

## **An Introduction to Blogging**

"A blog is defined as a Website with dated entries, usually by a single author, often accompanied by links to other blogs that the site's editor visits on a regular basis. Think of a blog as one person's public diary or suggestion list. Early blogs were started by Web enthusiasts who would post links to cool stuff that they found on the Internet. They added commentary. They began posting daily. They read one another's blogs. A community culture took hold"

**Source:** <http://anvil.gsu.edu/NECC2004/>

In 2004 blog was given the status of word of the year. Blog has come from the term **weblog** and was first developed by Jorn Barger in 1997. Now there are regular comments in blogs in mainstream media and professional writings, including Geography (Parkinson, 2004). It is increasing being seen as a worthy educational tool in classrooms.

Blogs are organized by dated entries with the most recent post at the top of the page. After a period of time these entries are archived with an index for easier access. Some bloggers, with developed skills use products such as FrontPage and DreamWeaver, can develop their own. However, the majority of bloggers use blogging software which is available online for people to use freely.

The features of blogs include:

- It's a kind of website that is easy and quick to create.
- It is organized by time.
- It is organized by posts
- The posts are usually short and frequently posted.
- Readers can often respond or react through a 'comments' feature.
- It is organized with dated entries.
- It lets you publish instantly to the web
- It is usually maintained by one person, but there are multi-person blogs.
- It can be free or very low-cost to create.
- The use of links is a common distinguishing characteristic.
- The author's voice and personality often comes through.

The appeal is that they are easy to use and content can be added on a regular basis. The best feature I feel is that you can have an audience with whom you can share ideas and get feedback.

The content of blogs is very diverse. There can be individual blogs by all sorts of people, group blogs of organizations, people with similar hobbies such as community activism, political campaigns, corporations and the rest. The beauty of these is that visitors can visit and leave comments. This adds to the knowledge base of the area of information that the blog covers.

When the whole gammit of blogs are put together they are usually referred to as the **blogsphere**. When a large amount of activity, information and opinion erupts around a particular subject or controversy in the blogosphere, it is commonly called a **blogstorm** or **blog swarm**.

### **How do I go about blogging?**

Here are some initial thoughts to get you started.

It is all about the planning. My blog started out of a hobby – running. It is developed using DreamWeaver but I have an account with another provider (indicated in Figure 1) so I can comment on other people’s blog. Here I learnt how to develop a blog and made all the mistakes (that I learnt from) before I embarked on one for teacher and student use. You need to choose a provider and a sample to select from is in the left hand column of Figure 2 while the right hand column has links to relevant blogging literature.

**Figure 1: An example of Blogger Software**



What do you want to do with you your weblog? To help you with this question you might like to think about your blog in the following context. Is it just a place to hold material you wish to keep? Is it just the basis for you to have a conversation with colleagues and other like minded people? Is it just a personal knowledge management system? Is it a means of social and professional networking? Is it a means to move information around?

Next you need to think about the style of your blog. Maybe you want to develop a reflective blog with your personal teaching experiences, with ideas of your favourite teaching techniques, links to favourite sites and learning resources.

The naming of your blog is important because a good name can be found through search engines. You should develop a name that reflects what is in the blog.

Now you need to sort out the specific content, how you will organize it, how much information you should include and an overall view and long term plan of where the blog is going.

Finally it is really important to realize you have an audience. So think about your readership: their age, gender, interests, professional understanding. Accordingly be aware of your own writing voice and writing style.

**Figure 2: Websites to help you in the development of Blogs**

<b>Blogging Software</b>	<b>Internet Links on Blogging</b>
Blog Spot <a href="http://www.blogger.com/start">http://www.blogger.com/start</a>	Web log Definitions <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weblog">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weblog</a>
Learning Blogger <a href="http://movielibrary.lynda.com/html/modPage.asp?ID=113">http://movielibrary.lynda.com/html/modPage.asp?ID=113</a>	An Introduction to Weblogs <a href="http://www.dynamicobjects.com/d2r/archives/002399.html">http://www.dynamicobjects.com/d2r/archives/002399.html</a>
Blog Box <a href="http://www.blogbox.com/">http://www.blogbox.com/</a>	Weblogging <a href="http://anvil.gsu.edu/NECC2004/">http://anvil.gsu.edu/NECC2004/</a>
Word Press <a href="http://wordpress.org/">http://wordpress.org/</a>	Kaironews: What is a Weblog <a href="http://kairosnews.org/node/3452">http://kairosnews.org/node/3452</a>
Blog City <a href="http://howto.blog-city.com/">http://howto.blog-city.com/</a>	Blog picked as word of the year <a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/4059291.stm">http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/4059291.stm</a>
Bravenet Journal <a href="http://www.bravenet.com/">http://www.bravenet.com/</a>	Scholars who blog <a href="http://chronicle.com/free/v49/i39/39a01401.htm">http://chronicle.com/free/v49/i39/39a01401.htm</a>
Mo Time <a href="http://www.motime.com/">http://www.motime.com/</a>	Web logs in a Learning Setting <a href="http://www.mcgeesmusings.net/2003/05/13.html#a3219">http://www.mcgeesmusings.net/2003/05/13.html#a3219</a>
School Blogs <a href="http://www.schoolblogs.com/">http://www.schoolblogs.com/</a>	

