that this population would likely answer truthfully and accurately to the best of their abilities.

Chapter 3

Educators' Purposes for Weblogs

[Web] logs lead to efficacy in learning by helping to build community by extending the reach of the classroom into the dorm, around the clock, and as a result helping students to see that their work has a meaningful impact on their environment – we are all apprentices to one another.

- Barbara Ganley

Based on previous research and historical development, we know that weblogs have evolved quite a bit from their original styles. This is due in part to the many diverse ways that bloggers can use their virtual space. Despite the diverse uses of weblogs in the classroom, some more common uses have emerged. As mentioned earlier, educators may organize course blogs in several different ways, including one blog for the course to which the teacher posts (the home-base blog), one blog for the course to which teacher and students post, individual student blogs, and student blogs for collaborative projects. After briefly exploring the ways in which educators use one blog for the course to which the teacher posts, I will give an in-depth analysis of how writing teachers are asking their students to use blogs.

Based on the sample from this study, many educators use the home-base blog as a place for teachers to post course-related items. The home-base blog tends to be used in one or more of the following ways: 1) to post announcements, 2) to post assignments, 3) to link to student blogs, 4) to link to the course website and/or syllabus, 5) to link to important website resources (the library website, or news sites), and 6) to serve as a daily agenda. For example, Dennis Jerz from Seton Hill University uses his home-base course weblog in a combination of these ways. In the image below, *Figure 9*, you can see the blog home page for one of his writing courses. This page looks very similar to a normal course website with

links to the syllabus, projects, due dates, etc. However, we can tell this is a blog site by two major features: the calendars of archives in the left column and the reverse chronological ordering of posts (December 13, then December 10).

Jerz: Writing for the Internet (EL236)

AUGUST
 Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 8 9 10 11 12 13 14
 15 16 17 18 19 20 21
 22 23 24 25 26 27 28
 29 30 31

SEPTEMBER
 Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat
 1 2 3 4
 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
 12 13 14 15 16 17 18
 19 20 21 22 23 24 25
 26 27 28 29 30

OCTOBER
 Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat
 1 2
 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
 10 11 12 13 14 15 16
 17 18 19 20 21 22 23
 24 25 26 27 28 29 30
 31

NOVEMBER
 Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat
 1 2 3 4 5 6
 7 8 9 10 11 12 13
 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

main syllabus outline news projects due dates discou

This is the web site for [Dennis G. Jerz](#)'s Fall 2004 section of EL 236, "Writing for the Internet." See also m collection of [Writing Electronic Text](#) handouts.

13 December 2004

Final Exam (15%)

The exam (in A405, from 10:30-12:30) is your opportunity to demonstrate what you have learned about researching and writing online, using hyperlinks effectively, troubleshooting common Web page errors, and important current issues in cybersp

Notes:

Open-book, open-notes, and open-Web -- but no collaboration is permitted.

You will publish your final exam on your setonhill.info website. (If that site is down some reason, I will announce an alternate plan during the exam.)

[Permalink](#) | [Comments \(2\)](#)

10 December 2004

Figure 9: Dennis Jerz's Home-base Blog

Jerz is able to link to important course information, such as the syllabus, as a teacher might when using a course website; however, he also has the benefit of easily posting announcements and daily assignments to the blog space. As you can see for the December 13th entry, Jerz has posted information about the course final exam. After learning more about the way Jerz uses blogs in his classes, I determined that he often posts to the blog for each class meeting, having it serve as a daily agenda. Jerz's blog fulfills all of the previous six home-base blog qualities (see page 35). The only one not visible from *Figure 9* is the

linking of student blogs; however, below the list of archives in calendar form, there is a blog-roll, or list of student names. When clicking on a student's name from the list, that student's individual blog for the course is brought up.

Several other teachers responded that they use a course blog for teacher postings. For example, Barbara Ganley from Middlebury College explains on her syllabus that the course weblog "will act as a course organizing tool: a place to find this overview, assignments and the syllabus, and helpful inks to the writing world." Though this is not the only way that Ganley uses the course weblog, she clearly outlines this purpose to her students up front. Other teachers who responded to the Weblog survey noted this organizational purpose as a major benefit of using weblogs in the classroom. One respondent, who wanted to remain anonymous, claimed that he/she uses the blog space "to post announcements to my students so that I don't flood their e-mail in-boxes," and Scott Rogers from Weber State University stated that "Weblogs are quite efficient for distributing information to students." Robert Milde, Eastern Kentucky University, noted that the course weblog gave him "an easier way to broadcast class announcements." Lynne Rhodes from USC Aiken similarly noted that "Having a course weblog allows for easy posting of announcements and links for additional material." Though the following analysis will cover some of the benefits of using course blogs in this way, the primary focus will be on the way in which educators ask students to use blogs in the classroom.

Based on the sample of blogs in this study, I determined that college teachers working with writing courses are asking their students to use blogs in one, or a combination, of the ways listed below:

1. As a public space with a broad audience.
2. To post student work.
3. As a journal.
4. To reflect on course related assignments.
5. For student discussion and interaction.
6. To explore and share ideas, as well as brainstorm.
7. To engage with and respond to assigned readings.
8. For collaborative projects.
9. To link to Web materials.
10. To ask and answer questions related to the course.
11. To discuss topics not necessarily related to the course.

These purposes are from both types of edublogs: one blog for the course (to which both teacher and students can post) and individual student blogs. Again, these purposes were determined by finding information posted by the instructor on the course Web page, syllabus, or blog, and by responses to the aforementioned Weblog survey. The following sections of Chapter 3 will explore these eleven uses in the way that educators have explained them to their students.

Though I've broken the edublog purposes into eleven categories, these are by no means exclusive. For instance, reflection and journaling are often very similar, and sharing one's own thoughts and opinions may come in the form of a journal. Also, I would again like to note that these findings are based on the current sample only; numerous other ways are likely to exist for how weblogs are being used in education and writing courses.

However, because the sampling covers a broad range and type of institutions across the United States, the sample seems fairly representative of how educators in college writing courses are asking students to use blogs.

Before beginning the analysis of edublog purposes, the types of blogging requirements teachers ask students to fulfill will be reviewed briefly. The sample provided a surprisingly diverse range of requirements for the blog space. Some educators, like Paula

Rosinski of Elon College, asked her students to post to their blogs at the end of every class meeting. However, Rosinski gave students class time to complete these posts, and the class only met approximately twenty times. Chas Clifton of Colorado University had one of the highest requirements for his writing students; on the syllabus, Clifton states that they must “maintain a blog with a[n] average of at least four posts per week throughout the semester.” Amy Stolley of Purdue explained on her syllabus that students “will be responsible for 48 blog postings by the end of the semester, which is equivalent to roughly three postings to the blog per week”; neither Stolley nor Clifton placed a minimum word count on these postings.

Spencer Schaffner, University of Washington, required his students to update their course blogs “at least twice a week.” Charlie Lowe asked his students to post twice a week, but he also required a “minimum of 150 words each.” Other writing teachers, such as Shannon Nason and Alice D’Amore – both from Purdue – asked students to “post at least one blog per week” (Nason), with no specific word range. In addition to posting once a week, D’Amore also required her students to give “at least two responses to two other student blogs.”

In another of Lowe’s courses, he simply asked students to blog “each time you have a reading assignment,” and “each reading response is to be no less than 400 words.” Karl Fornes from USC Aiken expected students “to post an average of between 250 and 500 words per week,” but he did not specify a specific number of postings. A final example comes from Robert Milde who, instead of requiring his students to comment on each others’ blogs, offered “extra credit for any constructive feedback to others’ papers you post in the comments section.” The data show that educators vary quite a bit in how often they expect students to use the blog space and in how much content they require students to post. In the

following sections, we will examine the functions and types of assignments writing teachers offer students in order to meet these weekly word and posting requirements.

3.1 Weblogs as Public Spaces

As mentioned in Chapter 1, part of what is appealing and unique about weblogs is that they are public writing spaces. Unlike other educational tools such as WebCT or Blackboard, which are accessible only to students in the class, blogs are often accessible to the public. Any Web browser/reader has the potential to access, read, and sometimes comment on the course blog space. Though some teachers limit who can read and/or access edublogs, many embrace the opportunity to increase and broaden students' awareness of an audience for their writing. As writing instructors explain the blog space to their students, they often emphasize the public aspect. The concept of "public" here can range anywhere from blogs being accessible to all of the students in the class, to any person browsing the Internet. Based on the course blogs in this sample, many educators identified the course blog (or individual student blogs) as a public space.

The purpose of weblogs as public spaces draws on previous composition research as to the role of audience in the writing situation. The "audience" has long since been an essential piece of a rhetorical situation, with roots dating back to the first Greek philosophers. However, the "audience" for a piece of writing, which is often removed physically, is quite different from that of a speech, where the audience is often physically present. In the nineteen seventies and eighties, composition theory and research, particularly in the areas of pedagogy, began to explore the writer's audience. In their article on audience, Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford explain that there were two main ways that theorists conceived of the writer's audience: audience addressed and audience invoked (156). However, Ede and

Lunsford sought to “propose an alternative formulation, one which [they] believe more accurately reflects the richness of ‘audience’ as a concept” (156). Ede and Lunsford claim that “Those who envision *audience as addressed* emphasize the concrete reality of the writer’s audience,” (156) and “Those who envision *audience as invoked* stress that the audience of a written discourse is a construction of the writer, a ‘created fiction’ (Long, p. 225)” (160). Ede and Lunsford offer a model that brings together these two, often seen as contradictory, conceptions of audience. They conclude that

A fully elaborated view of audience...must balance the creativity of the writer with the different, but equally important, creativity of the reader. It must account for a wide and shifting range of roles for both addressed and invoked audiences. And...it must relate the matrix created by the intricate relationship of writer and audience to all elements in the rhetorical situation. (Ede and Lunsford, 171)

Ede and Lunsford’s conclusions reveal that writing teachers need to encourage students to conceive of broad and diverse audiences for their writing. With technology progressing quickly, new media – such as the blog space – offer students the chance to write in a truly public place, for a broad audience, and educators are using this facet of blogs as a major purpose of their assignments for the space.

Several teachers from the sample specifically encouraged students to view the blog space as a public place for their writing. For example, Shannon Nason’s first blog posting for her first year writing course consisted of a “Welcome” message. Nason’s message began as follows: “Hello English 106ers, welcome to my blog. This blog will serve as a kind of online public square....” It seems unusual that Nason would refer to the space as “[her] blog,” instead of the class’s blog; but, what this quote reveals is that Nason wanted her

students to understand the blog space as a kind of “public square.” And, by situating the blog’s rhetorical context in a “public square,” Nason’s students will hopefully invoke a wide-ranging, public audience for their writing. This quick “Welcome” message continues with other purposes for the blog, which will be explored in later sections.

Also emphasizing the public nature of blogs for their course were Charlie Lowe and Terra Williams. Before moving to Purdue, Lowe team-taught an online course at Florida State with Terra Williams (now at Arizona State). For this course, they offered an extensive amount of information on weblogs and the requirements for the course. Since this was an online course, Lowe and Williams stressed that the blog would serve as the primary space for discussion; I will investigate this use in a later section. In addition to this, though, Lowe and Williams clearly stated, almost warned, students that the blog space was a public one. On the online syllabus, they explain to the students: “...much of your writing for this class will be public. **Our class weblog and your individual blog site will be accessible to anyone on the Internet**” (Lowe and Williams). As you can see, Lowe and Williams bolded the last line for emphasis. Other instructors also stressed how public blogs are. For instance, Paula Rosinski stated in her survey response: “I remind [my students] that these are public, not private, writing spaces.” Implied in Rosinski’s comment is that students must understand how the public nature of blogs is exemplified in the possibility for public readership, i.e. students’ writing is no longer private, nor seen only by the teacher.

The emphasis by Lowe, Williams, and Rosinski is definitely in order. In fact, a misconception of weblogs as private rather than public has become a major problem with their use by the general public. Miller and Shepherd provocatively begin their blog article on genre by relating horror stories of people losing their jobs or being questioned by the FBI

because of information they posted on their seemingly private blogs. Young teens are especially prone to this misconception, which is why educators must be very careful about introducing a public blog into their courses. The last thing that educators want is for their students to get themselves in trouble by posting on the course weblog; so it is important that Lowe and Williams – and others – clearly explained that blog space is public.

Another page linked from the syllabus titled “Posting to Your Blog Site” continues Lowe and Williams’ emphasis on a public audience. Since many educators explain blogs in terms of their similarities to journals, Lowe and Williams note a very big difference between the two. Here they distinguish the blog space from the typical journal space:

...unlike a journal which you might keep at home, your blog site will be public...Your fellow class members will be invited to read your blog, and even link and respond to it in their own blog. And, of course, since it’s on the Internet, other Internet surfers may encounter it and see what you have to say. (Lowe and Williams, syllabus)

Lowe and Williams have addressed the broad range of the term “public,” defining it as other students in the class as well as “other Internet surfers.” It is extremely important for students to have concept of the potentially broad public blog audience as they begin writing and posting assignments for the course.

Another way that teachers from this sample explain the course blog’s public audience to students is to specifically address that audience, similar to the way Ede and Lunsford use the term “audience addressed.” Robert Milde, for instance, uses this technique to emphasize the very public nature of weblogs. Similar to Nason’s first blog posting, Milde publishes a “Welcome” message for his technical writing students (See *Figure 10* below).

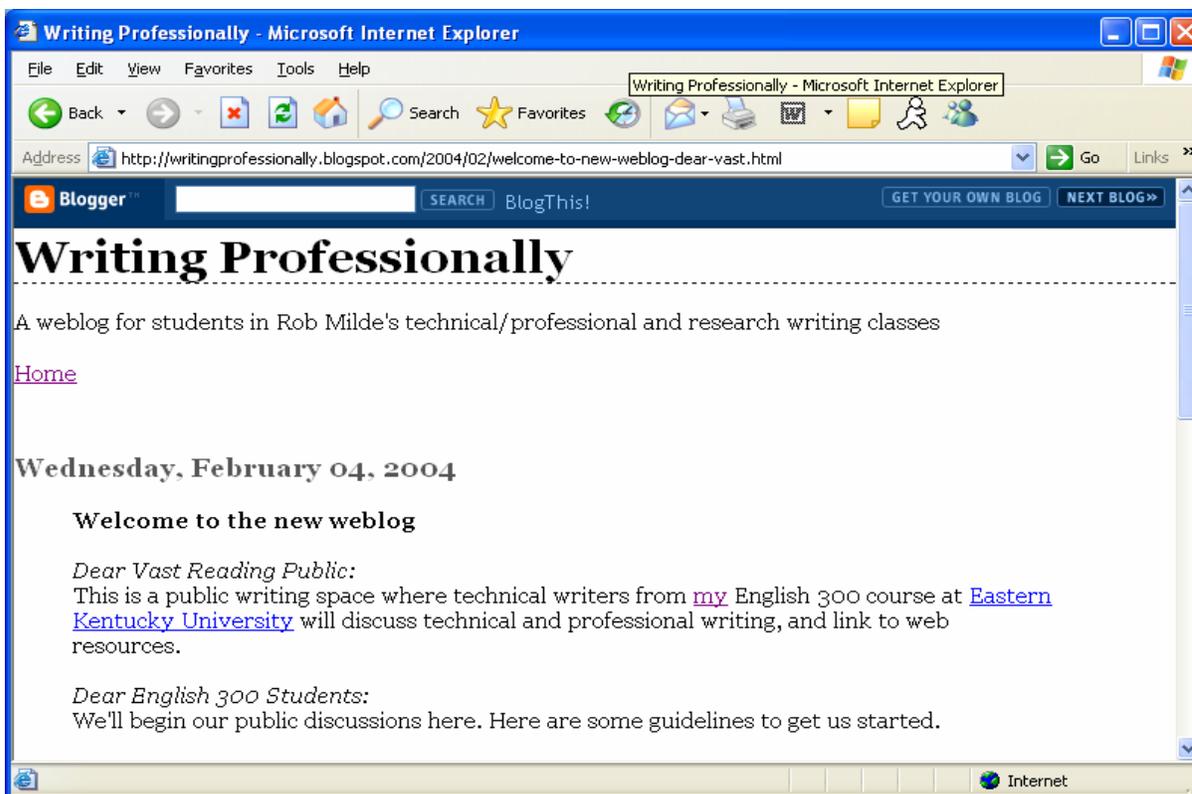


Figure 10: Robert Milde's English 300 Welcome Message

As you can see from Milde's post, he addresses two separate audiences on the blog, modeling to his students a public sense of audience. In the first welcome message, Milde addresses the "Vast Reading Public" to explain that this course blog is a "public writing space." The next message is specifically addressed to "English 300 Students," but it still focuses on how the weblog discussions will be public.

