

Setting Up A Classroom Blog with Edublogs.org

This guide will cover a small portion of setting up and using a blog site for free through the Edublogs.org website. There are many advanced options and tweaks available to a blogger, but we only have a limited amount of time to create and learn to use our own. Since Edublogs.org and Learnerblogs.org are using the WordPress blog engine, this workshop will use the name WordPress whether specifically speaking of WordPress, Edublogs, or Learnerblogs directly.

Web Browser

Your browser is the software you use to view web pages. For a long time, Internet Explorer was the standard used by most computer users. While it still works fairly well on Windows, it is no longer maintained for the Macintosh. A very good alternative to both computer platforms (Mac and Windows) is the FireFox web browser. To get full use of all features on most blogs, it is suggested that the user download and use the free FireFox web browser. (Download at www.mozilla.com) Safari is a wonderful browser, but there have been a number of blog features with WordPress that are unavailable if you are using Safari.

Edublogs.org

This training is using the free subscription to edublogs.org. It is based on the WordPress blog engine, but had been customized for educators. You only need to give them a working email address and create an account to get started. Go to <http://edublogs.org>, select 'Join' or 'Get a blog now', and click to create a new account.



First, you will need to create your username. This has to be unique and will be the username that your students will see with your posts and comments. Use an email address that you can check now. You can always change that address later. You will select 'Create your blog' and then click Next. Some users only wish to have a 'Just username' so they can leave comments on other blogs, but they don't wish to maintain their own. (Some ideas passed around mention that you can have your community of users each create their own username without having to create a blog. It is much easier to protect the blog from unwanted users by allowing only invited usernames registered with WordPress.)

A screenshot of the Edublogs.org sign-up form. The title is "Start your own edublog in seconds...". Below the title is a note: "NB: Are you a student? If you are, please do not use the form below, [get your free student blogs](#) (if you create a student blog using the form below it may be deleted)". The form has three input fields: "Username:" with the value "MsMartin" and a note "(Must be at least 4 characters, letters and numbers only.)"; "Email Address:" with the value "anonymous@t[REDACTED]" and a note "(We'll send your password to this address, so triple-check it.)"; and "Security Question:" with the value "eight" and a note "What is the sum of six plus two? (in letters, not numbers please)" and "This is to make sure you're a person and not a machine :)". There are two radio buttons: "Create your own blog (recommended)." which is selected, and "Just a username, please (you will not be able to log in until you are added to another blog.)". At the bottom is a "Next »" button.

Next, you need to create your domain (website address) name. It can be different from your user name or it can be the same. It must however be a unique name within the edublog system. The name you choose will be the first part of the website address your students or parents will enter to access your blog. “Hot Teacher” probably wouldn’t go over well with the principal, so choose wisely. Second, you will give your blog a title. This will be the name shown at the top of your browser’s window and does not have to be unique. Lastly, one can limit random visitors by keeping the blog private and not listing your blog with search engines. (Don’t check that last box.)

Blog Domain:	<input type="text" value="msmartin.edublogs.org/"/> (Your address will be domain.edublogs.org/.Must be at least 4 characters, letters and numbers only. It cannot be changed so choose carefully!)
Blog Title:	<input type="text" value="Mrs Martin's Messages"/>
Privacy:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I would like my blog to appear in search engines like Google and Technorati, and in public listings around this site.
<input type="button" value="Signup »"/>	

Activate the account. You will get an email that will give you a link to follow. The resulting email will give you your password needed to administer the blog. Do not loose the password. Do not give it to students. Do not pass ‘Go’ or collect \$200.

msmartin.edublogs.org/ Is Yours
But, before you can start using your blog, **you must activate it.**
Check your inbox at **anonymous@** [redacted] and click the link given.
If you do not activate your blog within two days, you will have to sign up again.