**Use of Blogging in Education**

Web logs are increasingly being used in educational setting. Educators are able update content more easily and share resources with in and between schools and universities.

Blogging has a number of potential and real uses in education. Specifically the one that stands out for me is its use in logging journal posts for major ongoing units of work and projects. It means a student, peers and teachers can read what is going on and can make relevant and helpful comments. Figure 3 indicates what teachers and students like about Blogging

Some of the general applications could include:

- post short current events articles to invite students thoughts, reactions, and possible solutions
- create a literature circle

- post photos and ask students to create captions
- foster book discussions in the form of an online book club
- encourage student writing to demonstrate learning
- direct students to curriculum web sites and have them read and make responses
- communicate with another classroom
- react to teacher entries about what they are learning and make connections to how this learning is relevant for them
- post quotes and have students write their interpretation and apply it to something in their life
- invite one student a day to post a summary of and their reflections on the day's learning
- observe the growth of plants or animals or keep records of science experiments
- spot and record student kindnesses or good deeds
- develop new vocabulary by writing about the new word and having students create sentences or a brief paragraph using new vocabulary
- enable students to post their ideas for the classroom or school
- let student write short reviews of books they are enjoying reading

As well these general considerations there can be more structured approaches to blogging.

Firstly teachers could develop content based blogs based on syllabus requirements. A summary of the weeks or term's curriculum could be posted for students and other teachers in a department. It can be used to monitor homework assignments and thus potentially included parental observation of the work and reward students for their effort by public comment supporting good work on a blog.

Secondly, a reflective journal type blog could be developed by teachers. It can possibly be used for registration and accreditation requirements. It will be very useful for teachers to share teaching activities, develop ideas for the integration of ICT, it could provide tips for new teachers and provide evaluation of what has worked and not worked in the classroom or for the overall department.

Thirdly, students can create their own individual blogs. Personally I think they are great because it helps students put their ideas down and this helps the process and think about what they write. In particular they can do their assignments, develop a portfolio of their work through out a defined period. It can be a showpiece of their good work.

Fourthly, you can develop a shared blog where all the students in the class can contribute to a blog, perhaps based on a theme a novel, play, historical event or geographical theme. This would be very useful for class tasks which require students to complete class tasks in small groups, showcase finish products and teachers will be able to read monitor and comment on progress.

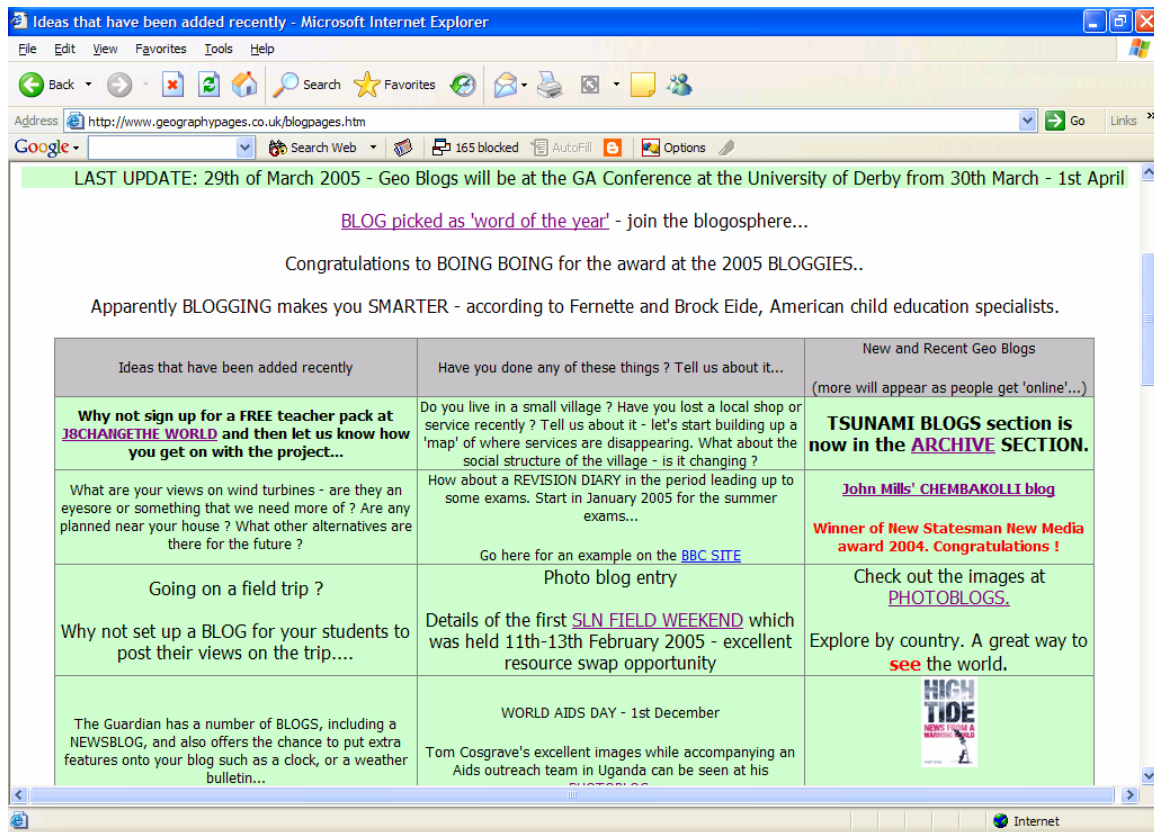
**Figure 3: Teacher and student Attitude to Blogging**