In another of Milde's classes, English 808 for composition teachers, he offers a similar message on the weblog that also addresses the public audience for the blog. Milde states how he intends the blog space to be used:

My plan is for us to gather theories, discussions, and resources related to teaching here. And then... because we are doing it in public, I hope this will become a larger community discussion of composition teaching issues. The center will be the comp/rhet community here at ECU and teachers nearby, I imagine, but who knows ...

we are on the web, so we might pull in anyone. Let's see what this starts. (Milde, *English 808* course weblog)

Milde emphasizes the blog's truly public nature, with an audience of readers who could be local (departmental teachers) or very global (anyone). Taking the explanation a step farther, Milde suggests the possible benefits of opening class discussions to a larger audience on the blog. He ponders that the larger public audience may only be other instructors at the university, but still alerts his students to the possibility of pulling in anyone from the Web. Milde's enthusiasm for the potentials of a public blog space seems clear: "Let's see what this starts."

A final example of how teachers explain and use the public space of blogs in their courses comes from Spencer Schaffner's writing class. On his course syllabus, Schaffner explains that "The blog is meant to locate our writing in a network that is readable by all. The blogs are also meant as an occasion for socially active student writing." Schaffner's conception of audience here is not quite as clear as in previous examples. Though his words seem to point towards the public nature of blogs, "readable by all" could imply an audience of other students or any Web reader. Regardless, Schaffner's explanation of the blog space is in line with that of Nason, Lowe, Williams, and Milde. Though these five educators are the ones who stressed the public nature of blogs on their course syllabi and blogs, several more educators from the survey note the benefits of the public blog space in their survey responses.

Based on survey responses, the most commonly cited benefit of using blogs for writing courses is the public nature of the space. Fourteen of the thirty-two respondents mentioned this benefit. For example, Sol Neely from Purdue explains, "On the whole, my students' responses have improved, most likely due to [the blog] being public. It provides a

more cons[pi]uous social context to the students' writing: they no longer write individual and private responses that I then collect and read/evaluate privately." Neely notes how public weblogs broaden students' sense of audience and readership. Mike Edwards from the University of Massachusetts makes a similar comment concerning how weblogs open up the way students view their written work for courses. He writes that the most beneficial aspect of course weblogs is "Having a public space where informal writing can circulate and have value beyond the mere value of a grade." When students understand the social impact of writing in a public space, their work becomes, as Edwards suggests, more than "the mere value of a grade."

Also commenting on the benefits of a public course weblog is Charlie Lowe. On the survey he responds that the largest benefit is "The notion of having students, and the teacher, write publicly instead of keeping their writing in the protected space of the classroom." Lowe clearly wants to expand students' conception of audience for their writing. His use of the word "protected" represents writing that is kept only in the classroom as fairly safe; this sheltered and confined writing, only viewable by the teacher (and occasionally a peer reviewer), cannot be exposed to a wider readership. Lowe, Edwards, Neely and others see how weblogs offer teachers and students the opportunities to engage a public audience for student work and classroom discussions.

An anonymous Weblog survey respondent notes that weblogs allow for "the potential for a 'live' outside of the university audience"; "potential" here is key, because it doesn't imply that the course blog will necessarily have an outside audience, but it highlights – much like Milde's enthusiasm – the *potential* for what *could* happen if an outside readership arose.

Because they often promote a far-reaching audience, Deborah Gussman, from Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, has also used blogs in her writing courses. In response to the survey, Gussman explains that she “hoped that [the blog] would create greater awareness of writing for a broader audience than the teacher.” Though she does not go into detail, Gussman’s wording implies that her original hopes were not fulfilled, and that students did not actually gain this “greater awareness of writing for a broader audience.” Based on this study’s findings, many writing teachers hope that using edublogs will expand their students’ conception of the “audience,” but the question still remains as to whether this happens. Again, the present study isn’t able to complete an extensive exploration of these issues, but the following examples may shed some light onto this debate.

Robert Milde, for instance, responded that one of his original goals was for students to “make some of [their] writing more ‘authentic’ by putting it in a public medium.” However, when talking about the benefits of weblogs, Milde claims that his “lower-level classes” didn’t see the benefits of a public audience: “I want them to experience writing as conversational and public, and they resist. Writing is a private chore to most of them, and sharing/publishing seems intimidating rather than exciting.” Based on the material quoted from Milde’s blog “Welcome” message, *he* was definitely excited about the possibilities of a public space. However, his survey comments reveal that his lower-level students were not as excited by this possibility.

Turning to a few student samples we can see this concept exemplified even more. Below is a quote from one of Dennis Jerz’s students. This is one of the student’s first postings, and you can see his/her enthusiasm about designing and creating a blog.

September 08, 2004: LOOK AT ME, I HAVE A BLOG!

I have a blog now. My very own. It's like a baby – mine to mold, change, and create. Hundreds of people (or in my case, about 5) will be able to see my writings. People from other countries even. Hola! Bonjour! Guten Tag! foreign peoples!

I think I may have become addicted though. I just found out how to personalize and change the colors. Now, every free moment I have will be spent changing colors and making the blog uniquely me. Homework? Who needs homework? I have to work on my blog. (*Special K*)

This student seems to be aware of, probably because Jerz emphasized to his students, the public nature of the weblog: “Hundreds of people...will be able to see my writings. People from other countries even.” However, what is even more intriguing is that the student states in parentheses “(or in my case, about 5),” which would seem to indicate that he/she does *not* think many people will be reading her blog. Without trying to explore the deep recesses of this students’ mind, we could hypothesize the reasoning behind this response. He/she might have been trying to get attention with this posting, or might not have *understood* the public nature of blogs, or at least did not *believe* in the public nature of blogs. Several students, three to be exact, did respond to this student’s posting. After these responses, the creator of “Special K” responded back thanking those who responded, adding “I was surprised to get even one comment!”, thus reinforcing his/her modesty concerning the public blog space.

Another student, this one from Adryan Glasgow’s introductory writing course at Purdue, also comments on the issue of audience. *Figure 11* shows the last two blog postings for Adryan’s course.

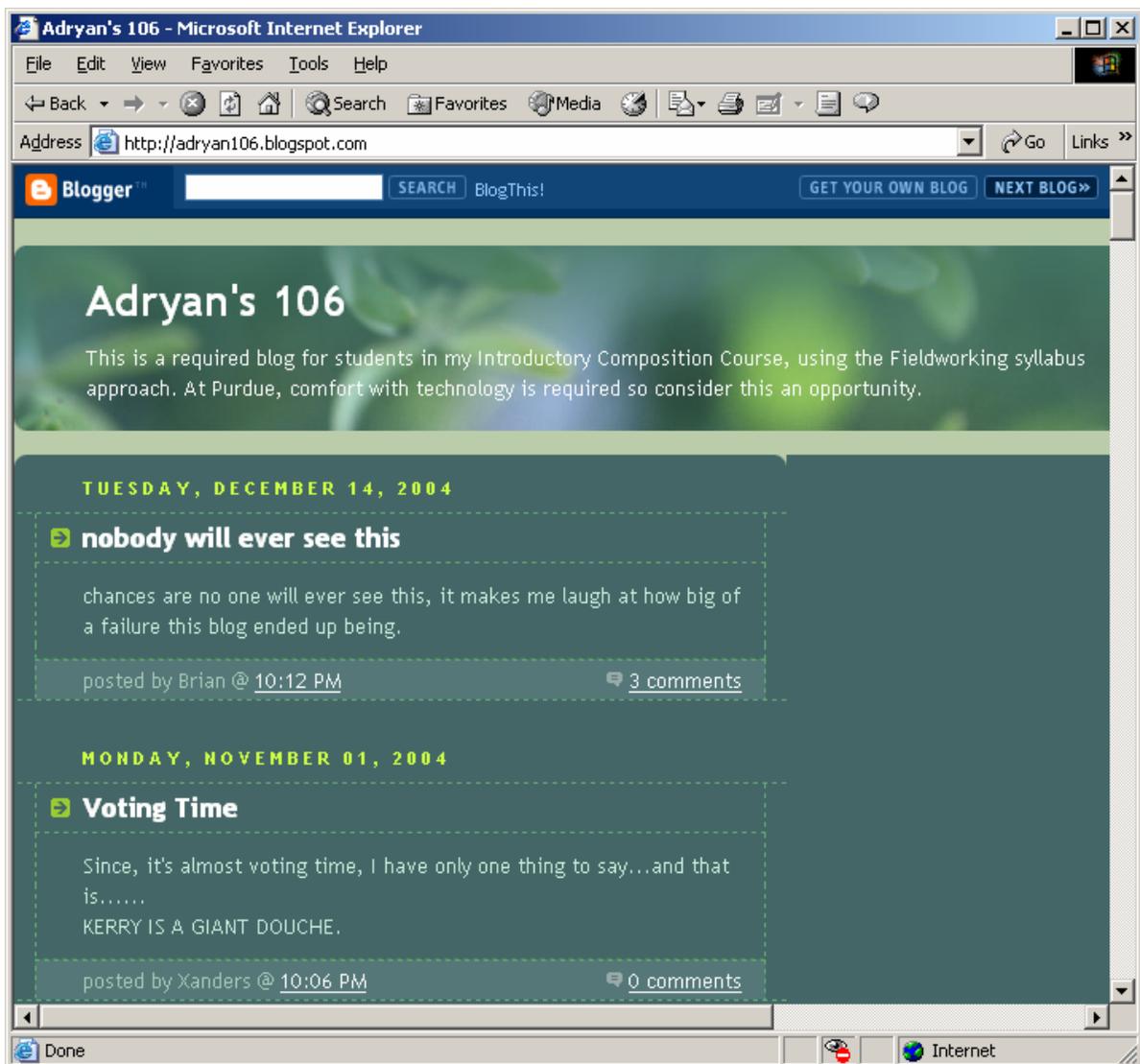


Figure 11: Sample Student Response from Adryan Glasgow's Course Blog

The response by “Xanders” on November 1st reveals the way that students might abuse (in some teachers’ opinions) the public and sometimes informal nature of the blog space.

“Xanders” is voicing his/her opinion about the election, knowing that he/she has an audience, which might have led to the name-calling. The last posting by “Brian,” though, is most interesting for exploring students’ conception of audience. Brian clearly does not believe in the public nature of the blog space, evidenced by the title of his posting: “nobody will ever see this.” From the rest of Brian’s comments it seems that he is not respectful of the teacher

or her assignments, since he calls the blog a failure. Brian's inability to understand that the blog is truly public reveals the obstacles teachers face when introducing this new technology into the classroom. Brian probably had no idea – and will never know - that I, a graduate student at NC State University, would be reading his blog entry. This example shows that *anyone* can, and does, read a public blog, but that students may not fully be aware of this very public audience for their work and thoughts.

Though these two examples suggest that students may not understand or appreciate the public nature of blogs, it is necessary to emphasize that these are just two examples. Many teachers require students to read and comment on each others' blogs in order to create a more interactive community, and, at least at that level, students seem to understand that there is a wider audience than student and teacher (an audience of their peers). However, whether they know that the audience may extend to a larger “public” community is something that cannot be determined in this study, but perhaps future research will explore the issue further.

3.2 Weblogs as Places to Post Student Work

Many educators find that the ease of electronic publishing to blogs is a great way to showcase student work. When students write specifically for the Web, teachers are able to emphasize a broader, public audience. Publishing writing to weblogs would seem to focus on the final written product, which can be appropriate after a process-driven writing assignment; the term “publishing” has become associated most with a polished, final draft. In this way, the blog serves as one final piece of the process, rather than the major point of focus. However, many teachers use the blog space for writing process steps as well, asking students to brainstorm, summarize, discuss, find main ideas, etc.

Over the last several decades, composition theorists have worked to shift the teaching of writing away from solely product-based pedagogy towards a more process-based approach. In Donald Murray's well-known piece "Teach Writing as a Process Not Product," he stresses the importance of teaching "unfinished writing" (12). Coming up with three stages for writing (prewriting, writing, and rewriting), Murray claims that teachers who want to teach the process of writing must "be quiet, . . . listen, [and] respond. [Writing teachers] are not the initiator; we are the reader, the recipient" (12-13). Murray's approach does not include a step for publishing in the writing process, but we must understand that he was reacting to many, many years of product-based composition pedagogy. In more recent years, composition theorists have maintained Murray's emphasis on the writing process, but have also added publishing as one possible step in a very complex process. Dr. Ron Honeycutt, a literacy specialist and teacher in NC State's College of Education, has been working on a map of the recursive processes of writing (Honeycutt). Honeycutt's map has several "clouds" stemming from the centered box of "writing to learn and writing across the curriculum." Among these stems are topics such as reflection, generating ideas, shape, drafting and revising, editing, proofreading, rewriting, and publishing (and each of these topics has several more stems leading to more specific processes). This map attempts to cover the various processes that writers go through; Honeycutt, who spent time studying under Murray, breaks the three original categories into more specific ones, as well as adding processes such as "publishing." Research by Honeycutt and others reveals the trend towards including publishing as a process step with some (but not all) writing assignments. Weblogs offer students a space to "publish" (this is the actual word that appears when students post to

Blogger software) both assignments created during the writing process, as well as final products.

For a creative writing course, publishing a final product can be an important step for writers. Barbara Ganley requires her writing students to post their work to the course weblog, which she calls the “Motherblog.” On her course syllabus linked from the weblog, Ganley explains the blog space:

This interactive Webpage is home for us during this semester.... It will...serve as a locale for our work: you will post your writing on the assignment page and on your own personal page; you will respond to another’s work here...and each of you will take a turn once during the semester at flipping the homepage of the blog, directing us to discoveries you have made during class discussions and through the assigned readings.

For Ganley’s course, she asks her students to post their original poetry, fiction, and non-fiction work to the page, as well as post excerpts from their favorite writers. On her syllabus quoted above, Ganley explains that the blog will be a “locale for our work,” clearly relating that it will be a work space to post writings. Ganley’s assignment of “flipping the home page” involves one student at a time posting to the course’s home-base weblog, rather than only on his/her individual student blog. When students take this role, they, as Ganley explains, direct other students to discoveries they have made. By identifying the blog space as a “locale for our work,” Ganley may be implying that both works-in-progress as well as final writing products will be published there.

