



# What is a Blog?

A Blog is a frequent, chronological publication of personal thoughts and Web links. A blog is often a mixture of what is happening in a person's life and what is happening on the Web, a kind of hybrid diary/guide site, although there are as many unique types of blogs as there are people.

A typical blog has a main page and nothing else. On the main page, there is a set of entries. Each entry is a little text blurb that may contain embedded links out to other sites, news stories, etc. When the author adds a new entry, it goes at the top, pushing all the older entries down. Some blogs also have sidebars that contain additional permanent links to other sites. The author might update the sidebar weekly or monthly.

Some common features of a simple blog are:

- It is a different kind of Web site--an almost instantly available writing space on the Web that can be created in minutes.
- No knowledge of HTML coding is needed to create it because it's powered by easy-to-use, Web-based software.
- Content can be edited and updated quickly and easily--just type and click a post button.
- Comments can be easily added to posts by readers.
- All posts (entries) are automatically archived.
- Blogs are arranged in chronological order. In this way, they are very different from other web pages.
- Each entry in a blog has a time and date stamp.

A good blog should have a focus and target audience. Your target audience is your students. You should aim to give your students useful information that will entice them to follow your blog. Your blog's info should be relevant to your student's needs and interests. Once you start blogging, give yourself some time to improve your skills as a blogger. It is a "learning by doing" process. At the beginning, it may take longer than you expect to give a personality to your blog. You will soon realize that you are becoming an expert:)

# A step-by-step guide of creating and maintaining a class blog

## 1. Decide what you are going to share with your students on the blog.

You can:

- ask your students' opinions. You can learn more about your students' interests by asking questions like: "Which web sites do you usually visit?"
- consult with your colleagues.
- take a look at various types of weblogs created by both educators and students. Here are some class blogs that you can visit and get ideas:

<http://tedistanbul5thgraders2009.edublogs.org> My Class Blog

<http://blogteddy.com/6th> A 6th grade English class blog from Turkey

<http://blogpals.edublogs.org> Two schools that are blogging across the oceans!

<http://mmsreading.edublogs.org/> Mr.Lane's Effective Reading Blog

<http://mrscaldwell0.edublogs.org/> Mrs. Caldwell's English Blog

<http://www.butlerville.net/> Butlerville Elementary

<http://epencil.edublogs.org/> A Sixth Grade Writing Workshop Weblog

<http://hburdette.edublogs.org/> Ms. Burdette's English Class

<http://dsaienni.edublogs.org/> Eight is GREAT 2008-2009

<http://ncowie.wordpress.com/> A blog for English students at Katikati College

<http://bookreport.edublogs.org/> A Classroom Book Blog

<http://mrsstoddart.edublogs.org/> 6th Grade Science and Social Studies

<http://mrlund.edublogs.org/> Mr. Lund's Fifth Grade Class Blog

<http://gwagrade5.edublogs.org/> GWA Grade 5 Students

<http://kchijefferson.edublogs.org/> Mrs. Chichester's Classroom Blog

<http://jmundorf.edublogs.org/> Mr. Mundorf's Class

<http://inesworkshop.blogspot.com/> A blog for Spanish students of English in the Secondary School

## 2.23 Choose a blog provider.

When you are starting a blog, an important choice is which platform you are going to use to host your blog. At the beginning you can start with a free blogging platform as they are easy and free to use. It requires minimum IT knowledge to publish web content and there are little web maintenance job to be done. In this part, you can find some information about the two biggest host options, Wordpress and Blogger. I would also like to recommend Edublogs which is powered by WordPress and hosts thousands of educational blogs.



[Blogger](#) had been around for a few years before it was bought out by Google in 2003. It was formerly known as Blogspot. It is a free blogging platform which has many features. It is easy and reliable. You have also the chance to use your own Domain Name for your blog.



[WordPress.com](#) is popular with businesses and personal users alike. WordPress boasts the ability to import journal entries from other blogs, meaning that moving over to WordPress is not too complicated a task. Some of the more recent features of WordPress such as increased storage space are only available for a fee, but the free service is more than adequate for most users.

You can find a comparison chart in this link. (Blogger vs. Wordpress)  
<http://pulsed.blogspot.com/2007/07/blogger-wordpress-chart.html>



[Edublogs.org](#) hosts hundreds of thousands of education blogs. You can easily create and manage a class blog. It's powered by WordPress and you can use many WordPress features, including the customizable themes. It's easy to set up podcasting, videos, and photos. Because it's powered by WordPress, you have complete control over which comments and posts get published. Any visitor can leave a comment, and you can moderate the comments before they go live on your site.