What do teachers think about blogs?	What do student's think about blogs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a way to improve my own writing</li> <li>• just in time learning arena</li> <li>• place to share</li> <li>• easy way to create a website quickly</li> <li>• way to connect with others and make connections to learning</li> <li>• perfect spot for quick writes</li> <li>• a writing room in which you can make it be what you want it to be</li> <li>• a perfect spot for quick writes</li> <li>• a writing room in which you can make it be what you want it to be</li> <li>• a perfect place to think outside the box</li> <li>• a way to give students ownership of a personal space</li> <li>• a web site that encourages active engagement by the students and teacher</li> <li>• a place to collaborate</li> <li>• an up close and personal way to include parents in the process (in elementary schools)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a place to think outside the box</li> <li>• a place for me to show my true colors</li> <li>• a power to be heard by the public</li> <li>• an unrestricted place to divulge my perspective</li> <li>• a weblog is like an invisible friend.</li> <li>• a site where I can go all out.</li> <li>• a place learn about other people's opinions.</li> <li>• It helps me improve my writing.</li> <li>• a place to let my feelings go</li> <li>• a position where my feelings are being written down</li> <li>• a place to practice my writing skills</li> <li>• an enjoyable site</li> <li>• a spot to investigate about the news</li> <li>• a point where I can be heard by the public</li> <li>• my special imaginary friend</li> <li>• an independent place to voice my opinions</li> <li>• a place where you can express yourself.</li> </ul> <p align="right">Source: Web logging Source: <a href="http://anvil.gsu.edu/NECC2004/">http://anvil.gsu.edu/NECC2004/</a></p>

**Blogging in Geography**

There is huge potential for blogging in Geography. In fact there are a lot of resources in the form of blogs in Geography.

**Figure 4: Blogshere: the bringing together of blogs**



Firstly, the most common form of geography blogging is done by people who have special interests such as travelling. They go to an internet café while around the world and blog what they are doing and what they see. This means family and friends can keep in touch with what they are doing and there is a record of what is happening. From a geographers perspective you get some great photos and ideas about different parts of the world.

Secondly there are geographers themselves who blog, usually as an extension of their webpages. These people have an understanding of space and time and really move into the geographical issues about which they blog. The beauty about these blogs is that they can be less formal and act as a stream of consciousness for later ideas to be fully developed.

Thirdly there are the blogs that can be based on themes such as disasters, weather, transport, freedom movements (Figure 5). Some blogs come up almost instantaneously after a geographical event. In particular this year there has been a plethora of blogs on tsunamis and earth quakes in the Asian region.

Fourthly, a blogosphere has developed for geography blogs. Here some bloggers have group blogs together and fleshing out the geographical focus. In this, an attempt, by different bloggers, has been made to explain and explore the different geographical events in everyday situations. It becomes a matter of converting the every day events into geographical terms such as the geomorphological, meteorological and topographical aspects of a tsunami or earthquake. Below is a list and description of some blogs in Geography

**Figure 5: Special Interest Blogs**



## Links to some Geography Blogs

Geo Blogs

<http://geoblogs.blogspot.com/>

This is a personal blog by a quick blogger who took the name geoblog.

Archive of tsunami blogs

<http://www.geographypages.co.uk/blogarchive.htm>

The title makes the content of this page self evident.