Other instructors, such as Robert Milde and Sybil Priebe (North Dakota State University) ask their students to treat the blog space as somewhere to post drafts. For Milde

and Priebe, the blog space is ideal for having students work on the process of writing, rather than simply posting final works. Priebe explains on her syllabus that “[the students] will also use the blog to...draft.” Milde, who has a blog called “Works in Progress” for his introductory writing course, explains that “This is where we will post partially completed rough drafts of each project.” So it seems that writing teachers are using edublogs to encourage students to post their work at several stages throughout the writing process.

In agreement with these educators, Karl Fornes notes the benefits of posting work to the Web in his responses to the survey. Fornes identifies “student ‘self-publishing’” as one of the benefits of using weblogs in the writing classroom. He uses quotation marks around “self-publishing,” probably because it is difficult to define what we consider “published” work when so much is posted easily to the Web. The point Fornes and others are highlighting, though, is that posting writing to the Web can be empowering for students when seen as a way to publish their work, and thus complete one of many stages of the writing process. However, as we see with Milde and Priebe’s uses, weblogs can also be a central location for posting drafts, conducting revisions (this also might include peer commenting), and tracking student progress. Therefore, the ability for students to post work to the blog space at various points in the writing process makes it a useful resource for composition teachers.

3.3 Weblogs as Journals

Chris Anson and Richard Beach begin their book *Journals in the Classroom: Writing to Learn* by explaining “The Legacy of the Journal;” the journal is a common form that has been around for centuries. Journals have also become popular in classrooms, especially in

English courses, as Anson and Beach describe in their book. They explain in their chapter on “Journal Writing Activities in the English Class,” that

Journal writing provides an ideal bridge between...two quite different visions of learning: they are *strategic* in the way they encourage critical reflection and provide students with many ways to examine and learn about a topic; and they are *content-driven* in their potential to focus students’ attention on many subjects both personal and academic. (Anson and Beach 113)

The potential for journals to have students attend to “both personal and academic” subjects carries over to the edublog space, which can oscillate between personal and professional purposes. Indeed, journaling provides many benefits to student writers and this is one reason why weblogs, which are often defined as similar to journals, are becoming so popular in the classroom.

Aaron Campbell, quoted in the website *Weblogs: The Possibilities are Limitless!*, offers a definition of weblogs: “A weblog (or 'blog') can be thought of as an online journal that an individual can continuously update with his or her own words, ideas, and thoughts through software that enables one to easily do so.” Campbell’s definition for weblogs reveals a focus on the journal-style potential of weblogs - a shift, according to Rebecca Blood, from the earlier filter style weblogs. As explained in Chapter 1, Blood’s work highlights how the popularity of weblogs has brought with it a change in approach; the original filtering of Websites and Web material has become less popular among bloggers, who now seem to prefer the personal, archived journal-style blog. In a study of blogs in their writing classrooms, Kevin Brooks, Cindy Nichols, and Sybil Priebe found that their students had preferences for journal-style blogs, compared to other genre types (notebook and filter

styles). These educators had their students experiment with each of the three genre styles for blogs, and then, for their article, they analyzed data from student entry and exit surveys concerning preferences for weblog style. Brooks, Nichols, and Priebe conclude that “In both semesters, [their] students preferred the journal weblog regardless of which course they were enrolled in, and as student awareness of weblogging increases, the personal, daily reflection seems likely to be the defining characteristic of weblogging.” Their findings are in agreement with both Blood’s understanding of the shift in focus in weblogs towards a journal-style and Campbell’s definition of blogs as being similar to an “online journal.”

One more example supporting the prevalence of weblogs as journals comes from the work of Herring et al.. In Herring et al.’s genre analysis study, their findings show that seventy percent of the blogs analyzed were classified as having the purpose of a “personal journal” (6). They make the following statement:

Although filter blogs in which authors link to and comment on the contents of other web sites are assumed by researchers, journalists and members of the blogging community to be the prototypical blog type, the blogs in our sample are overwhelmingly of the personal journal type (70.4%) in which authors report on their lives and inner thoughts and feelings. (Herring et al. 6)

Though Herring et al.’s study did not look at edublogs, their results still reveal a general shift in the purposes of the blog space. Herring et al., like Blood, Brooks, Nichols, and Priebe, have found that journal blogs are much more prevalent and popular than what researchers previously considered.

Several educators in this sample explained and asked students to use weblogs as a place that was similar to an online journal. For example, on her course website, Paula Rosinski explains how she wanted students to use their personal weblogs:

For the last 15 minutes of class, submit an entry to your blog.... This is a casual kind of “journal” for you to reflect on ideas, and it is also a way for us to experiment with a new kind of writing. Please start each entry with the label “CLASS 1”, etc. If you want to add more entries than are required, that is fine, just please label the required entries. We will learn how to create blogs as a class. (English 212)

Rosinski states that students should consider the blog as a “casual kind of ‘journal’ ...to reflect on ideas.” It’s interesting that Rosinski uses quotes around “journal”; she seems to recognize that blogs are not always entirely journals, but she is, in this case, asking her students to treat their course blogs in that manner. Rosinski gives her students the choice as to whether they will allow comments to their blogs. In her response to the Weblog survey, she states that many students did not add the comment option. Rosinski does not require her students to interact through blogs, but she does have a list from the course Webpage that links to each student’s blog. When students do not add the comment feature, the blog space has the potential to act even more as a journal. By organizing student blogs in this way, the personal style of a journal blog becomes a fairly “private” space (set up to be only between the teacher and student).²

Describing the class blog space as a journal is also appealing to Charlie Lowe and Terra Williams, who jointly taught the online course at FSU. In an article they published on

² I use quotation marks around the word private here because most blog researchers are acutely aware of the issue between public and private nature of weblogs, since they are accessible to almost anyone from the World Wide Web.

their experiences teaching with blogs, Lowe and Williams state “Given that students have access to the Internet, weblogs can easily replace traditional classroom uses of the private print journal” (Lowe and Williams). Here, they allude to the ease of using weblogs for typical writing course activities, such as journaling. Especially at the college level, students often have access to the Internet in their rooms or residence halls, so posting homework and other journaling assignments to the blog is fairly simple. In one of his writing courses at Purdue, Lowe continues to encourage the journal-style of blogging. On the course syllabus he states that students’ postings to their individual blogs will act as, among other things, “a journal for other class members to read your work...[and as] a journal for the instructor to review your work” (ENC1102). Again, Lowe asks students to treat the course weblog like a journal, similar to the way Rosinski suggests her students consider the blog. However, Lowe opens the audience for the course journal to include not only the teacher, but also “other class members,” again emphasizing the public nature of the space.

Bethany Miller from Purdue also situates the blog space in terms of its relation to the typical journal. On the course weblog she offers a “Welcome” message to her English 106 students (See *Figure 12* below), explaining how she intends the course blog to be used. In her posting, Miller comments that the blog will be used “as a form of journaling and journal response.” Her explanation directly identifies the blog space as similar to a journal, but she adds in room for the interactivity of blogs by stating that it will also be a form of “journal response.” Students may benefit a great deal from using the blog space for interactive journaling.

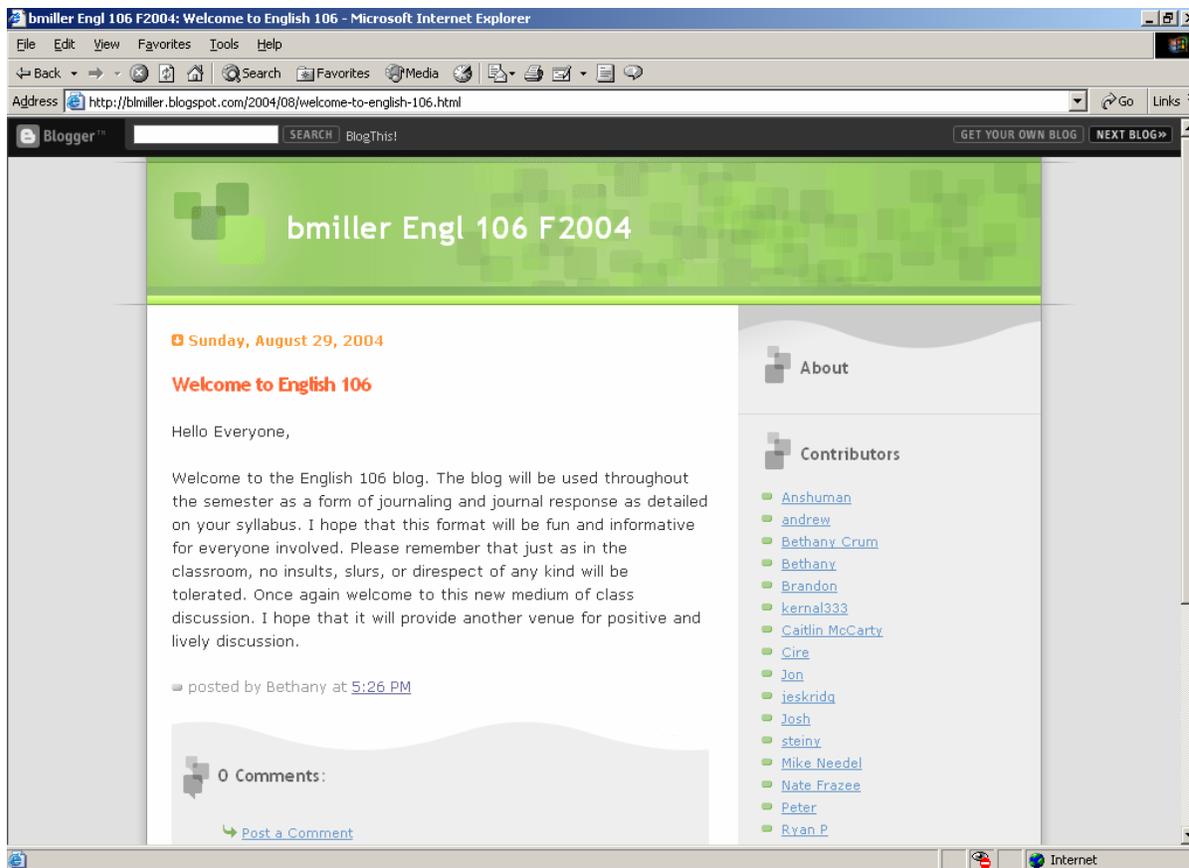


Figure 12: Bethany Miller's Welcome Message, Blogs as Journals

In their section on “Peer Dialogue Journals” Anson and Beach note how

Most people think of journal writing...like diary writing as a solitary and very private activity. Without an immediate audience some students may find ‘solo’ journal writing difficult or purposeless. Exchanging entries with a teacher and/or peer in a dialogue journal provides them with the social interaction and motivation to extend their writing” (64).

Miller’s explanation of the blog as a kind of “journal response” meets many of the same expectations of the peer dialogue journal; however, the interactive journal blog is a new form for students that may add to their engagement and excitement even more.

Another example of how educators are using writing course blogs like journals is the way in which they ask students to give their personal thoughts. Laura Ward, also from

Purdue, explains, in the “About” section of the blog, how she wants to use one weblog for her course; she states that the “Fall 2004 – English 106R” blog is a “Blog for sharing thoughts, ideas, and questions about assignments for English 106R.” Though this description does not explicitly ask students to treat the weblog as a journal, it asks for students to “share [their] thoughts,” which is a typical characteristic of personal journaling.

Other course syllabi, several from teachers at Purdue³, also state that the course weblog will serve as a new kind of “journal.” For example, Alice D’Amore’s syllabus states, “This source [the course weblog] for electronic journaling will be a weekly source for reading and writing response.” D’Amore positions the course weblog as an updated version (electronic) of the older, widely recognized genre of journaling. Carrie, a Weblog survey respondent who only gave her first name, also noted how weblogs as newer journals offer students so much more to work with. Carrie “like[s] the fact that...[the students] begin to experiment with the technology in ways that they can’t in a normal journal, that they can incorporate visual and audio links to better explain themselves, that they can make their journals unique.” Indeed, as Carrie notes here, students have the possibility to make their electronic “journals,” or blogs, unique in ways that traditional, paper-based journals don’t allow for. Students are able to “express themselves” differently in the blog space, while still staying within the expectations of journaling.

Though several educators found blogs as electronic journals to be successful for course activities, others, such as Kevin Brooks, were extremely frustrated by the journal-style student blogs. Brooks was the only survey respondent of thirty-two to claim that he will not use blogs in future courses; his response was largely due to the very personal, rather than

³ I’m assuming that many, though definitely not all, of the instructors using weblogs at Purdue are teaching assistants, either at the Master’s or Doctoral level. Many of the course syllabi for English 106R, the first-year writing course, had similar assignments and phrasings.

academic, forms of self-expression his students posted to their course weblogs. For their study, Brooks, Nichols, and Priebe explained to students that weblogs were similar to journals; they stated that “one of [their] assumptions was that students familiar with journaling would have a frame of reference or guidepost for weblogging.” As Brooks noted in his survey response, “blogging [is]...a web application that...most students are still not aware of,” and, therefore, it is important to explain this new technology in terms that students can understand. Based on the previous examples, many teachers define and explain course weblogs in their relation to personal journals, thus serving as the “guidepost” that Brooks, Nichols, and Priebe were hoping for. However, Brooks explains the problems he faced after describing weblogs as journals to his students:

My use of blogs [in the classroom] resulted in a few individual success stories but an overall luke-warm reception. Very few students saw the academic potential of weblogging (a venue for personal content managements, practice writing summaries and analysis, following a blog related to one’s major), and many got hung up on the personal nature (hung up in the sense of either excited about using blogs to journal or hating the fact that they were being asked to journal—even if I wasn’t asking them to journal!). (Brooks, survey)

As Brooks notes, one of the risks educators take in using journals (paper-based or electronic) is that students will interpret the assignment as a personal, diary-type response. Especially at the college level, writing teachers often want more than just personal response from students. As we’ll explore in later sections, teachers – like Brooks – want students to engage with “the academic potential of weblogging” by asking students to summarize material and respond to assigned readings.

The quoted material below exemplifies a student clearly using a personal style of journaling for this weblog entry⁴. This student is from one of Dennis Jerz's writing courses.

November 05, 2004: a weekend away from SHU

So here's the thing...

I apologize yet again for not blogging in awhile, but I've had writer's block [...]

Anywho...I'm typing this while I'm @ Bethany College right now. I came to visit my cousin who I haven't seen in **forever...**

Winter weather is quite awful...now I do like snow, it's very beautiful but I hate the wind that cuts through me like a thousand butcher knives...yeah...it kills me...

I'm watching *Coyote Ugly* right now...I'd love to have that job...just serving drinks, having a good time, dancing on the bar... (*A Scapegoat to Carry*)

This student clearly has an informal tone and is posting an entry similar to what one might find in a personal journal or diary. The posting has nothing to do with the course, except that he/she mentions writer's block, and serves more as a cataloguing of events from the student's life. Brooks would likely be frustrated with a blog entry such as this, noting that this student does not see the academic potential of blogging.

