

The Lord Winston TALKFEST



Blogs - Teacher Information

Scientists in the 21st century are frequently using blogs to communicate their observations and convey their thinking. They also use this medium to critique other scientists' research and challenge commonly held theories. Blogging is a tool of the internet and permits quick dialogue amongst geographically distant scientists, which was not possible before advent of the internet. The ability to openly publish and respond immediately to keep the narrative in a logical sequence makes it possible to develop ideas quickly. Just think what a blog started by Charles Darwin would have looked like with Alfred Wallace responding from the Indonesian archipelago!

[SciBlogs](#) | [Te Papa's Museum Blog](#) | [Blogs at Scitable](#)

This form of communication can be used as a teaching strategy. Opportunities to explore how scientists use blogs can be integrated into learning, based on the contextual strands of the New Zealand Curriculum - Science. When students create or respond to a science-related blog they are offered the opportunity to develop aspects of competencies described in the Nature of Science strand. Providing students with this experience helps them develop a broader understanding of 21st century science.

The more frequently a person writes on a blog the better they become at communicating their thinking. This includes structuring of ideas, spelling and grammar, graphic or aesthetic awareness, and eventually – web content management systems. Blogs could be placed on the Internet, on a school blog page, or within the school's intranet. Blogging may be new to many students. They will require some assistance, and initially some guidelines. It is important to keep in mind the very public nature of the internet, and therefore the potential for lack of privacy. Teachers may want to develop the skills associated with blogging in an intranet setting before submitting to the Blog BLAST competition. To this end we are providing some background information for students that can be used as a class activity or given to students individually.

Happy Blogging!

– The LENScience Team

Blogs - Student Information



What is a blog?

The term 'blog' actually came from 'web log' and was [popularised in 1999](#). You can consider a blog to be a personal diary, a story telling medium, a family up-date portal, or an information spreading tool. It is entirely up to the writer. There are a couple of popular free blog-hosting sites, which let you design your web layout, and control all aspects of your site: [Blogger](#) (by Google) and [Wordpress](#) are two examples.

Have a look at some of the characteristics below, how do they fit in with your present thinking about blogs?

- A blog is a communication tool of the internet
- A blog is a type of website
- Blogs can be seen as a type of social networking
- Blogs evolve (change) over time
- Blogs are used for different purposes (questions & answers, how to, news, personal views, storytelling...)
- Readers can leave personal comments on a blog
- The content of blogs are published in chronological manner.

Writing to a blog can be a fantastic hobby. You can post photos or video, sound clips or podcasts. You can develop your fiction or non-fiction writing skills, scientific critical thinking, or just talk about a hobby or topic you love. Blogs are fantastic in that they are interactive – you can embed links for your readers to go to different sites for more information or detail, and your readers can leave comments on your work – to which you can also reply. You can even link between a blog and twitter, facebook or other social media.

How to write a blog?

There are over 1 billion entries if you search for 'how to write a blog' using Google. Here are some points to think about before you start your blog. They are not to be seen as rules but *ideas* to consider and develop for yourself as you start blogging:

- Identify your target readers – who will the target readers be in your blog, or in this specific case, your TALKFEST Blog BLAST?
- Collect your information (content) before writing
- Categorise your content (*draw* a mindmap, or use mind mapping software tools such as MindMap, Inspiration, FreeMind, Mindjet, MindNode, SpiderScribe)



- Keep to short paragraphs – each paragraph focuses on one thought or idea. Think about how you read things on the internet; does a long chunk of text = tldr?
- Check your grammar and spelling before submitting – always good practice for developing your writing skills, but that said – creative use of English certainly has its place on the internet (eg lolcats)
- Let the audience enjoy the journey with you – include your own voice in the blog. It is okay to personalise the content with good quality delivery. Would you rather read a factual account of an idea, or the idea supported by personal thoughts and experiences?

Safety

The Number One Rule of the Internet? - ***The Internet is forever.*** This is definitely something you should keep in mind. The things you write now, and post online, will most likely still be there in 10 years when your employer starts googling you to see what your online profile is like. While facebook has a bit of diplomatic immunity, due to being mostly closed to the public (or the public you have *not* friended), blogs can be quite different in that typically they are fully open and discoverable. You need to decide for yourself what your limits are going to be, but certainly for a start, try to avoid swear words and negative personal critiques. Evidence of development of writing skill, however, can be quite useful if you want to go into a comms or writing career later on, so don't be afraid to post works-in-progress!



In addition to the *forever* threat, there is also the **internet troll population** – people who like being *mean* online, basically. If you ever feel attacked or bullied online, **tell a parent or teacher** – the police do have the power to get involved and you do *not* have to put up with it. A general rule is '*don't feed the trolls*' – if you get negative or *just plain mean* comments;

- delete them
- block the user
- forget about them

Don't get caught up in a comment war! If they continue, or you feel at all threatened – **ask for help!**

All of that said – don't let the trolls put you off from writing; the online community (and especially within science) can be a *fantastic* one – kind, fun, supportive and encouraging.



The final 'safety' idea to keep in mind is that of **copyright**. Stealing other peoples writing or pictures is a no-no. Always write your own content (this doesn't *exclude* inspiration or quoting with attribution) and if possible, take your own pictures! Then *you* own the rights to them and can use them for whatever you want (you can even put a watermark or copyright on them so *other* people can't steal them). If you want generic pictures to use, try having a look at the [Wikimedia Commons depository of images](#) – work people are happy for you to use for free.

Content

While you might be ready to make a mind map of the content of your blog post, finding the information, facts and data to back it up can be quite tricky. While google can be a powerful tool, keep in mind that the quality of the information depends upon the site you found it from.

Pro tip: while [Wikipedia](#) is a gold mine of information and can feel like a *one-stop-shop*; they also show the links for where their info came from, down the bottom of the page. Try heading to the original site and having a read of the information they have there. This is a good place to start!

Pick out some of the key words you want to write about; for the Blog BLAST competition this might be '*puberty*' or '*reproductive technologies*', and start a google search with them.

As for structuring your blog post, a commonly used trick for web-writing (and even journalism in general) is the 'inverted pyramid'. This relates to both how much information people will read online, and the physical movements of their eyes over the web page.



The information in your title and first paragraph need to **grab the reader's attention**; you need to convince them (within ~2 lines of text!) that they should definitely continue reading to find out more. There is a real art between balancing sensationalism ("Cancer: CURED!!") and accuracy, but you should strive for a medium between the two. Try to keep it engaging, so that people read right to the end.

Now go forth and write, new blogger!