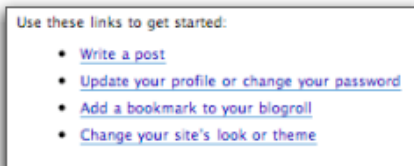
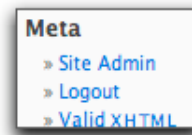
Setup Notes:

Email address used: _____

Domain used (###.edublogs.org) : _____

Username used: _____

As soon as you check your email, you will have a password to access your 'dashboard'. Only you have access to the dashboard since it is the main 'control center'. There are two ways to get into your dashboard. The first is after you login, you enter the dashboard automatically. The second, and easier, way is to use the 'Site Admin' link under your Meta links. The Meta links are one of the widgets provided by Edublogs. If you remove this widget when you choose to customize your blog, you will lose the easy access to your dashboard.



Your dashboard will have a number of sections to amaze and confuse you. The one we will use is the section at the top left, "Use these links to get started:" How helpful.

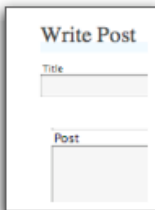
Update Your Profile

The second link, I know I skipped the first one, is where you can change the password to something more memorable. That link also shows you your contact info in case you want to change the contact email address later and it shows you the website address that you will need to access your new free blog.

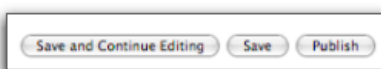


Write A Post

The 'Write a post' link gets you started on your first post. If you don't see the link on the page, find 'Write' on your blue Dashboard and select 'Write Post' from there. Take a deep breath because it can be visually overwhelming. We are going to make a simple post for our students to read and respond to.