One of the difficulties teachers face is in where to draw the line between personal and academic content on course weblogs. Many teachers may welcome entries like the one above, claiming that it gets students writing more and that is important. In fact, nine of the thirty-two survey respondents noted that one of the major benefits of using weblogs was that they simply encouraged students to write more. Therefore, an entry like the one above would be seen as fulfilling the teacher's goal of having students write more, even if it is not

⁴ Though I have chosen this blog entry to exemplify a personal, journal-style, I would like to note that many of this student's entries were academic, fulfilling course assignments.

“academic” writing. Others, such as Brooks, might cringe at the thoughts of course weblogs being taken over by personal stories. The data indicate that educators will clearly need to define their expectations for what material is acceptable on their course weblog(s).

3.4 Weblogs as Places for Reflection

As explored in the previous section, journaling coincides with the way many people use weblogs, so having students reflect (a skill similar to journaling) in the space would seem to work well also. Since journal-style writing is often characterized as reflective, the explanations here may overlap with those in the previous section. However, since several educators described weblog use in terms of reflection, it is necessary to make this a separate section. Reflection is an important part of developing students’ higher order thinking skills, as well as initiating knowledge transfer.

Kathleen Yancey, current Chair of the *CCCC*, has written a great deal on the uses of reflection in the writing classroom. Yancey defines reflection as including three main processes: “projection, retrospection (review), and revision” (6); When reflection is used for writing, Yancey that claims it uses the following three processes:

1. goal-setting, revisiting, and refining
2. text-revising in the light of retrospection
3. the articulating of what learning has taken place, as embodied in various texts as well as in the processes used by the writer. (Yancey 6)

In Yancey’s opinion, “reflection is a critical component of learning and of writing specifically” (7). It is clear, then, that reflection has an important place in the writing classroom, and many writing teachers are asking their students to experience reflection through blogging.

Reflection is a key aspect of the blog space for Paula Rosinski's writing courses; she specifically asks her students to "reflect" as they post entries. On her course syllabus, Rosinski explains how the individual student blogs will be "a space for you [students] to reflect on what we've discussed...things you learned.... This is a casual kind of 'journal' for you to reflect on ideas...." Again, Rosinski uses the term "reflect" as she explains how she intends the blog space to be used, offering suggestions as to what students might reflect on. In this sense, Rosinski likely has the expectation that her students will work through several of the reflection processes. *Figure 13*, below, is a blog posting by one of Rosinski's students.

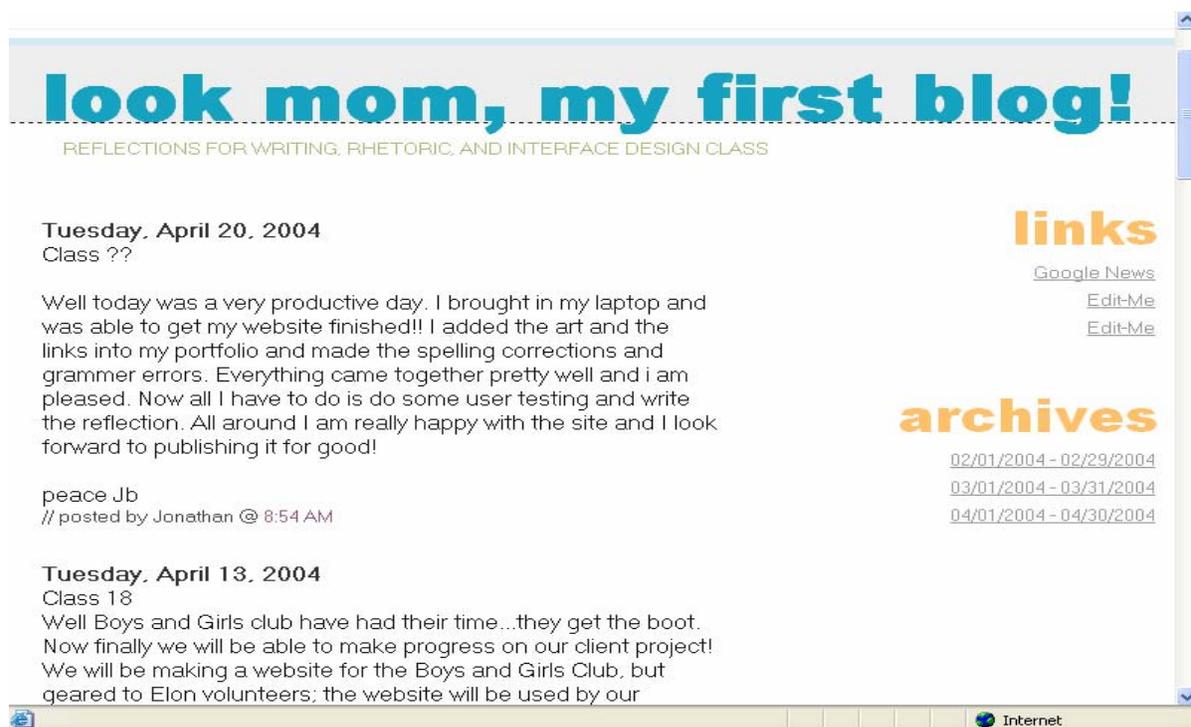


Figure 13: Sample Student Reflection 1

Jonathan's blog entry reveals how he has completed several reflective moves, such as reviewing and goal-setting. He begins by describing the events of his productive day: "I brought in my laptop and was able to get my website finished!!! I added the art and the links into my portfolio and made the spelling corrections and grammar errors." Here, Jonathan is reviewing the work he has already done; this is an essential step before moving on to an

assessment or projection for the future. Jonathan then reflects on how things are at this point based on the work he has already completed: “Everything came together pretty well and I am pleased.” Jonathan then completes another important step of the reflection process, goal setting: “Now all I have to do is do some user testing and write the reflection.” Jonathan is clearly setting goals for himself as to what steps he needs to take next. Ironically, Jonathan claims he still needs to write his reflection, but he has, in fact, completed a reflection with his blog posting here.

Another example of student reflection comes from Kerry who is also in Rosinski’s class. Kerry’s blog posting, presented in *Figure 14* below, reveals her working through many reflective processes as well.

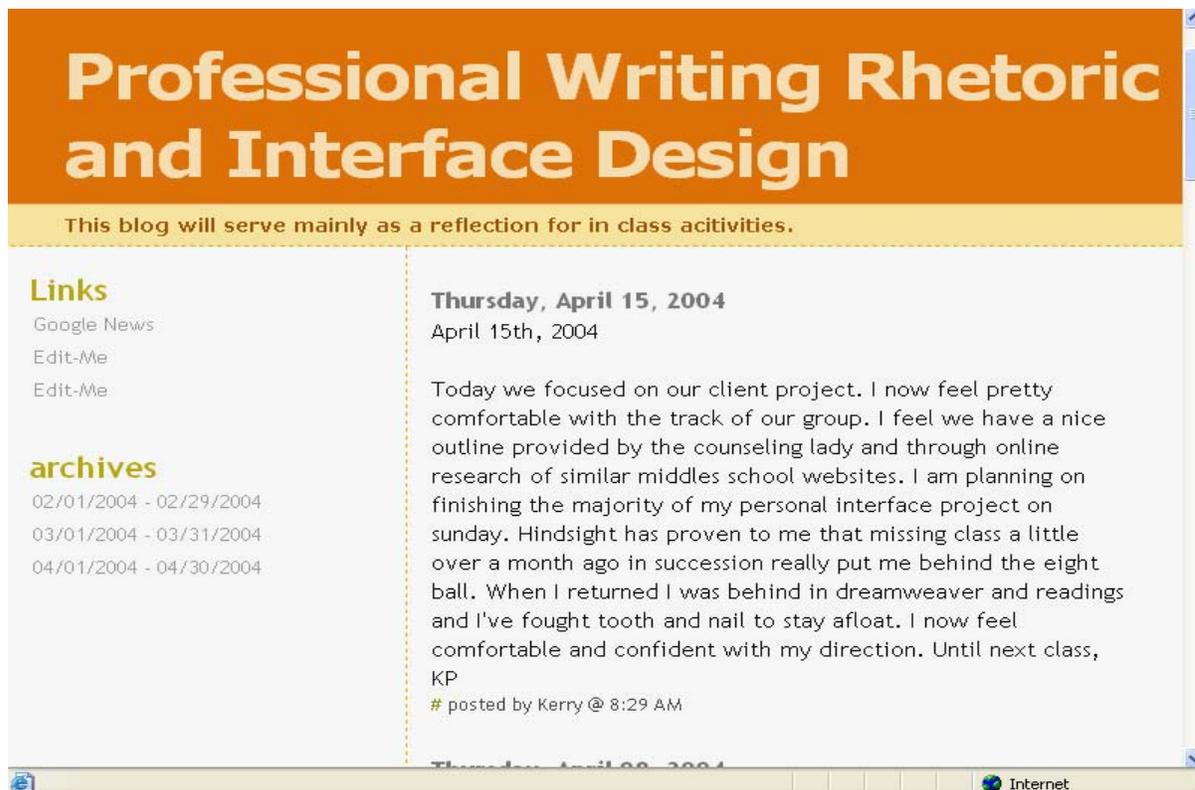


Figure 14: Sample Student Reflection 2

Kerry, like Jonathan, begins by summing up the present state of things and reviewing what has already been completed: “Today we focused on our client project.” Kerry then reflects

on how she feels about what's been done: "I now feel pretty comfortable with the track of our group. I feel we have a nice outline...." The next step Kerry completes is to set goals for the future: "I am planning on finishing the majority of my personal interface project on Sunday." After this goal-setting, Kerry thinks back even further to when she missed a day of class. She reflects on how behind she got in the coursework, but she also explains that she is feeling more comfortable and confident now. Kerry likely learned a valuable lesson about the importance of attending class, and this is evidenced by her thoughtful reflection on past circumstances and their future effects.

Other instructors in this sample also asked their students to use the blog space to reflect. Amy Stolley has her students use the course weblog to "reflect on the readings" for the course. And Shannon Nason hopes her students will use the blog to "reflect on class discussions." Also, in another of Charlie Lowe's courses, he explains that "The blog posting will act as: A place to reflect on digital culture and electronic communication," and further he adds: "[blog] posts could [also] be meta-reflection on the writing you are doing for this class." These educators are specifically using the word "reflect" to explain what content they want students posting to the blogs.

3.5 Weblogs for Student Discussion and Interaction

One of the most common ways that writing teachers from this sample are using weblogs in their courses is to promote student discussion and interaction. Though the weblog is conducive to personal journaling and reflection, it also has the versatility to promote virtual discussion. By having students use the "comment" feature of blogs, teachers can easily encourage discussion and interaction.

Supporting student interaction on the course blog, Sol Neely encourages students to respond directly to the work of their peers, but he does not *require* students to use the comment feature. On the course syllabus, Neely illustrates student roles on the blog space: “You are encouraged to address other students’ posts; with regard to such, you may critique or support other students’ work, but please remain respectful.” He states that the blog should act as a forum to “facilitate debate and discussion on [course] material.” On the course blog, Neely again emphasizes this interactive use of the blog space as a supplement to the academic work they’ll be doing on the blog: “Note that the blog can ideally be used as a tool for dialogue, so I encourage you to respond to each others’ submissions.” By explaining the blog as a “tool for dialogue,” Neely hopes his students will use the space for further discussions.

Several other writing teachers from the sample describe the blog as an interactive space for student sharing and discussion; the phrasing from many of these examples situates blog interaction as informal, but course-related. For example, Colin Charlton, also a writing teacher at Purdue, explains on the blog “Welcome” message that “[The blog] is a space where we can discuss your ideas for projects, [and you can] ask each other about ways to compose texts.” Charlton’s expectations here reveal that he wants the blog space to be an interactive community among students. Sybil Priebe also declares the course blog space as “A place for freshmen composition students to converse about project ideas, etc...,” and Robert Milde claims that his blogs will be used to “discuss technical and professional writing.” All of these educators value the blog space as somewhere students can interact and hold discussions, and thus they explain the space in those terms.

While the previous teachers encouraged a general interactivity on course blogs, Dennis Jerz has designed a specific assignment to promote student communication on blogs early in the semester. On his course syllabus, Jerz clearly states that “Students are expected to contribute actively to a positive classroom environment both in person and online.” In Jerz’s courses, the online discussion takes place on individual student weblogs, as well as on a home-base course blog. One of Jerz’s first assignments asks students to “Review one or both of your chosen blogs...,” and then post a review or response: “...you will respond to one another’s work here [on the blog] (by clicking on the discussion icon)...” After students have set up their blogs, Jerz has them complete this review assignment, where students choose a couple of their peers’ blogs on which to comment. An assignment such as this, early in the semester, begins to instill in students the interactive nature of the blog space.

Though many teachers from the sample used the blog space to promote interaction, some were not as pleased with the results. Amy Stolley, who uses the blog space to encourage discussion among her students, responded on the weblog survey that she:

...originally intended the blog to be used for continued discussion of the issues we discussed in class, especially for those who are less inclined to participate in a class discussion and who would prefer to respond electronically. Instead, students usually use the blog for social reasons rather than academic. (Stolley)

So, from her survey response, it seems that Stolley wants students to hold discussions on the course blog, but she is hoping they will be less for “social reasons” and more for “academic” reasons. Stolley’s dissatisfaction concerning students’ social blog discussion is similar to Kevin Brooks’ frustration with the personal responses on journal-style blogs. However, in Stolley’s case, the way she explains the blog space to her students may have opened the door

for more informal discussions. On her syllabus, Stolley explains that “The course blog...is a forum for us to continue the conversations we begin in the classroom after our class time is over.” This wording seems to capture the more academic use of the blog space, and how Stolley hopes it will be used (based on her survey response). However, on the actual blog, part of Stolley’s “About” section describes the blog space with fewer boundaries: “English 106 blog[:] A place to talk/write about class things and non-class things. Whatever suits your fancy....” Though the descriptions of the blog space on the syllabus and on the blog itself both emphasize student discussion and conversation, the wording of each gives students slightly different expectations. It seems that by allowing students to respond to “Whatever suits [their] fancy” gives them the opportunity to post more informal and personal responses to the blog, rather than the academic posts Stolley originally hoped for. Perhaps a lesson here would be that educators should make their expectations for the blog space clear to students, both on the course syllabus and blog.

Another writing teacher who uses the blog space to promote interaction among students is Bethany Miller. In her Weblog survey response, Miller notes that her “original goal for the weblog was to find a way for the students to interact through and with writing outside the traditional classroom. These goals were met because the weblog allowed students to...interact with me and their classmates....” In the “Welcome” message on Miller’s course blog (see *Figure 5*), she again emphasizes the interactive purposes of the course weblog: “Once again welcome to this new medium of class discussion. I hope it will provide another venue for positive and lively discussion.” Miller wants her students to use the blog space as a “new medium of class discussion.” Much like the idea of adding a new technological twist to print-based journals, Miller wants the blog space to serve as an updated version of class

discussion. This is not an entirely new concept. Teachers have been using Web-based forums for discussion, such as WebCT or Blackboard, for years now. However, the blog space, according to some educators, presents a unique situation that is different from these more common forms of online discussion boards.

