

# 7 Developing Writing Skills Through Weblogs

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## Summary:

Many students struggle with writing at one time or another and find academic writing “daunting” (Carlse, 2019, p. 183). One strategy I used previously while lecturing in the media in two universities was to implement blogging into relevant writing-related modules. Lasica (2003) argues that weblogs (blog is short for weblog) provide an innovative way for people to express opinions and promote two-way communication. Many students complain that they have writer’s block and cannot complete a particular writing assignment as they face a mammoth task getting started. Freewriting or looping (Edwards, 2021) are useful ways of getting the writing started and when the topic is of interest to the writer, as in the form of a blog, it is more likely that the writing will continue. Blogging is very different to academic writing and adopts a more relaxed style. Nevertheless, there are similarities across both forms of writing: the discipline, planning and development of ideas is consistent. A lot of students are initially not overly enthusiastic about academic writing and referencing; however blogging can potentially make the writing more enjoyable.

## Implementing the Strategy

First Year students were tasked with setting up a blog on a topic of their choice. They were required to plan a schedule of content at the start. One blog entry was required every week and they received prompt feedback on each entry so that they could apply it to subsequent entries. They were not required to publish the blogs and were not required to engage with readers. Some students chose to publish and a small number of students linked their blogs to their social media accounts and invited comments from readers. Marks were not awarded for blogs.

## Your Observations/Reflections

Overall student engagement was excellent. There were many benefits to this strategy, three in particular:

- Students’ writing skills developed and this benefited all of their writing tasks. Their motivation increased. Most were able to transfer the skills acquired and developed into all of their writing. Most students reported that their writing became more fluid and they were no longer overwhelmed by any form of writing including academic writing.

- It led to the creation of a more positive attitude towards writing, among most of the participants. Students stated that their ability to generate ideas for writing tasks improved and overall they stated that negative attitudes towards writing reduced.
- It helped students to transition from second-level to third-level, in terms of their writing. Many students struggle to move from essay writing in second-level to a more formal academic writing style in third-level (Sefalane-Nkohla & Mtonjeni, 2019) and writing blogs helped with this transition, particularly helping students to gain more confidence in their writing.

## Recommendations:

I believe that blogging should be incorporated into writing-related modules in the initial years of study at third level in a formal way and marks should be allocated. From my experience, the vast majority of students who engaged with blogging were positive in their evaluations. It would be difficult to see similar levels of engagement going forward if there are no credits attached.

## References:

- Carlse J. E. (2019) *Writing centre consultants as critical friends*, Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics Plus, 57, 183 – 194.
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- Lasica, J. D. (2003) *Benefits Blogging Brings to News Outlets*, Nieman Reports, 15 September 2003. <https://niemanreports.org/articles/benefits-blogging-brings-to-news-outlets/>
- Sefalane-Nkohla, P. and Mtonjeni, T. (2019) “*We are not a ‘fix-it shop’*”: *The writing centre as a uniquely configured learning space*, Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics Plus, 57, 1- 23.