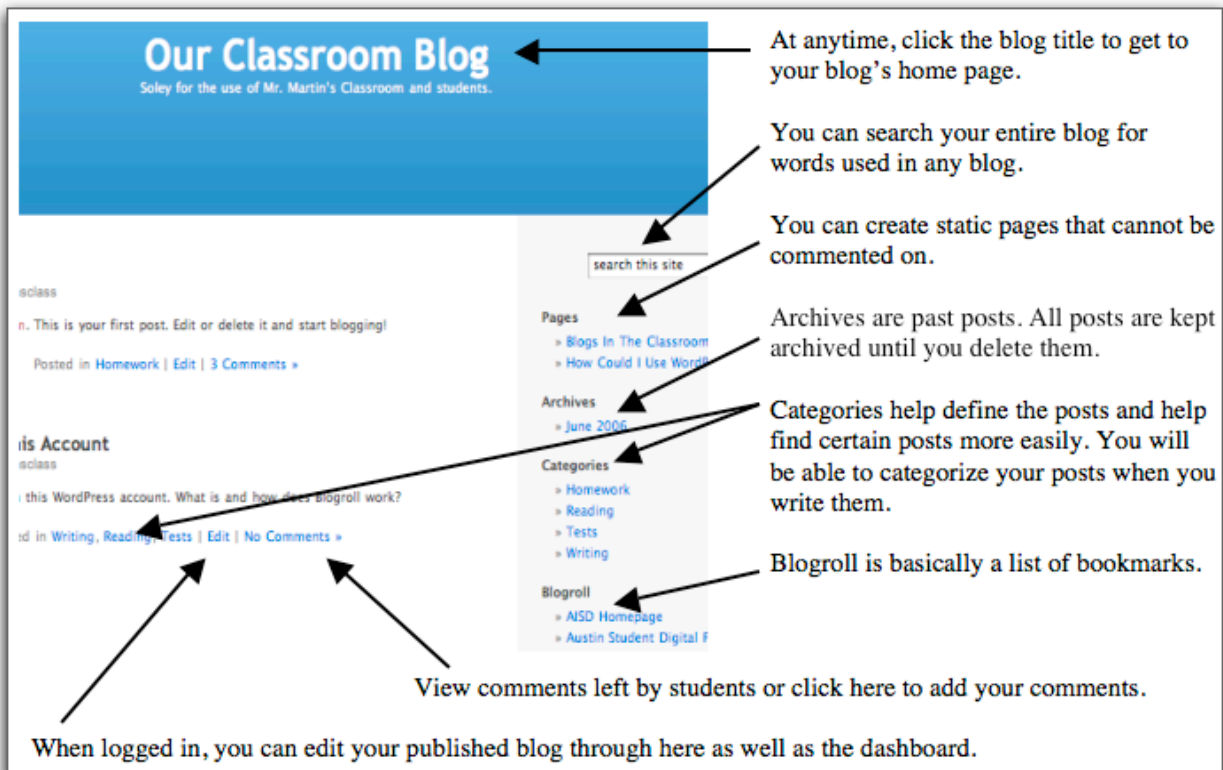


1. First, give the post a title. This not only gives a framework for the post, but is also a nice reference.
2. Click in the 'Post' box and start typing meaningful and thoughtful text that will provoke students to respond in a similar deep manner. You have 30 seconds. Go! One has as much room as needed. If you type to the bottom of the box, a scroll bar will appear and you will have more room to type. It is suggested that for your longer posts, type first in a word processor, copy and paste it into this box.



3. Your last choices: 'Save and Continue' will save your post as a draft and let you keep typing; 'Save' will save the post as a draft and exit the new post window; 'Publish' assumes you have finished and want the post shown on the blog. Drafts are not visible until they are published.

Navigating Your WordPress Blog



Our Classroom Blog
Solely for the use of Mr. Martin's Classroom and students.

At anytime, click the blog title to get to your blog's home page.

You can search your entire blog for words used in any blog.

You can create static pages that cannot be commented on.

Archives are past posts. All posts are kept archived until you delete them.

Categories help define the posts and help find certain posts more easily. You will be able to categorize your posts when you write them.

Blogroll is basically a list of bookmarks.

View comments left by students or click here to add your comments.

When logged in, you can edit your published blog through here as well as the dashboard.

The screenshot shows a blue header with the blog title and subtitle. Below the header is a search bar labeled 'search this site'. To the right is a sidebar with sections: Pages (Blogs In The Classroom, How Could I Use Word?), Archives (June 2006), Categories (Homework, Reading, Tests, Writing), and Blogroll (AISD Homepage, Austin Student Digital F). The main content area shows a post titled 'This is your first post. Edit or delete it and start blogging!' with a '3 Comments' link. Below the post is a 'Write Account' section with an 'Edit' link. Arrows point from the text annotations to these specific elements on the page.

Edit Posts

From the dashboard, select the 'Manage' tab and then the 'Posts' tab when it appears. This window will show you the last 15 posts on your blog. To edit one, click the 'edit' link to the right of the post you wish to edit. This takes you to the 'Write Post' window that you used to create the post initially.



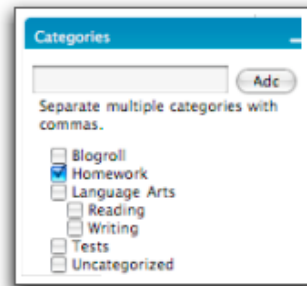
Categories

One can live without categories, but if your blog grows through frequent use, then categories can be a life-improver. Possible uses:

- label post by curriculum area if used in self-contained room
- label post by period or class
- label post as 'test' for review information that could be covered on a test
- label as genre of literature, style of written response requested, etc

Whether you do this when you are creating a new post or by editing previously created posts, adding a category is the same. First, get to the 'Write Post' window as discussed above.

Click the + to the right of the blue 'Categories' option to the right. Initially, WordPress has one category, 'uncategorized'. All posts will be uncategorized until you create your own.



Create categories by typing the new category in the box and clicking the 'Add' button. *Here is where Firefox comes in handy. Safari and sometime Explorer don't work well with adding categories.* As you type, WP will want to suggest some category ideas. You can select one of theirs or create your own.

Once clicking 'Add', the category will be listed here. Select the items you want before publishing to get it shown with the post.

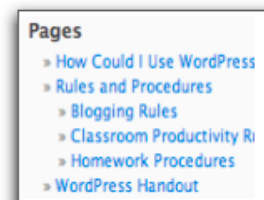
Once categorized, a user can click that category on the front page to show matching results. For example, a student wants to view posts that were marked as test review material. By clicking the 'Tests' category, that student can remove all non-matching posts from sight.

Create a Page

Pages are different from posts in that the reader can not leave comments. In the classroom, this hold good promise in that procedures, teacher notes, or other static information can be placed here. Pages are linked to from your blog's home page.