Several educators responding to the Weblog survey commented on how the blog space differs from other types of online discussion spaces. For example, Kevin Brooks notes one of the benefits to using weblogs in the classroom: “weblogs can seem more real, more authentic, than course ware discussion boards. They have the potential to be active sites of exchange.” Brooks, in an often-cited quote displayed on Will Richardson’s *Weblogg-Ed*, continues explaining this distinction: “Students can start their own weblog very easily, but they can’t start their own Discussion Board—weblogging could be a tool for life” (*Weblogg-Ed*). Brooks’ comments here seem to be speaking to the issue of ownership. Especially if the course weblogs are organized where each student has an individual blog, students are able to create something that is truly theirs, taking an active role in the design process by choosing or designing templates. This is not something that discussion boards allow students to take part in. Brooks’ comments reveal that students take ownership when they create a weblog, and those skills of learning and using a new technology can carry over into their lives: “weblogging could be a tool for life.”

Also commenting on this issue was Terra Williams. In her survey response, she states: “Seeing them [students] engaged with each other’s blogs and with the web is really exciting. I’m not sure that what they do with blogs could easily be duplicated using other software like Blackboard, though I’ve tried.” Williams’ has used blogs in the past to promote student discussion and interaction. Williams’ comment reveals that she has tried

other discussion tools, such as Blackboard, but has not received the same types of responses as those that show up on the course weblog. John Lovas, a writing teacher at De Anza college, offers a reason as to why he thinks students respond differently on the blog space. On his Weblog survey response, Lovas states that “[Blogs]...make students aware of formatting and audience issues in a way that listservs and discussion boards do not.” This brings us, again, back to the public nature of weblogs. According to Lovas, the reasons students respond differently on a blog than they might using Blackboard is that students are supposedly more aware of their audience. This increased audience awareness affects the type of writing they do on the blog space, making it unique to that genre.

Use of “the comment function” on blogs is also an important part of promoting student interaction and discussion on blogs (Milde, survey). Robert Milde, who emphasizes the “public medium” of blogs, praises the ways in which the blog space encourages student interaction through use of this comment feature. He explains one of his original goals was “To do all this [have students interact and work with technology] in a medium more usable and fun than Blackboard. [Blackboard] didn’t have ‘journals’ in those days (which are still hard to use, though having password-protected journaling space is good for some purposes).” The last part of Milde’s comment points toward an important distinction between weblogs and programs such as Blackboard. He mentions the benefits of using a closed environment, such as Blackboard, for some assignments. Perhaps Milde, though implicitly, is making the case that blogs should not completely take the place of other discussion boards that are closed forums; rather, he is stating that blogs can be used to supplement Blackboard-type discussions in a course where having a public audience for student work would be appropriate. In fact, based on the information I have from his course syllabi, Milde does use

both types of technology in his courses. However, the blog space is strictly a public space. Milde does not use it for course organizational issues at all, and he uses Blackboard for more private discussions.

Other Weblog respondents note the benefits of using weblogs for student interaction and discussion. One respondent comments that “Weblogs allow for sustained discussions and development of thought;...and demonstrate some of the complexities of networked interaction” (Anonymous, survey). By typing their responses and then posting to the weblog, students are able to think through their response first and, ideally, give a more engaged and meaningful reply than one might find in a normal oral class discussion. Sybil Priebe also comments on the ways she has used weblogs and the benefits she has seen:

I simply used the course weblog to get students interacting with each other outside of the classroom walls. It also succeeded in extending my contact time with the students...The course blogs...were helpful in adding another area for students to continue the conversations from the classroom discussions....The course blogs also allowed me to have conversations ‘written down’ or tangible. I could print off the blog and bring it to class to comment on what someone said. Normally these thoughts outside of the classroom would have never been ‘captured.’ (Priebe, survey)

Priebe is explaining how one of the main reasons she uses course weblogs is to “get students interacting with each other.” Again, many educators from the sample share Priebe’s use for the weblog as a place for discussion and interaction. However, as you can see from the previous analysis, educators’ expectations vary quite a bit for the types of discussions that are to happen on the course weblog.

3.6 Weblogs as Places to Share Ideas

The purpose of weblogs as places for students to share ideas and brainstorm is closely related to the previous issue of student interaction and discussion on the blog space.

However, as with reflection, enough educators from the sample specifically cite this type of purpose; therefore, it is necessary to separate this section from the previous.

Because writing is often process driven, writing teachers find the blog space to be beneficial during the pre- and early writing stages. Therefore, many writing teachers ask their students to post ideas for projects, as well as conduct brainstorming activities on their course blog(s). From many of these teachers' comments, it seems that by posting ideas and brainstorming on the weblog, students have a more formal and public audience for these ideas. This may increase their ability to think through things early in the writing stages. Also, this gives students the chance to read preliminary feedback from their peers and/or teacher concerning their ideas.

Two educators who ask their students to use the blog space for, among other things, the exploration of ideas are Charlie Lowe and Terra Williams. On their syllabus they state, "The blog posting will act as: A place to explore ideas which will be developed into one of the writing projects." Again, this use for the blog encourages students to work on idea generation in the early stages of the writing process. Barbara Ganley comments on the Weblog survey that she has three main uses for the technology, one of them being "to create connections...between students and their own work and process." By having students post work and ideas throughout many of the stages of the writing process, students are better able to see those connections between themselves as writers and the processes of their writing.

For Paula Rosinski, an important part of the reflection she asks her students to conduct on the blog space involves reflecting on ideas. On the syllabus she explains that “[The blog] is a space for you to reflect on...ideas you’d like to research or found interesting.” Rosinski, like the previously quoted writing teachers, encourages students to use the blog space to consider thoughts that might turn into research topics. In her response to the Weblog survey, Rosinski reflects on the way students use the blog for these purposes. She states: “For each of the courses I also asked students to use the weblogs as a place to keep track of project ideas, steps, and strategies. I think this goal was sometimes met for some students, but not always” (Rosinski, survey). As she states on her syllabus, and then on the survey response, Rosinski asks her students to use the blog for planning and preparation including “project ideas, steps, and strategies.” Unfortunately, though, Rosinski reports that some of her students did not benefit from these types of prewriting strategies meant for the blog space.

Another writing teacher that uses the blog space for idea sharing and peer feedback in the early writing stages is Robert Milde. He claims that in his “composition classes, [he uses blogs] to have students post ideas on a usable space where everyone can see and respond to each others’ writing” (Milde, survey). However, much like Rosinski, Milde comments later that his “lower-level classes have shown little interest in commenting on others’ writing” (survey). This brings us back to the previously explored issue of student motivation and interest. Rosinski explains that some of her students didn’t see the benefits of using blogs during the early stages of writing, and Milde also notices this with his students. A Weblog survey respondent, who wishes to remain anonymous, remarks that he/she:

require[s] students to post each of their project topics on the blog so that other students can see what type of projects they're doing since [he/she] use[s] a choose-your-own-genre approach, and if the project can be done in collaboration with other students, then students what other students are doing and find a team to work with.

(Anonymous, survey)

As with Rosinski and Milde, this educator finds that the original goals were not completely met: “many students don’t check the blog on a regular basis and some of them don’t post to it at all” (Anonymous, survey). Though this educator claims to “require” students to post project topics, he/she does not grade student work or participation on the blog and suggests this as a modification to blog use in the future.

Similar to Rosinski and Milde, Sybil Priebe also asks her students to use the blogs in the early stages of writing. On one of Priebe’s first blog messages, she writes to the students: “Hey all!~ Glad to see some of you on ‘here.’ Feel free to start brainstorming about any of the papers or projects...For instance, what are some of your ideas for Paper #1? Maybe we should brainstorm a little in class everyday...would that help too?” (Priebe, blog). Priebe asks her students to use the blog space specifically for “brainstorming.” In the above quoted passage, Priebe prompts students to respond with their ideas, and even asks if it would be helpful for them to brainstorm everyday. On her course syllabus, Priebe also reinforces the idea of using the blog for brainstorming: “You will also use your blog to brainstorm, draft, think through your papers and essays for class....” The blog space, for Priebe, seems ideal for this type of early work in the writing process.

A final example comes from Amy Stolley who asks her students to use the blog space for sharing ideas, but not necessarily ideas related to a specific project. On her course

syllabus, Stolley explains that the blog will be a place to “share ideas about the course material [and] ideas about language.” Though her prompt is a bit more general, Stolley still hopes that students will post ideas related to “course material.” This brings us to the next commonly cited purpose for weblogs in which students are asked to engage with and respond to course reading materials.

3.7 Weblogs as Places to Engage with Assigned Readings

Many writing teachers from the present sampling also ask students to complete blog assignments in which they engage with the course readings in some way. This engagement can be in the form of a summary/application assignment, or response/opinion on the reading, or a number of other ways to post about assigned readings. Below we will explore the ways in which writing teachers ask students to use blogs in this way.

Several writing teachers explained that they want students to respond to course readings on the blog space. For instance, Alice D’Amore asks her students to use the blog as “a weekly source for reading and writing response” (D’Amore, blog). And Robert Milde states that students should “Write...weblog entries in response to course readings” (Milde, blog). Similar to making a “response to course readings,” Sol Neely explains one purpose for the blog space as: “to write thoughts and concerns on a week’s reading” (syllabus). D’Amore, Milde, and Neely see the value of having students engage with texts on the course blog space. Students have a chance to give their thoughts and opinions in a new kind of discussion forum.

Charlie Lowe has an extensive explanation on the course syllabus as to how he expects students to use the blog space to respond to readings. On the bulleted list of items concerning uses for the course blog, Lowe’s syllabus states: “The blog posting will act

as:[...]A place to engage in dialogue with texts.” Then, on one of the first blog postings titled “Blogging to the Course Website,” Lowe explains one way that students will use the space: “Each time there is a reading assignment, a workshop group will be assigned to post their reading response to the course home page using the **create story link**.” Much like D’Amore, Milde, and Neely, Lowe wants his students to post a “response” to course readings on the blog space, but he has devised a special assignment involving “workshop group” responses. And then for another of his writing classes, Lowe posts a similar message: “Each time you have a reading assignment for this class, you will be responsible for posting a reading response to your weblog...Your response is to consist of two parts: a short summary...[and]...your response.” Here, Lowe is a bit more specific about the type of posting he wants when students engage with texts on the blog space. He clearly specifies a two-part posting that involves “summary” and “response.” Lowe may have felt the need to add this specificity if students were not exhibiting a combination of both types of skills. He is able to clearly explain his expectations to students, stating that they should not simply summarize, nor only respond with thoughts and opinions; rather, students should exhibit both kinds of academic competencies when responding to texts on course blog(s). In this way, Lowe might combat some of the earlier addressed issues of students not using the blog space for academic purposes.

Similar to Lowe’s two-part reading response post is Neely’s assignment which asks students to “summarize a specific passage and apply it to some current events” (Neely, syllabus). Neely’s course involves engagement with current events. Like Lowe’s explanation, Neely clearly asks students to do two things: “summarize” and “apply” (syllabus). One of Neely’s colleagues at Purdue, Shannon Nason, also asks students to

respond to readings, but her explanation does not involve the two parts. Nason explains on the course “Welcome” message that students will use the blog as an “online public square” to, among other things, “critically analyze a reading from your textbook or the newspaper.” Here, Nason does not specify that students must first summarize and then apply or analyze; rather, she simply asks students to engage with these texts in some sort of critical analysis. One explanation for why Nason is not quite as specific here is that her assignment and explanation are posted to the blog space, a considerably less formal space (though this often depends on the way it is used by educators) than the traditional course syllabus, even if that syllabus is online. Nason, unlike Neely and Lowe, leaves a bit more room for students to interpret her expectations for a critical analysis⁵. Nason might want to offer her students more freedom in their blog responses, but she also risks receiving non-academic responses that do not meet her expectations of critical analysis.

Another anonymous educator posted an assignment to the blog space that is more specific. This writing teacher asked students to do the following: “Before you comment [to the blog], take a few minutes to review the readings. Then, in your comment, discuss one statement or quote from one of the readings that you found intriguing/interesting/innovative and explain why.” Though this instructor has posted to the blog space, like Nason, the assignment is more detailed. The instructors’ expectations are clearly stated that students should 1) think first, 2) discuss one quote that they found interesting, and 3) explain why. Students are equipped with a step-by-step process to follow as they post their responses.

⁵ Educators would likely have different opinions as to how beneficial or detrimental this would be for students. In other words, Nason has essentially left the blog assignment of “critical analysis” open to a great deal of student interpretation. Some educators might see this openness as a positive in that it gives students more freedom in how they respond, whereas other educators would see this openness as a negative in that students are not given clear expectations for how to respond to blog assignments.

This teacher is more likely to receive blog postings that meet his/her expectations since students have been adequately informed of what they should be doing.

The data reveal that the blog space is useful for writing courses that ask students to engage with outside readings. Megan Conklin of Elon College responded that one of the largest benefits she has found from using the blog space is that it offers an “easy-to-administer place to write up quick critical thinking exercises, summaries, etc” (survey). In this virtual space, educators can ask students to summarize, analyze, and respond to course readings in a way that prepares students for later stages in the writing process. By having students respond to readings on the blog, educators have a place to begin class discussions, or continue class discussions that have already started, or create a record of students’ engagement with readings, or hold *all* students accountable for their responses to readings, etc. Basically, as evidenced by the previous examples, teachers find the blog space beneficial for having students engage with and respond to course readings.

3.8 Weblogs as Places to Link Web Materials

One of the major features of earlier, filter-style weblogs was the way in which bloggers could post links to items on the Web and add commentary to those links; in this way, early bloggers were acting as Web editors. As Blood, Herring et al., and others have noted, there has recently been a shift away from the older filter-style blogs towards the more personal, journal-style. However, some educators still see the value of using filter-style blogs in their courses, and many from the present sample are asking their students to use blogs to link to Web materials.

For one of her blog assignments, Amy Stolley asks her students to post and/or link “snippets of articles, books, speeches, or any other kind of writing that you like. Then, write

a paragraph explaining how the author uses language effectively (and rhetorically) to convey his or her meaning” (Stolley, blog). Charlie Lowe has a similar explanation of the blog space when he states that students should post to the blog often, and “these posts could be...an example of good writing that you recently read.” Stolley and Lowe do not limit their students to only linking to writing on the Web, but the ease in which students can post a hyperlink makes these types of assignments ideal for course blogs.

Other writing teachers, such as Robert Milde, have developed particular blog assignments for students to post links to Web materials. In several of his courses, Milde explains that they will be using the blog to “link to web resources.” *Figure 15* below shows the posting with Milde’s specific job assignment, which asks students to link to Web sources. In an earlier section of Milde’s writing course, he explains that the blog will be a place where his class “will discuss editing and writing, as well as work on Project 2. For that project, we are going to find examples of professionals writing in careers or fields of interest to each of us. If the examples are on the web, we’ll link to them here” (blog). Milde has used this same assignment for other classes; *Figure 15* shows a similar explanation of the assignment.

