

The Basics of Blogging

If you want to know what blogging is, ask your fifth graders. Chances are most of them know. For the uninitiated, we will address these basic questions:

- What is a blog?
- Why would a principal want to have one?
- How can you set up your own blog in 10 minutes?

Defining a Blog

The term “blog” is short for “Web log” and it is basically an online journal. The key to its popularity is how simple it is to construct and maintain. The blogger simply types in his or her thoughts and clicks “post.” The blog handles the rest automatically, with the new posting appearing at the top of the blog Web page, followed by previous postings in reverse chronological order.

Some blogs take on a “Dear Diary” format, with the author reflecting on the day’s activities. For those who are passionate about a particular subject, blogs provide forums in which they can share their opinions or expertise with a target audience.

Perhaps the best way to understand blogging is to take a look at the blog I constructed to serve as a follow-up to workshops I conduct on organization and time management. You can view this blog at <http://frankbuck.blogspot.com> and read the most current posting. On the right side of the screen, you will see links to the 10 most recent postings, followed by links to earlier postings.

At the end of each posting, there is a link for “Comments.” Clicking on this link allows you to read the comments of others and to post a comment of your own. The author of a blog can limit the comments and delete those that may seem in poor taste.

Why Blog?

A blog, which requires no special software, no knowledge of html, and virtually no time, can substitute for a traditional Web site if your aim is to have a simple medium for communication.

Parents do not necessarily have to be your target audience. You may want to

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establish a dialogue with students in the upper grades. With a blog, you can create a message and invite students who visit the blog to add their comments. Or the target audience could be your teachers. For a large faculty, where communication can be difficult, a blog can substitute for the written weekly memo, with the added benefit of enabling teachers to give you feedback.

J. H. House Elementary School in Conyers, Georgia, gives an excellent example of how a school can use a blog

instead of a Web site. By viewing <http://itc.blogs.com/househighlights>, you will see how Principal Joyce Hooper uses the blog to announce current events and accomplishments. One of the links takes you to “Principal’s Quest,” Hooper’s own blog, while other links take you to blogs established by individual classrooms.

This summer, I established two additional blogs. **GrahamSchool.blogspot.com** is designed as a tool to communicate with parents. Blog visitors will see a “welcome back” message, along with a photograph of the school. A variety of links will take parents to the school calendar, common documents (such as the student handbook and student supply list), and other sites parents may want to access on a regular basis.

The second and similar blog, **Graham Staff.blogspot.com**, serves as a means of communicating to my faculty and staff all of the information that I had previously sent through the traditional “welcome back” letter, at a fraction of the time and absolutely no cost.

Creating a Blog

If you’re ready to set up a blog, two helpful sites are Blogger (www.blogger.com) and Easyjournal (www.easyjournal.com). At each site, you will find step-by-step instructions that can have you up and blogging in 10 minutes.





Once your blog is in place, you are ready to let your target audience know its address.

RSS—Really Simple Syndication

No discussion of blogs would be complete without a discussion of Really Simple Syndication (RSS). Let's say

that you have found several blogs that you like to visit frequently to read their postings. Wouldn't it be great if new postings came to you by e-mail instead of you having to go to them? That's what RSS does.

To set up an RSS feed, you will need what is known as an "aggregator" or

"RSS reader." I use one of several free programs called Attensa for Outlook (www.attensa.com). If you use Mozilla Firefox as your Web browser, you have a built-in aggregator (www.mozilla.org/products/firefox/live-bookmarks).

When I find a blog I want to read regularly, I subscribe to it by simply clicking on a small orange icon labeled "RSS." Every time the blog author posts a new entry, it shows up in my e-mail. For Firefox users, clicking a small orange and white square in the corner of the screen adds that blog to your bookmark list.

As principals, we have a lengthy list of "should dos" and communicating more often and more effectively with people in our schools is probably on that list. Blogs give us a way to make regular communication quick and easy. ■

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