Go to the dashboard and select the 'Write' tab and the 'Page' tab afterward. Give the page a title. This title will be shown on your homepage. Next, type your information in the 'page content' box.

Options for pages vary. Since pages are listed on your home page, you could organize pages by giving specific topics. Pages can have sub-pages on listed on your home page. That means, you could create a 'main' (called a parent) page called rules. This main page would give some general rule information. A second page could be created for blogging rules and you could select the 'main' page as the parent. The figure to the right shows three pages that have Rules and Procedures as their parent.



The Surmountable Downside- Commenting

One of the great things about WordPress is that you can set it to mandate the entry of identifiable information in order to leave a comment. The main identification can be a required email address or WordPress username. Since students don't generally have email addresses yet, there are two workable solutions a teacher can utilize.

1. The First method is to first log out of WordPress and go back to the main Edublogs.org webpage. Follow the directions from page one in this handout, but this time click the 'Just a username' button. Make this username for your students. You can create a user and password that all students will use when they blog in class. Perhaps I would use 'mrmartinsclasstudent' as an login ID. The trainable fix is that students must type their name or initials at the end of their comment. Otherwise, nobody will know who left which comments.

The second part to that is setting the blog to mandate the WordPress ID. Using the Dashboard, select the Options menu and the General tab. By checking the box 'Membership', you are mandating that the only comments left will be left by WordPress registered users. A

problem with this method is that you

Membership: Users must be registered and logged in to comment

are making any parent or sister class across the country also register a WordPress account.

2. The second method is a much tighter lock down for comments. This can be used in conjunction with the first method to increase the security of posted comments. Using the WordPress 'Moderation' tool, one can filter out undesirable comments and keep strangers from adding comments. We will set up the blog moderation tool in WordPress because so that once an email account is accepted by the teacher, that account is automatically posted from then on. The truly wonderful thing is that the email accounts do not have to be valid! Have students sign their comment with anonymous-like initials, but everyone uses an assigned fake email account. Fake email accounts mean that there is no actual email the students will use and their personal information isn't online anywhere. In the example below, I just used student initials with a bogus @email.com domain. You could use any domain such as @mrmartin.com, @class.email, or whatever. Each student should use a different fake email, which will register in your WordPress dashboard, but not on the page viewed by others. Once you approve an email, that email address will be allowed to post without moderation. Other comment attempts will be stopped by the moderation tool and wait to be approved by the teacher.

Leave a Reply

J.S. Name

j.s@email.com Mail (hidden)

Website

I don't agree with PR's comment. The second little pig p the natrual tendancy of a person to take short cuts to s way of undervaluing the true belief behind how got wha'

The downside to WordPress moderation is in the initial posting. The teacher will have to approve each student. That would only happen once for each student. Another downside is that students who misspell their approved fake email will not see their comment until approved; a point for typing accuracy.

Setting Options in WordPress

To set any options, login to your WordPress account and find your dashboard. If you have more than one account, you will see it under the drop down menu.

Go to the Options tab and select Discussion. There are two settings that can really help manage your classroom blog.

Email me whenever:

The email feature is nice especially when the blog is not used on a daily basis. Emailing comments that are held for moderation will alert you to either outsiders trying to comment or the student who mistyped their fake email address and isn't recognized by your moderation filter.

Before a comment appears:

Some teachers want to approve every comment, which is what the first option shows. I firmly believe that in a collaborative classroom environment, delaying all comments will only slow the process, take away student-perceived ownership, and take away from the high level of student interest in immediate interaction. But there are times that this may be necessary. You will want the students to fill out their name and fake email. But the greatest tool is the automatic approving of previously approved comments. This is where the fake email comes in. Turning on the third option automates your moderating strategy.



Support

You can of course email me for additional support. The whole blogging community is a very supportive group and help can be found in many forms. For specific help with WordPress, Visit <http://wordpress.org> for lots of help files, support links, and blog ideas.

This handout can be found online at <http://classroomblogging.wordpress.com> along with a new post every week about how teachers can use blogging in their classroom.