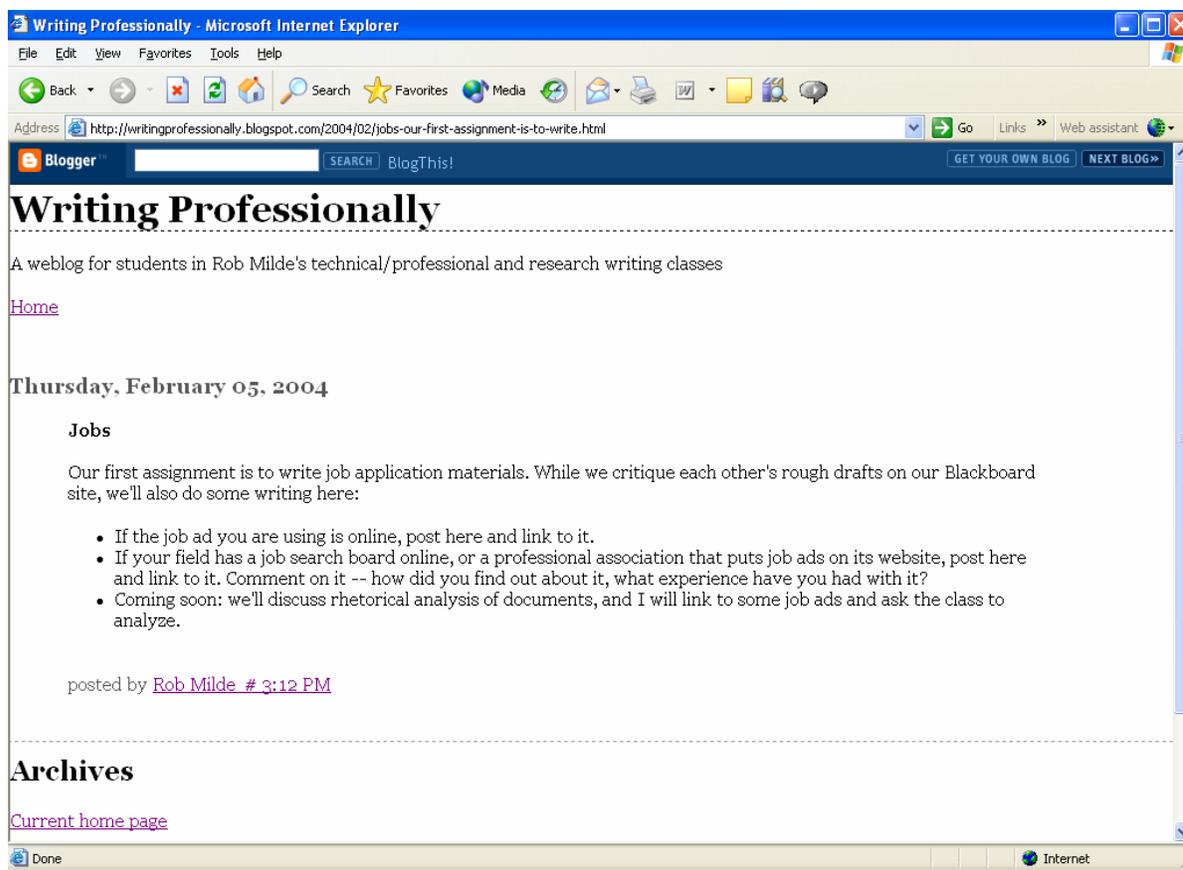


Figure 15: Robert Milde's Job Assignment, Linking Sample

Basically, Milde wants his students to find examples of professional writing, and he encourages his students to post links to these examples if they are on the Web. In this way, the student blogger acts as a filter for professional writing on the Web, offering commentary as to why he/she finds that writing interesting.

As explained earlier, Dennis Jerz asks his students to conduct a review of each others' blogs early in the semester. As part of this assignment Jerz explains that students should "Be sure to provide links [to the students' blogs], so your readers can see your sources for themselves" (blog). While completing this assignment, students are able to post links to the blog they are reviewing so readers can see the original source. This brings in the very important issue, especially for college writing courses, of plagiarism. How can teachers combat the issue of plagiarism when they encourage their students to link to Web materials

from their blogs? Jerz clearly asks his students to post a link, but what about other Web materials that have copyright issues?

Other educators using Weblogs have addressed the issue of plagiarism and proper citation of Web sources. For example, Spencer Schaffner has a very clear explanation on his course syllabus as to how students should handle citation. He states: “In your blog, you are encouraged to link extensively to other sites. However, if you fail to cite other people’s ideas and language in your work, you’ve committed plagiarism. Summarizing someone else’s work and not citing them is also plagiarism” (Schaffner, syllabus). Schaffner clearly draws the line for what would be considered plagiarism on the blog space. He wants students to “link extensively,” but he wants them to use proper citation as well. Schaffner provides clear guidelines for how he wants his students to cite Web material that they have linked.

Charlie Lowe encourages his students to link to items on their blogs, but also emphasizes the use of proper citation when doing so. Lowe, who offers his students background and history on weblogs, reminds his students of the importance of linking: “Don’t forget. Bloggers link. Blog posts which refer to or use the ideas of another text on the web must follow good citation practices” (blog). Like Schaffner, Lowe hopes his students will take advantage of the use of blogs for linking Web materials, but he also reminds them to cite these items.

Several educators who responded to the Weblog survey comment that one of the benefits of using blogs in the classroom is students’ ability to link to Web materials. For example, Terra Williams states that the most beneficial aspect of using weblogs is “The sharing [o]f information through hyperlinking. Students have a knack for finding information on the web that they want to share with others – whether it is related to class or

not. Seeing them engaged with each other's blogs and with the web is really exciting" (survey). Williams' comments reinforce that the average college student is very familiar with the Web; and though weblogs may be a new technology to them, students are happy to use the resource as a way to share what they find on the Web. By acknowledging this familiarity with the Web that many of our students have, educators can use students' search-and-find skills to an advantage, creating assignments that will hone and develop this important research activity.

Other survey respondents, one who wanted to remain anonymous, noted that blogs are beneficial for "interaction and commentary on outside websites (through linking)" (Anonymous, survey). And Lynne Rhodes comments that they are beneficial for "easy posting...[of] links for additional material" (survey). However, based on what I have seen from the present sample, many educators are not pushing link-driven blogs in their courses. Despite this trend, Lowe comments on his Weblog survey response that some of his students find blogs useful "as project management tools, places that students can use to discuss and track their group project work. For instance, students share research notes and keep a weekly project log." Filter-style blogs can be an excellent tool for Web research, offering students the chance to link to and cite sources on the Web, as Lowe encourages his students to do. Lowe's use of weblogs as filter-style research tools is in the minority, though, based on the present sample. Perhaps in the future, educators will begin using link-driven blogs more often in their research-based courses.

3.9 Weblogs as Collaborative Projects

A few of the educators sampled in this study used student blogs for particular, free-standing collaborative projects, as well as a supporting mechanism throughout a collaborative

group project. In this way, small groups of students (usually three to five) either create a weblog for their project (likely to present material as a final product), and/or students use the weblog as a shared organizational tool throughout the collaborative process. Collaborative learning has become a cornerstone of composition pedagogy within the last few decades; the topic was introduced most notably by Kenneth Bruffee in the mid-eighties.

In his article on collaborative learning, Bruffee advocates for more teachers to use this valuable educational tool. Collaboration and discussion-based courses were already gaining popularity among literature teachers during the mid nineteen-eighties, but Bruffee argues for their place in the writing classroom. He explains the collaborative situation:

What students do when working collaboratively on their writing is not write or edit or, least of all, read proof. What they do is converse. They talk about the subject and about the assignment. They talk through the writer's understanding of the subject. They converse about their own relationship and, in general, about relationships in an academic or intellectual context between students and teachers. Most of all they converse about and as a part of writing. (Bruffee, 645)

In previous sections we've seen how the blog space is used to promote discussion, interaction, and idea sharing, which all seem to apply to Bruffee's statements about student conversations. On the blog space, students can converse virtually and from remote locations, when necessary. Though discussion on blogs should by no means take the place of in-class, face-to-face collaboration, it provides another medium for teachers to encourage, as Bruffee might say, "conversations" among students about their writing and assignments. The blog also offers a space for collaborative group projects: both works-in-progress and final products.

One teacher from the sample uses an in-depth collaborative blogging assignment. Laura Ward explains the “Collaborative Symposium Blog” assignment on her course syllabus:

For this assignment, you will be working in groups of three to four students. Your task will be to examine short stories read during the first three weeks of class and find a common theme running through several of the stories...Groups will be responsible for creating a weblog script depicting an imaginary symposium where the characters and/or narrators of the stories have gathered to discuss your chosen theme...Some important things I will be looking for: 1. Organization. Your group’s weblog should be thoughtfully centered around your selected theme... 2. Use of the texts... 3. Presentation...The weblog should reflect a careful and collaborative effort on the part of all group members. (Ward, syllabus)

As you can see from the above quoted passage, a major part of Ward’s writing course assignment involves students creating a collaborative weblog to present their work on themes in short stories. Ward explains that she will be looking specifically at organization and presentation issues as they relate to the group blog, and she also states in other parts of the assignment sheet that she will teach them how to create a basic weblog structure in class. In this way, students can share the load of creating, designing, and posting thoughtful and appropriate material to the group weblog. The blog for Ward’s assignment becomes a presentation tool for one specific assignment and a place to post a final product of their work.

Though the final products of Ward’s students were not accessible, part of one group’s blog is pictured in *Figure 16* below. This entry exemplifies group work completed during

the early preparation stages for their blog symposium project. Alex, Allan, and Britney are deciding how the story and theme will work for the Blog Symposium project.

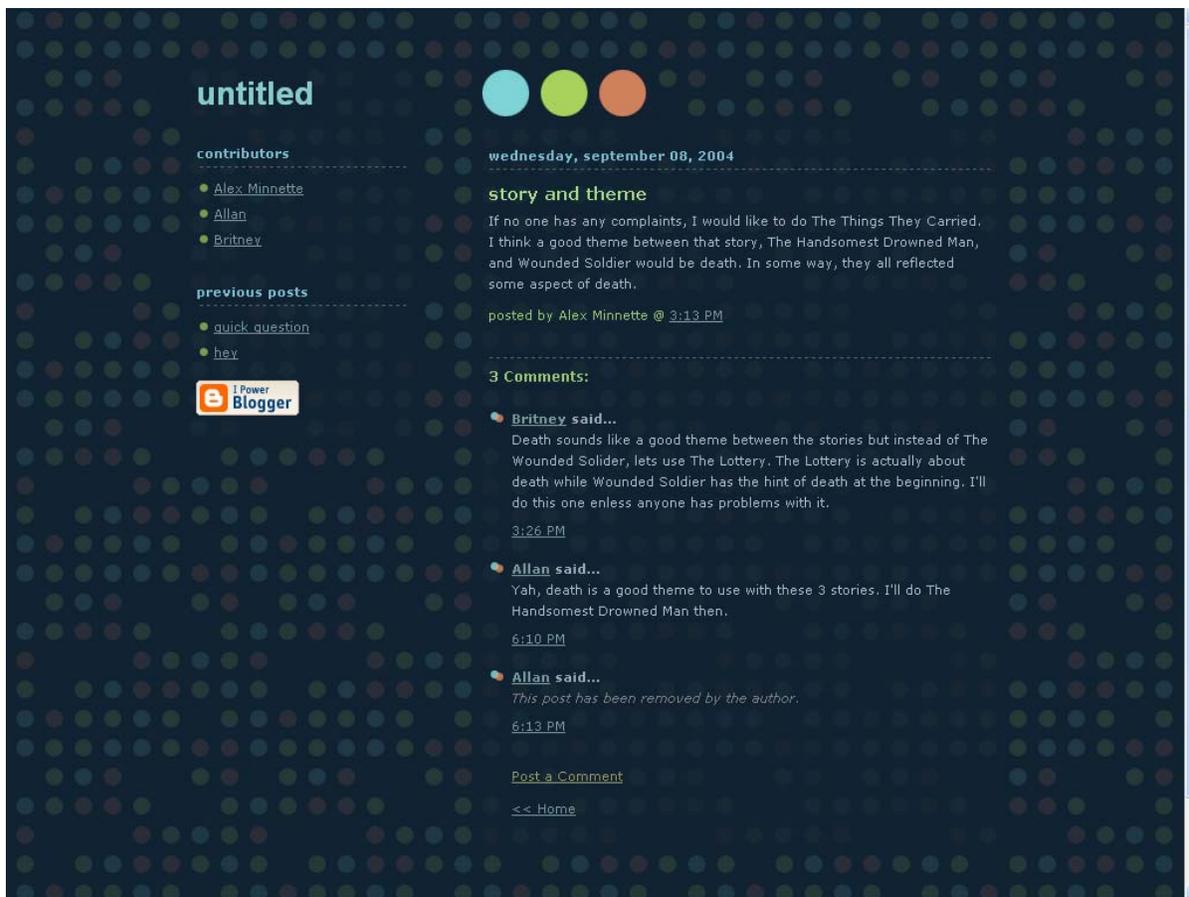


Figure 16: Laura Ward's Students, Collaborative Blog Sample

I wanted to include the image of this blog template for the visual aspect, but I will quote from the image heavily because it is difficult to see in black and white. In the first major posting “story and theme,” Alex proposes the idea that his group work with the story “The Things They Carried” because he thinks the theme of death relates to two other stories: “The Handsomest Drowned Man” and “The Wounded Soldier.” Below this posting are three comments. The first is by Alex’s group member, Britney, who comments that “Death sounds like a good theme between the stories but instead of The Wounded Soldier, lets use The Lottery.” Britney agrees with Alex’s suggestions, but adds her own thoughts on the direction

the group should take. Allan, the group's third member, then adds his comments. He agrees that "death is a good theme to use with these 3 stories," and suggests that he "do The Handsomest Drowned Man." This example shows how a small group of students can use the blog space for planning and preparation for a course project. The group has easily made decisions, conducted brainstorming, and begun dividing the work load. Since blogs are easy to access with the Internet from nearly any location, these students can have a virtual group meeting, without the hassle of coordinating three schedules. Since the blog is collaborative among the three group members, the rest of the class doesn't see their preparation at this time, so they can brainstorm ideas freely.

The blog space can also be used for collaborative research. For example, one anonymous educator asks her students to complete a weblog project in which they maintain and conduct research using the blog space. The groups are mostly divided into three to four students each, and each of these groups creates a weblog for their collaborative work. The collaborative research blog is an easily accessible place to store links, summaries, and information pertaining to group projects.

As mentioned previously, Charlie Lowe asks his students to use blogs as "project management tools, places that students can use to discuss and track their group project work" (blog). Keeping a "project log" for collaboration is a good way to promote group organization, while also providing a clear record for teachers to track individual participation within group projects. Cindy Nichols, of North Dakota State University, also encourages her students to use the course "team blog" as a place for collaborative group work. On one of her postings, she states: "Feel free to use this weblog as you wish...share notes; devise a hands-on writing session for your Group Presentation, whatever works" (Nichols, blog).

Nichols, here, leaves the use of the blog space largely up to the students' preference. However, she does suggest they use it as a place for their "Group Presentation." The collaborative blog space can be advantageous for process and product types of assignments.

Other teachers, such as John Lovas, have designed collaborative activities specifically for the blog space. On his course blog, Lovas states that one of their projects "will involve each group identifying an information need of De Anza students and then organize that information and publish it on the weblog." Lovas seems to be using the particularly public nature of blogs here to encourage students to publish their collaborative group work. The data reveal that collaborative group blogs have unique benefits for projects in writing courses. Based on the few examples listed here, there are a broad range of assignments that could be enhanced through the use of blogs as planning, research, and presentation centers.

3.10 Weblogs as Places to Ask and Answer Questions

Another way that writing teachers are using the blog space is for students to ask questions. Some educators hope that students' peers will be able to help them answer those questions on the blog space, thus continuing the interactive/discussion aspects of blogging, while other educators see it as a chance for them to answer students' questions quickly and informally without taking up class time.