The Christmas blog – where do the toys come from?

[http://www.geographypages.co.uk/christmas\\_blog.htm](http://www.geographypages.co.uk/christmas_blog.htm)

A quirky blog that looks at where Christmas presents come from.

### Chembakolli Blog

<http://www.schoolblogs.com/chembakolli/>

This is an example of one of the many blogs started by classes in schools in different areas of the world. In this case India.

### SLN Field Weekend

[http://www.geographypages.co.uk/sln\\_field\\_weekend.htm](http://www.geographypages.co.uk/sln_field_weekend.htm)

I really like the idea that you can have blog about fieldwork. Here is an example of one such endeavour.

### Photo Blogs

<http://www.photoblogs.org/countries/>

Well this is just the tip of the iceberg.

### Aids in Uganda

[http://www.thisisdiopiter.org/additional/aids\\_in\\_uganda/](http://www.thisisdiopiter.org/additional/aids_in_uganda/)

Blogs in developing countries I found difficult to find but when you do you can really connect the students to the issues.

### High Tide Climatic Change

<http://www.marklynas.org/>

An example of a pseudo academic blog which is representation of those with more than a passing interest in geographically phenomena.

### Iceland Eyes

<http://www.marklynas.org/>

Country based blogs are always interesting- especially the small lesser known ones.

### Earth Log: Weather and Hazards

<http://earthlogii.blogspot.com/>

A highly developed blog with obvious relevance.

### Transport Blog

<http://www.transportblog.com/>

Although officially terminated this blog has worthwhile content but also reveals how you can blog special interests like transport, urbanism, rural life...

### Rising Slowly: UK Weather Blog

<http://www.risingslowly.com/>

A blog about extreme weather reports.

Juicy Geography

<http://www.juicygeography.co.uk/blog/>

A more individual approach to observing the weather.

Mini Geogs

<http://www.geographypages.co.uk/minigallery.htm>

Even primary school kids can get involved.

Palin's Travels

<http://www.palinstravels.com/>

One of the many official blogs with connections to individual experiences.

Geography in the News

<http://www.geographyinthenews.rgs.org/>

A more sophisticated blog of geography in the media.

Getting involved with Geoblogs

<http://www.geographypages.co.uk/getblogging.htm>

A guide for ideas about getting involved in blogs.

Geogblog

<http://geog-blog.blogspot.com/>

A personal blog by Anthony who named his blog aptly.

Radio Free Nepal –Free Nepal

<http://freenepal.blogspot.com/>

An example of an activism blog about media censorship in Nepal stalling the freedom movement.

## **Conclusion**

Hopefully this introduction to blogging might encourage a few people to look at blogs in Geography. At the very least information can be gleaned from blog subjects to the normal quality assurance criteria you use in selecting material on issues.

As blogging is an evolving aid to learning it is important to keep an eye on issues which might pop up. For example, I don't really want to touch too much on the negatives of blogging but I guess one for schools to consider is the privacy issue. Blogs are on available in the public arena. However, as we are doing at my school in consultation with those who know, we are investigating obtaining the software directly and blogging behind the security of firewalls and the intranet. So, as with many things in education, the issues can be overcome.

It is clear that there are benefits of blogging to teaching and learning in the classroom. However I want to touch on how it can be used to help geography teachers professionally. Some lateral thinking is required when developing and using blogs. Stay with me.

I have been involved, at the grass root level, in developing a blogging network for runners. We now have about 50 runners who blog about running and we have become so large that we are now in teams of 8 where we update on Wednesday of each week on a rotating basis. This update gives a summary of what everyone has been doing. The blogs are also linked to an online forum (aka professional association) where there is more immediate conversations about issues and if we want “just in time” contact we use the group’s chat facility. I thought geographers could be fanatical but runners have given a different insight into the meaning of the term! If you want to get a feel for how the whole process developed and is evolving I have included a web reference in the bibliography.

Anyway I can envisage this sort of thing happening among geographers and it is starting to appear on the web in embryonic stages. Ultimately we have to keep moving forward in Geography. If we expose our students to the world of blogging it will be the first of many steps to involve them in collaborative online learning. At the same time it is another step in preparing them for university or work, their writing will improve, their ideas will become more developed and they might even have a bit of fun. Happy blogging.

### **References**

Parkinson, A. “Have you met Geo Blogs?” Teaching Geography, October, 2004

Australian Blog Guide: Australian Running Blogs

<http://www.coolrunning.com.au/runningguide/arg.php?pagename=Main.RunningBlogGuide>

Australian Running Guide

<http://www.coolrunning.com.au/runningguide/> go to “Running Blog” in “Other Guides” in the right hand column of this page