Using Blogs and Journals in Blackboard

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What are Blogs?

The word blog is short for web-log. A blog can take a variety of forms, but the most common is that of an online diary or journal, recording what is happening in the blogger's life, or commenting on news and happenings in the world at large. Often a blog will contain links to other websites, perhaps other blogs. Usually visitors to the blog are able to leave comments on what the blogger has written. The entries are arranged chronologically - most recent first - but are often tagged with keywords to allow visitors to find relevant entries.

Example of blogs at the University of Reading include http://blogs.reading.ac.uk/engage-in-teaching-and-learning/ and http://blogs.reading.ac.uk/grass/.

External examples from the HE sector include http://www.seda.ac.uk/blog and http://digitalstudent.jiscinvolve.org/wp/

What is the difference between a Blog and a Journal in Blackboard?

A Blog can be added, viewed and commented on by other users of the course including staff and students.

A Journal is an individual blog for each student, which is private to that student and instructors on the course.
Why use a Blog or a Journal?

There are many possible uses for blogs or journals in education.

For teachers:

- Summarising and commenting on research in your field (for the benefit of students and colleagues)
- Recording, publicising and inviting comments on your current research
- Networking and sharing knowledge
- Instructional tips for students
- Course announcements and readings
- Annotated web links for students

For students:

- Reflective journals (as part of the course, or when on work placement)
- Creative writing
- As a tool for group work
- As an E-portfolio
- To share course-related resources

How do I add a Blog or a Journal to my courses?

By default, a course does not have any blogs or journals. As instructor you need to create the blogs that you would like to use on your course.

There are three different types of Blog and one type of Journal:

- **Course Blogs** i.e. a single Blog for the course. All enrolled users are able to post Blog Entries. All enrolled users can also post Comments to Blog entries.
- **Individual Blogs** i.e. a blog for each student on the course. Only the owner of the Blog is able to post Blog Entries. All other users enrolled in the Course are able to view and add Comments.
- **Group Blogs** i.e. a blog created within one or more Groups on the course. If the instructor enables the Blog tool for a Group, all Group members can post entries to that Blog. Any course member can view and comment on other Groups’ Blog posts.
- **Journals**: These are Individual Blogs which are private to each student. They can only be viewed and commented on by the student and the instructors of the course.
To create a Course Blog or an Individual Blog

Click on Control Panel > Course Tools > Blogs and then Create Blog.

On the next screen, enter a name for the blog, and any instructions for your students.

Under Blog Participation you need to choose Individual to All Students (i.e. a separate blog for each student) or Course (i.e. one blog for the whole course).

Other options should be self-explanatory but for further help click on More Help at the top of the page. Note that you can make the Blog a gradable item, if appropriate.

Examples of text that you might use for blog instructions are given below. Please amend as required for your own blog.

Course Blog:

This course blog will be used to record your thoughts on what we have been studying. It will also be used to track our progress though the course.

All instructors and students can add entries to this blog.

Please add your own entries on what you think you have achieved and any questions you would like to put to me and the rest of the group. Please comment (politely) on my entries and others.

Individual blog:

Use this blog to record your thoughts on what we have been studying and how you think you have been doing.

Only you can add entries to this blog but all students on the course can read your posts and add comments.
Using Blogs and Journals in Blackboard Centre for Quality Support and Development

Remember: A Course Blog allows any member of your course to add entries. The Individual Blog permits each member of the course their own blog, which can be seen and commented on by everyone. If you would like Individual Blogs that can be viewed and commented on by instructors you need to create a Journal.

Creating a Group Blog

If you have Groups set up on your course, you can create a blog for use by the Group members.

You can specify the tools you want to be available when setting up a Group.

If you have already set up your Groups but did not enable Blogs, go to Control Panel > Users and Groups > Groups

Click on the editing chevrons next to the Group name, and choose Edit Group.

Scroll down to Section 2 Tool Availability, tick the box next to Blogs and then Submit.

For more help with managing Groups, please see the Blackboard Help site http://help.blackboard.com/en-us/Learn/9.1_SP_14(Instructor/080_Collaboration/050_Course_Groups/020_Course_Groups_and_Tools

Creating a Journal

A Journal is a tool for self-reflection. By default only the individual student and course instructors are able to view and comment on Journal entries – although it is also possible for an Instructor to make a Journal visible to all enrolled users on a course.

Creating a Journal is very similar to the way you create a blog. Go to Control Panel > Course Tools > Journals then Create Journal.

Enter a name and instructions, and choose the appropriate settings.

N.B. if you tick the box next to ‘Permit Course Users to View Journal’ all students enrolled on the course will be able to read other students’ journal entries. Normally you will want Journal entries to remain private, so don’t tick this box.

When entering instructions, you may wish to specify how often students should post to the Journal (e.g. at least once a week) and the format which entries should take (e.g. following the What? So What? Now What? model).
Viewing and editing Blogs and Journals

N.B. Instructions on the following pages apply equally to Blogs and Journals.

At any time if you go to Control Panel > Course Tools > Blogs you will see a list of all the blogs which exist on the course. To enter a blog, simply click on its name.

To edit a blog’s settings, click the chevrons to the right of the name and choose Edit.

Making your blog accessible to students

To access a blog, students need to click on Tools on the course menu, and then choose Blogs. However you can make a blog more readily accessible by linking to it from within a content area (e.g. Course Documents) or by adding a link to the course menu.

Add a link to the course menu

With Edit Mode turned ON, click on the + sign at the top of the menu and choose Tool Link.
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Enter a name for the new menu item and from the ‘Type’ drop-down list select **Blogs**.

Remember to tick the box next to **Available to users** otherwise students will not be able to see the link.

The new Blogs link appears at the bottom of your menu. You can drag it to any position on the menu by using the up-down arrow icon to the left of the button.

As an instructor, if you click on the menu item, it will display a list of all of the blogs which exist within the course.

Students will also see all available blogs when they click on the Blogs link.
**Add a link to a specific blog through a course content area**

You can create a link to a specific blog from any content area, e.g. Course Documents.

To do this, go into the content area and select **Tools > Blogs**.

You can then:
- link to a list of all Blogs
- link to a specific Blog
- create and link to a new Blog

When you create links in this way, students will see them as shown.

**Individual Blog**

This is your personal space which you can post to as often as you like - all posts can be viewed and commented on by other course members.

**Course Blog**

Any member of the course can post to this blog.
How do students post to a Blog?

When students go into a Blog they see a Create Blog Entry button. Once they click on that, they see the standard Blackboard editing toolbar, so are able to format their text, and upload images and other media to display within their entries.

Further Help

Please see

https://en-us.help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Interact/Blogs

https://en-us.help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Interact/Journals

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