On her course syllabus, Amy Stolley states that the blog can be used as an "opportunity to...raise questions." Similarly, Robert Milde explains that students in his courses "can also post [their] questions to [the] weblog, and others can answer in the comments" (blog). In Milde's case, he indicates students will be able to answer each others' questions on their blog. Cindy Nichols asserts on the blog home page that this is "A group blog for my writing students. This is a place for...question-answer help." Sybil Priebe also

encourages her students to “post questions as well as answer others” (syllabus). Stolley, Milde, Nichols, and Priebe all value the blog space as an informal place that is ideal for quick questions and answers.

Similarly, Paula Rosinski comments on her survey response that she wants her students to use blogs as “a place to pose questions.” She states that she has “found it useful...to read their blogs and see where students have questions, so I can address these questions in the next class period” (Rosinski, survey). Again, Rosinski, like others, sees the potential for blogs as a place to address student concerns that might be brought up again in class. Often teachers are bombarded with the same question posed by many different students. By having students post their questions to the blog, the entire class benefits from seeing the question-and-answer discussion, which cuts down on the teacher’s need to provide individual responses.

For example, one of Robert Milde’s students posts the following message as one of the first few for the course: “I am not sure what this blog consists of. I just know we are to use it. Anyone else in ENG 300 got any ideas?” (Milde, blog). Though this student’s question is rather broad and vague, especially since on the previous post Milde goes into detail about how to use the blog space, it shows that questions are often fielded on blogs. Though this student does not receive a response on the blog, Milde likely addressed this question off the blog space, and – at the least – the teacher is aware of this question and issue because of the student’s post.

3.11 Weblogs as Places to Discuss Non-Course-Related Topics

There are a few educators from the sample who encourage, or are, at least, open to students discussing on the blog space issues and topics not necessarily related to the course.

Though some of the wordings are subtle, some writing teachers leave the blog space open for students to discuss any type of topics they like.

For example, in *Figure 17* below, we can see the “Team Blog” for Cindy Nichols’ course. Under the title, she lists some information about the blog.

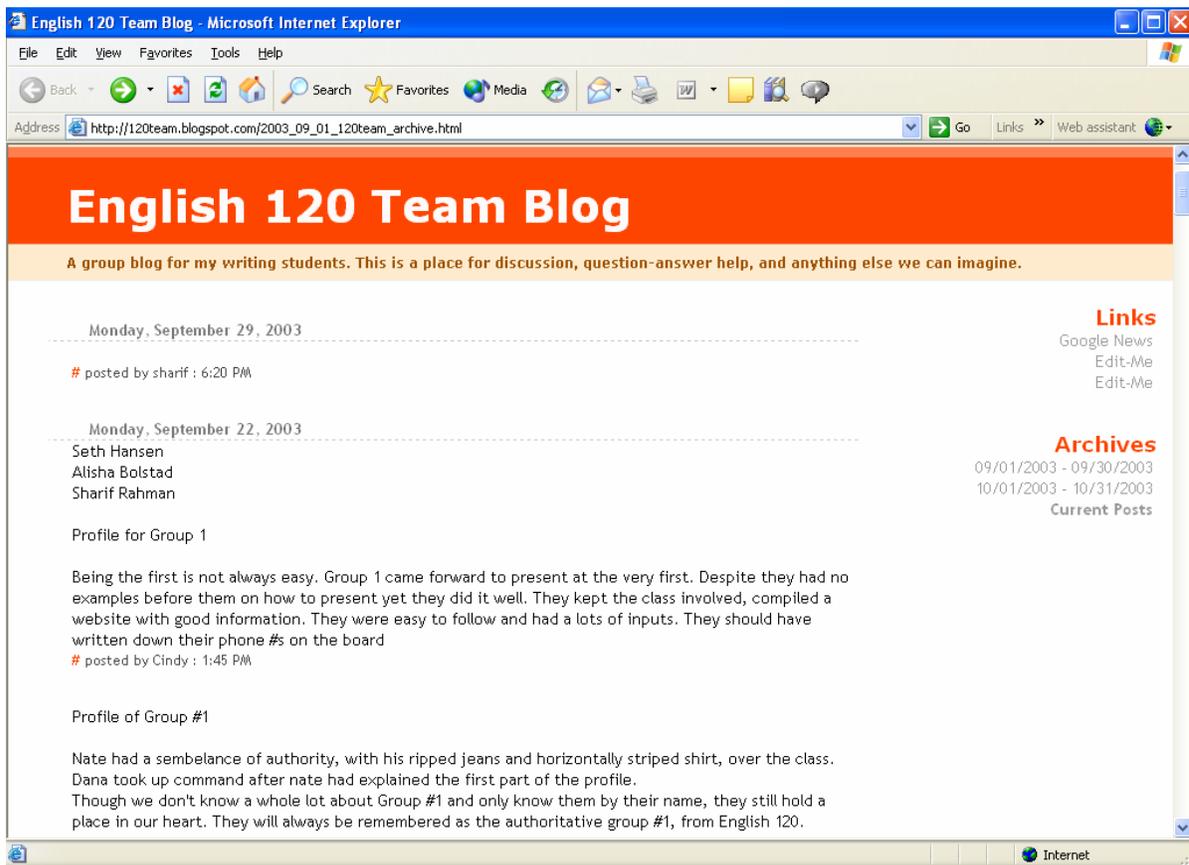


Figure 17: Cindy Nichols’ Team Blog, Question-Answer Sample

The information under the title directs students to specific tasks such as “discussion” and “question-answer help,” but it also leaves the blog space open to “anything else we can imagine” (Nichols, blog). By having this type of wording, Nichols is truly leaving the discussion space of the blog open to her students, which could lead to very productive or destructive types of comments. However, on the first “Welcome” posting, Nichols reinforces this freedom, but defines certain “rules” for the space: “Feel free to use this weblog as you wish, keeping in mind all of the usual rules for courtesy” (Nichols, blog). Based on her

wording, Nichols shows she is open to having discussion on the blog that doesn't necessarily relate to the course.

Amy Stolley is also very open to the blog as a place for different kinds of discussion. On her course blog, Stolley states that it will be a place to “talk/write about class things and non-class things,” and on the syllabus, a place to “share ideas about course material...or anything else, for that matter.” As mentioned in an earlier section, Stolley comments on the survey that she is frustrated by how her students use the blog for more social purposes. But her wording on the blog and syllabus, as quoted above, leave the blog space open to nearly any type of discussion. Though the blog might be a good place for discussing “non-class things,” it seems awkward to mesh academic and social (class and non-class) things in one place. This type of wording might give students a mixed message that they don't truly understand the expectations of the teacher.

The blog space is difficult enough for students to fully grasp audience, linking, and collaborative issues; throwing in topics that confuse course and non-course discussions on the blog space might be too much for them to handle. If educators plan to use blogs in an educational setting, it is important to distinguish them from personal or social type blogs (edublogs vs. blogs).

3.12 Charting Purposes

Because this work is largely definitional and seeks to catalogue the ways in which writing teachers are using weblogs, the previous sections have been broken into separate categories. But many of the categories overlap and most educators are using weblogs in more than one of the aforementioned ways. The chart below more accurately displays the many ways that teachers are using weblogs in their writing courses.

Table 3: Educators' Uses of Weblogs

Uses	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Instructor											
Anonymous	X					X	X	X	X	X	
Brooks			X		X						
C. Charlton					X					X	X
J. Charlton					X						
Conklin									X		
D'Amore			X		X		X				
Fornes		X			X						
Ganley	X	X			X	X	X				
Glasgow	X				X					X	
Gussman	X								X		
Jerz			X		X		X	X			
Lovas	X				X				X		
Lowe	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Milde	X	X			X	X	X	X		X	
Miller	X		X		X						
Nason	X				X		X				
Neely	X				X		X				
Nichols			X		X				X	X	X
Priebe	X	X	X		X	X				X	X
Rhodes							X	X			
Rosinski	X		X	X		X				X	
Schaffner	X				X			X			
Stolley				X	X	X		X		X	X
Ward	X	X	X						X	X	
Williams	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Carrie	X		X								

Along the left column are listed the names of educators whose blogs were accessible for this study, and along the top are listed the eleven major uses found from studying these blogs.

Please consult the list directly below to see the corresponding purposes for each of the numbers. Also note that though thirty-two teachers responded to the Weblog survey, not all of them provided links to their course blogs. Therefore, the chart above only contains information for those educators whose blogs were accessible.

1. As a particularly public space with a broad audience
2. To post student work
3. As a journal

4. To reflect on course related assignments
5. For student discussion and interaction
6. To explore and share ideas, as well as brainstorm
7. To engage with and respond to assigned readings
8. To link to Web materials
9. For collaborative projects
10. To ask and answer questions
11. To discuss topics not necessarily related to the course

Table 3 shows how the sample of writing teachers uses weblogs in their courses for diverse purposes. Some writing teachers, such as Lowe, Milde, and Williams use weblogs for nearly all of the eleven ways found in this study. However, other educators, such as J. Charlton and Conklin only use weblogs for a few of these purposes.⁶ These results raise questions as to whether students benefit from using the blog for several functions, or whether students feel overwhelmed (may not benefit as much) from a diverse number of uses. Questions and issues of this type will be addressed in the following chapter.

⁶ Again, I would like to reiterate that the information here is based only on what was accessible in terms of course syllabi, blog home pages, and Weblog survey responses. I was not able to read every single entry for each of the blogs viewed, so some educators may be using blogs in more than the ways listed here.

Chapter 4

Results and Implications

Weblogs carry our intentions. They, like all good tools, work with human will and imagination to help us create. Like pieces of paper, weblogs are generally useful. Take a piece and write a sonnet, wrap a piece of fish in it, and then light a fire over it. I think I gain from reflecting why that might be. A student can gain, too, if the weblog becomes a way of approaching any problem.

- Terry Elliot

In the previous Chapter, we explored the various ways in which writing teachers in this sample are using weblogs in their courses. Based on information from their blogs, course syllabi, and survey responses, eleven core purposes arose as the most common ways in which writing instructors ask their students to use weblogs. The following section will review the results from the first part of the weblog survey, which included several multiple choice questions. In the explanation of these results, the analysis will also draw on educators' open-ended responses. These results will lead into this study's implications for using weblogs in the classroom.

4.1 Results: Multiple Choice Responses to Weblog Survey

The following set of data was based on the sample of thirty-two writing instructors who responded to the weblog survey (complete survey questions appear in Appendix B). Shortened versions of each question are used in the table below. In *Table 4*, the results from the multiple choice questions of the survey are listed; each number is based on the thirty-two total sampled. Percentages for each set of responses are given in parentheses.

Table 4: Multiple Choice Results of Weblog Survey

Question	Results		
	Yes	No	No Response
Refer to name?	30 (94%)	2 (6%)	0
Have personal?	22 (69%)	9 (28%)	1 (3%)
Blog member?	7 (22%)	25 (78%)	0
Students graded?	30 (94%)	2 (6%)	0
Required to interact?	21 (66%)	11 (34%)	0
Use again in future?	31 (97%)	1 (3%)	0

	<u>On a Scale of 1-5, with 5 being VERY</u>				
	1	2	3	4	5
Comfortable with technology?	0	0	5 (16%)	7 (22%)	20 (62%)
Overall satisfaction?	0	1 (3%)	11 (34%)	14 (44%)	6 (19%)

	<u>Number of Years</u>				
	<1	1	2	3	>3
Use in classroom?	3 (9%)	10 (31%)	8 (25%)	6 (19%)	5 (16%)

	<u>Organization of Blogs in Course</u>			
	1 for Course	Individual Students'	Both	Other
Organization?	10 (31%)	2 (6%)	18 (57%)	2 (6%)

As is evidenced from the results above, all but two of the respondents gave permission to use their name when referring to this survey. Again, many of the respondents are well-known in the field of research on weblogs, so they were more than willing to offer their responses and identify themselves. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents indicated that they also had a personal blog that they used in addition to the blog(s) they set up in their courses, with 28% not having a personal blog and three percent not responding. This number was slightly lower than expected. The literature on the introduction of weblogs into the classroom indicates that many teachers who were personal blog users expanded this technology into classroom use. However, the results from this survey show that teachers using blogs may not be as likely to have blogs for themselves. Perhaps the technology of

weblogs is now taking off as a unique pedagogical tool on its own, rather than simply a personal tool that has implications for the classroom.

The next question, which asked if respondents were part of a blogging community such as Will Richardson's *Weblogg-ed* or *the Educational Blogger's Network*, revealed that not many (only 22%) of the surveyed teachers participated in these blogging support systems. This low number was quite surprising; we might expect teachers using blogs in their classroom to have built extensive networks and be involved in the ongoing research and conversations that these sites promote. A few respondents note that they are not sure what exactly constitutes a "blogging community"; they might not have been a part of the ones listed, but might have had another support system of other edubloggers not affiliated with a formal organization. This would reveal the need, or perhaps desire, of teachers using blogs and new technologies to be involved in some sort of community with other teachers doing the same things.

The next question in *Table 4* refers to whether students were graded on their participation and/or work posted to the weblog. Ninety-four percent of the teachers surveyed responded that they did grade students. This tendency may arise from teachers' need to justify the place or role of blogs in their courses; assigning a grade to an activity makes it an integral part of the course. Secondly, assigning a grade to an assignment such as blogging shows the value that the teacher places on the assignment and students may be more willing to participate or respond if they know there is a grade attached. Some educators who responded that their students received a grade for blog work report concerns about this practice, though. For instance, Colin Charlton states that though he answered "yes" to the question: "[he] d[oes]n't technically grade blog participation" (survey). Charlton explained

that he uses blog participation for attendance purposes and “daily writing grades”; “So I’m making sure people are participating, but I’m not evaluating their performance on the blog” (survey). This issue with grading and concern for blog participation leads in to the responses to the next blog question concerning whether students were required to interact.

Though 94% of the respondents note that they graded blog work/participation, only 66% require students to interact in the blog space. Paula Rosinski explains why she does not require students to interact on their blogs: “My concern is that ‘requiring’ responses may make blogs into a dreary forum BlackBoard responses where students only offer cursory responses” (survey). John Lovas does not require his students to comment or interact, but he claims that “With individual blogs, I had hoped we’d create a blogging community. Only about half the class participated at this level” (survey). So, though many teachers were resistant to requiring grades, several are unsatisfied with the level of interaction.

In fact, based on the open-ended answers, twelve of the thirty-two respondents note in some way that they want more interaction on the blogs and/or that they plan to modify their current edublog use to require student interaction. The only two respondents who do not grade students’ blog use are included among these twelve who want more interaction. Of these twelve seeking student interaction on the blogs, only six require commenting during class. For example, Sol Neely responds that he does grade students on the blog work, but does not require interaction and commenting. However, in his open-ended response, he explains: “I had originally hoped for more dialogue,” offering the following modification: “I would require commenting on other students’ posts, so as to foster more dialogue” (Neely, survey). Similarly, later in Rosinski’s response, she describes a modification: “In the future I may modify the assignment so students are required to make their blogs interactive and so

that students are required to respond to a couple of their peers' blogs" (survey). A final example comes from Lynne Rhodes; she did not grade nor require her students to interact in her course blogs. Rhodes states: "I'd hoped for more interaction and student ownership, but that has not happened to the degree that I'd hoped for; blog ownership and interactions are not a spontaneous reaction on the part of most students" (survey). The problem of whether to grade and/or require student interaction on the blog space is clearly a debatable issue. These examples indicate that educators want the blog space to be interactive, but they do not want a pre-packaged or forced interactivity. They want spontaneity, dialogue, informal conversations, not artificial communication driven by grades. The root of this spontaneous dialogue may be in the more general and popular uses for weblogs. As explained in Chapter 2, a sense of community is important to bloggers and they often have links to other blogs and blog-rolls to which they can interact and respond. Teachers want to encourage this same spontaneous interaction among their students, but currently it does not seem to be working as well as they would like.

The next question in *Table 4* addresses whether educators plan to use weblogs in their courses again in the future. All but one, 97%, of the respondents say they will – or plan to – use edublogs in the future. Again, many respondents note that they will make major changes to the way they use them, such as those who might require student commenting or who grade student work. But, on the whole, educators are pleased enough with the way blogs work in their classes, or are at least willing to continue tinkering with the technology, to try using them again in the future.

The next set of survey questions in *Table 4* asks respondents to use a rating scale of one to five, with five being "VERY." In response to how comfortable educators are with

using technology in their courses, 62% selected “5”, corresponding with “VERY comfortable”; 22% rated a “4” and 16% a “3.” No one selected either a two or one in response to their level of comfort with technology. This may suggest that edublog technology has only gained popularity among those most technologically savvy; the question may still remain as to how accessible weblogs are to those not as comfortable with technology. As explained in Chapter 1, part of what is so appealing about weblogs is their accessibility and ease of use. However, these results reveal that though edublogs may be easy to use, those not as comfortable with technology either are choosing not to use them (for whatever reason) or are simply not aware of them.

Table 4 reveals that on a scale of one to five, 19% of the respondents rate that they are “VERY satisfied” with the use of blogs in their courses. These are followed by 44% rating a “4” based on overall satisfaction, 34% rating a “3”, and 3% rating a “2.” No one gave the rating of “1”, being the least satisfied. It is interesting to note that five out of the six who rated being “VERY satisfied” with course blog use also rated being “VERY comfortable” with technology. Perhaps this reveals a trend that educators are more satisfied or pleased with their edublog results when they feel more comfortable with using technology in general; they may be able to “tinker” with the technology more to make it satisfy their needs and goals. For example, Karl Fornes notes a satisfaction and level of comfort at “4”; he explains in the open-ended section how he wants “more technical modification....Blogger is fine, but [he’s] beginning to think we’ve gone as far as we can with it” (Fornes, survey). Perhaps Dr. Fornes is not able to make the present technology he is aware of work to his advantage. Adryan Glasgow rated a “4” on level of comfort, but a “3” on level of satisfaction. Like Fornes, she is not completely happy with the options her blog server offers; she notes the

need for a blog “organized by threads” (Glasgow, survey). Again, perhaps her level of satisfaction is affected by her ability to work with the technology. However, Fornes’ and Glasgow’s comments may simply reveal the need for more advanced blog software that offers educators, specifically, more options for classroom activities.

Looking again at the results in *Table 4*, the last two questions address how long teachers have been using weblogs in their courses and how they have organized their course blogs in the past. The majority of respondents, 31%, have been using weblogs in their courses for approximately one year. Twenty-five percent have been using them for two years, 19% for three years, and 16% for more than three years. Only 9% of respondents have been using weblogs for less than one year. These results suggest that the number of teachers using weblogs is on the decline, since only nine percent just started using them. However, the results here may be somewhat skewed as well. As mentioned earlier, many of the respondents are extremely involved with edublogs research, and many of them are among the first to introduce weblogs in their courses. Therefore, it would seem logical that most of the respondents have been using edublogs for two or more years.

In response to the organization of writing course weblogs, 57% of respondents claim that they use both types of organizations: individual student blogs and one blog for the course. Thirty-one percent responded that they use only one blog for the course and 6% only use individual student blogs; 6% of the respondents use some other type of organization for blogs in their courses. The prevalence of using both styles of organization reveals that teachers have experimented with different kinds of organizations; this would also be supported by the use of “other” organizations. In the open-ended questions, several respondents note problems they face with different forms of organization. For instance,

Charles Lowe, who responded that he had used both types of organization, states that “The community site was very active while the individual blogs ended up being only places that students posted drafts. This was in part due to the individual blog sites the student used – there was no comment board option” (survey). Spencer Schaffner from the expresses a similar frustration with organizational issues:

Each student in the class maintained a blog throughout a 10-week quarter, and I linked them together through a “central blogging hub”...Two main frustrations: there was a great deal of separation in the class...[and] the other frustration was the material configuration of the blogs in the network. It was a bit tedious for students to read each other’s blogs, and after a while they quit doing so. (Schaffner, survey)

From earlier responses and examples, it is clear that educators often want blogs to create a sense of community, and for interaction among students to flourish. Schaffner’s comment about the separation students felt in the blog space by having individual blogs is definitely a concern.

Terra Williams comments that if she uses blogs in her courses again she “would have a class/community blog only”; she explains why: “In the past I’ve used a combination of a community blog that everyone posts to, plus individual blogs....I’ve never been completely satisfied that I was using my students’ time efficiently....the way I had it set up seemed a little unwieldy...” (Williams, survey). Scott Rogers’ comments seem to agree with Williams’, only he’s already tried moving to only one course blog: “I’ve also found that using a centralized group blog, rather than individual blogs, works better, as students have to click around to read what their peers have written” (Rogers, survey). Rogers’ explanation addresses the problem Schaffner notes in the previous block quote concerning how students

eventually stop reading their peers' blogs simply because of the trouble and time it takes to click around and find them.

Many of the issues brought up by the multiple choice, as well as open-ended, responses to the weblog survey have important implications for the future use of blogs in the classroom, and these will be explored further in the following section.

4.2 Implications

The implications for this study are numerous; a definitional study, such as this, often raises more questions than it answers. However, the following pages will explore some of the implications based on the data about blog purposes from this sample. This was a modest work, which has offered fruitful avenues for investigation; however, the present goals were not to judge and/or evaluate which methods for blog use were better than others. Rather, the goal for this study was to define and catalogue the ways writing teachers are currently using weblogs, with the hopes that future studies will examine and evaluate the best practices for this new technology.

Based on the results from the survey, many writing teachers are torn as to whether they should grade student and/or require student responses on the course blog. Milde has tried offering incentives for more "spontaneous" response, such as extra credit for thoughtful, but respectful, peer critiques. This may be one way to encourage student participation without getting a forced response. However, it seems almost inevitable that students be graded in some way for their work on the blog space. Without assigning a grade, teachers are not able to set clear requirements and expectations for the blog space. From the present study's findings, I recommend that educators make a choice as to the role they want the blog to play in the course. If it is a minor role (posting announcements or quick comments), then

teachers may not need to grade student response; in this way, the space would be for more voluntary response. However, if writing teachers want the blog to have a major role in the course (using it for several of the eleven core uses), students must have some clear guidelines for how to fulfill blog requirements, and attached with these guidelines should be an evaluation or feedback mechanism. Many teachers simply include student blog work as part of a “participation” grade for the course, but this may not be enough to push students to respect the assignments offered on the blog space (if these are, in fact, major assignments).

Another issue teachers must face is how, and to what extent, they should present the blog space as public. From the examples in section 3.1, we see that some students do not fully grasp the truly public nature of weblogs. Again, many educators from the sample cite the public space of blogs as a major benefit to their use in the writing classroom. But, how can teachers ensure that students have a clear conception of the blog audience, in a way that accounts for “public” at different levels (peers in class or a wide Web readership)? One way is to promote interaction among students in different classes, such as the way Fornes and Rhodes link five sections of student blogs from one home-base blog. From what information was accessible, though, it did not seem that Fornes and Rhodes designed specific assignments to promote student interaction across different sections. However, there is a great deal of potential for offering a more concrete notion of “public” by having students interact with other specific audiences (students from their university, students from other universities, students from other courses across the curriculum, professionals in the work force, etc.) Another way to promote a sense of audience for students is to devote course time to explaining this and other specific blog issues early in the semester.

Several instructors from this study, including Lowe, Williams, Lovas, Rogers, Gussman, and Milde have links to an extensive amount of background information on blogging. These educators have developed materials that provide preparation, examples, and support for student blog use in their courses. For example, Lowe has links to information concerning “Individual Blog Sites,” “Class Requirements for Blogging,” “Moving Beyond the Minimum Requirements,” “Who Posts to the Class Website,” “What and How to Post,” etc. For each of these sections, Lowe clearly explains the blog space and his expectations for how students should use their blogs. Dennis Jerz and John Lovas have links to articles on weblogs, including their history and development, as well as how to create an appropriate blog response. Scott Rogers includes very specific instructions (with images) as to how students can “make a link” or post a response to the blog. Perhaps if more time were spent preparing students for the blog space, they would be able to more adequately fulfill the requirements and expectations that teachers have⁷. Though our students may be technologically savvy, the blog space is often a new and complex medium for most of them, and it is important for teachers to do as much as possible to help students through the process of using this new place.

Another critical but challenging choice teachers face is how to organize the course blog(s). As we see from teacher responses, many are not satisfied with the level of interaction on individual student blogs, suggesting an organization with one blog for the course. Though this may combat many of the issues of student interaction on the blog space, it is not ideal for all situations. For instance, by shifting from individual student blogs to one blog for the course, students lose their sense of ownership for the space. Many teachers

⁷ Again, this study is not able to conclusively state the extent to which students meet requirements and expectations. However, based on teacher responses to the weblog survey, it seems that several did not feel their goals were met. This suggestion might combat the issue of meeting course requirements.

commented that they like how blogs are more student-driven, but moving to one blog would jeopardize this benefit. Also, students would be excluded from the design process, which is important to many (based on student samples). Once again, teachers must make the choice based on the role they want blogs to play in their courses. If the main goal for the blog space is for students to hold discussions and interact, it seems best to organize one blog for the entire course, so that students can post and comment to each other without having to click through links to read responses. However, if the main goal for the blog space is to encourage personal journaling, reflection, and works in progress, individual student blogs might work better to fulfill teachers' expectations. And, if teachers hope to use the blog space for a combination of these uses, they might consider using both types of organization and developing specific assignments that cater to each type. Essentially, educators should take the time to consider how they want to use blogs in their courses, making clear connections to the original course content and goals.

Though several educators note problems with course blog use or offer modifications for the future, all but one (Kevin Brooks) responded that they will use blogs again in future courses. However, in his open-ended response, Brooks offers hypothetical situations in which he might return to blog use:

If I were to return to using weblogs (I said I wouldn't be doing so above), I would like to be working in an institution that really supports the technology – provides students with a weblog space as part of a content or information management strategy for students. I would see the weblog as part of a larger project, likely connected to e-portfolios. Blogging increasing feels like “process” to me, so I would want to firm up some connections to a product. (Brooks, survey)

The issues Brooks raises here are ones that every teacher using blogs in their courses should consider. Earlier in the passage, Brooks mentions having support from his institution when using new technology for weblogs. Though this may seem like a macro-level issue, it does affect how teachers feel about trying new technologies. Without support for pedagogical experimentation, the process of introducing blogs into one's teaching can be arduous and frustrating. However, Brooks' comment suggests a more formal institutionalized use of the student blog, one that transcends work for one writing course to move towards electronic portfolios. Though it is difficult to say whether this is the best or only direction for blog development in the future, Brooks' suggestions capture the essence of the technology's versatility. It is encouraging to see persons involved with blog research, as Brooks is, problematizing this space and creating new purposes for it. The final comment Brooks makes concerns blogging as a "process," and how he wants to "firm up some connections to a product." This reinforces the previous suggestion that educators using weblogs truly think through the role of blogs in their courses. What goals do teachers have for the space? What products do they want students to work towards? And have educators adequately explained their expectations for the blog space?

Later in Brooks' comment he offers other insights into why he has stopped using blogs in his classes. Again, his responses question the blog space in a way that is important for educators:

I have stopped using weblogs for the time being because I was pulling my students in too many directions – I maintained a course website, a course management site, they maintained blogs, I maintained a blog, etc. I am trying to figure out how to provide a more integrated web experience for my students; if weblogs are a part of that

experience, great, if not, I don't think there is anything particularly magical about weblogs as web application. (Brooks, survey)

Though the results from this study suggest that weblogs offer a unique application ideal for writing assignments, Brooks' comments question the many things we ask our students to do with technology. One of the original questions driving this study was the extent to which weblogs present a singular space that offers teachers a different application from Blackboard and the traditional course website. But, as Brooks questions, by adding in the new technology of blogs, are we overloading or "pulling [our] students in too many directions"? This is an important question for educators to consider as they create course syllabi with expectations for the blog space. Brooks' proposal to create a "more integrated web experience" for students is an ideal direction to head. Clearly, more research and exploration need to be done in these areas. How can we use the unique technology of blogs in our writing classes, while not excluding other technologies, but also not overloading our students?

Again, this study suggests that weblogs are a unique application. As several teachers in this study commented, the blog space is different from traditional Web discussion boards or Websites, offering teachers the opportunity to use blogs for many different purposes. And with the push towards more computer-assisted composition, especially at the university level, blogs present a new space for students and teachers to explore. Because of their versatility, weblogs are an excellent technology for the classroom. And there is still quite a bit of unexplored territory for blogs, which will lend it to even more tailored uses for educational settings. We can glean from this preliminary exploration, then, that educators are, in fact,

using weblogs in their writing courses for a number of purposes, including the eleven noted here, but that there are nearly endless uses for the space that have yet to be explored.

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Appendix A

Weblogs and Survey Responses Relevant to this Study

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Appendix B

Use of Blogs in the Classroom
A Very Brief Survey

Many thanks for responding to my brief survey. My name is Ashley Holmes, and I am conducting some descriptive research as part of my M.A. thesis in composition under the direction of Dr. Chris Anson at NC State University. Most of my work has involved collecting and describing cases of blogs used for the teaching of college composition. I am interested in cataloguing and analyzing the various uses to which blogs are being put. To enrich the information I have gathered, I would greatly appreciate your responses to some brief questions about your use of blogs in your teaching. The survey below should take only a few minutes of your time, but your responses will be enormously helpful to me in my project.

When you submit your responses, they are sent only to me in email format. If you would like more information about my project or this survey, please contact me at ashley_holmes@ncsu.edu. Many thanks in advance for your help.

1. Your name: (I need this to identify your course blog.)
2. May I use your name in discussing this survey? Yes No
3. Do you have a personal Web log separate from your class Web log? Yes No
4. Are you a member of an edublog community such as Will Richardson's Weblogg-ed or the Educational Blogger's Network? Yes No
5. On a scale of 1-5 (with 5 being VERY) how comfortable do you feel using technology in your teaching? 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
6. How long have you been using Web logs in the courses you teach? (Numbers are years) <1, 1, 2, 3, >3
7. Currently, or in the past, how have you organized your course blog(s)?
 - One blog for the course
 - Individual student blogs
 - Both
 - Other
8. Did your students receive a grade on their participation and/or work posted to the course weblog(s)? Yes No
9. Were your students **required** to interact (use the comment feature) in the blog space? Yes No
10. Do you intend to use Web logs in future courses? Yes No
11. On a scale of 1-5 (with 5 being VERY) rate your level of satisfaction with the use of weblogs in conjunction with your course. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
12. Based on your level of satisfaction from Question 11, briefly explain the extent to which your original goals for the weblog in your course were or were not met.
13. Briefly explain what you think is the most beneficial aspect of using weblogs in your classroom.
14. Briefly explain what modifications you might make to the process if you were to use weblogs in your classroom again in the future?