## 3 You can get started in a few minutes!

Starting a blog is as easy as creating an email account. You should decide on a user name, a password, and the name of your blog. You can start posting on your blog in a few minutes. Here are some basic instructions for opening a blog on Edublogs. (adapted from Edublogs sign up pages)

- At Edublogs.org, click on the blue link **“Sign up here”**.
- On the sign up page, choose a user name. Enter your email address. Check the terms of service box. Click on **“Gimme a Blog!”** Click on **“Next.”**
- Name your blog. The name should reflect the purpose of the blog.
- Give a title to your blog. Your blog’s title appears at the top of your blog pages.
- If you want your blog to be visible to anyone who visits and in public listings around the site, click on **“Yes”**.
- Select a blog type. (**Teacher, Student or Other**)
- Select a language.
- Click on the **“Sign Up”** button.
- Check your inbox and click the given link to activate your account.
- Get your password and then login to your account. (The page that you see when you login is a kind of a control panel where you can post messages, change the look of your blog, moderate comments, etc.)
- Click on the **“Write a New Post”** link. Give a title and write your post.
- Click on **“Publish”** to send it to your blog.

In order to learn more about the features, you can watch the video tutorials on [Edublogs.org](http://Edublogs.org).

Because I am a highly visual person, I prefer to start by changing the look of my blog. When you click **“Design”**, you can see that there are more than ninety themes with different features. After changing the theme, I customise the side bars using the Widget system. (There are one or two side bars depending on the theme) This is my second favourite activity:). You should click **“Design”** and then **“Widgets”**. The greatest thing is you can add different interesting widgets by adding **“Texts”** to your sidebar and then pasting the html codes of the widgets you want to add. Here are some widget options:

[Clustrmaps](#): This is a tiny map on with red dots which grow as your blog's readers, from around the world, visit your blog. Students love watching the red dots grow and it reminds students that they are part of a global audience.

[Flickr Slideshow](#): You can share photos with your students and parents by adding a Flickr Slideshow to your sidebar. First, you must have a [Flickr account](#). After you get familiar with Flickr, you can click this link to see how you can add a Flickr Slideshow to your sidebar. <http://theedublogger.edublogs.org/2009/01/31/embedding-a-flickr-slideshow-in-your-blog-sidebar/>

[Feedjit Maps](#) Live Traffic Feed: Students can see the cities and the countries of blog visitors.

[Box.net](#) Box Widget: The Box widget is one of my favourites because it makes my life easier. It is a box on your sidebar where visitors can download files. We call it the "Homework Box" and my students always know where the homework is.

[PollDaddy](#): You can now create surveys and polls for your blog. [Daily Factoid](#), [Clocklink](#), [Site Meter](#) are the other Widgets I use on my blog.

### **And some blog tools...**

[Smilebox](#): You can create scrapbooks, slide shows, postcards, and more to post on your blog with this tool.

[Voice Thread](#): You can create online presentations with audio and text. You can incorporate PowerPoint, Flickr, Word, PDF, and more. Teachers get a free account.

[MakeBeliefsComix.com](#): You choose your characters, add word or thought bubbles, and complete with your own text to create your very own comic strip. This is a fun activity for students to incorporate in their blogs, too.

## 4✿ Introduce the blog to your students, maintain interest.

This is the best part of blogging! When I first introduced the blog to my students, the expression on their faces was worth seeing. I said to myself, “I managed to impress my [Digital Natives!](#)”

Here are some ideas to maintain your students’ interest:

- **Choose blog assistants every month.** Students feel more involved if you give them responsibility. First, talk about the responsibilities of “Blog Assistants”. (e.g Responding to friends’ comments regularly, finding good links and reporting to teacher, helping the teacher find interesting content for the blog, etc.) You can take Blog Assistants’ photos and post a message to the blog introducing that month’s assistant. (I only use students’ first names, not surnames.)
- **Reply to student comments regularly.**
- **Send compliments to your students from time to time.**
- **Praise students who write comments regularly.** This motivates the other students as well.
- **Learn about your students’ interests, their favourite things and put some fun stuff up on the blog.** Update this stuff regularly. (e.g. Music videos, songs and lyrics, podcasts, funny videos, episodes from Garfield, etc.)
- **Give links to other class blogs.**
- **Give useful links and make sure that the links are appropriate to their level and interests.**
- **Write your posts in a conversational tone.**
- **Put some thought into your headlines and try to find eye-catching headlines.**
- **Reward your top commentors.** You can give certificates to the students who write the most and the best comments. Let them know that the students who write the most comments are going to be awarded with a certificate. Don’t forget to mention that not only the number but also the quality of comments is very important.

## 5 ✿ You have created a class blog.. How can you make your blog an effective learning tool?

- Start class discussions on the blog and expect students to contribute with their comments.
- Post reading passages and ask students to comment on them.
- Give useful links. (e.g. fun links, online exercises, online research links for performance tasks, etc.)
- Give links to other class blogs.
- Post some cool stuff. (e.g. Music videos, short films, songs, etc.)
- Put different widgets on the sidebars. (e.g. Clock, Calendar, Feedjit, This Month in History, etc.)
- Post brain teasers and reward the students who give the correct answer. (e.g. First five students get chocolate.)
- Post interesting facts and fun trivia, and ask students to comment on these facts.
- Use [Looky Books](#). (Picture books you can talk about)
- Upload worksheets and assignments.
- Create a class page and let students leave comments freely in this area.
- Create quizzes and post the quizzes to the blog. (<http://www.proprofs.com/quiz-school/create-a-quiz.php>)
- Post motivational messages.
- Put class photos.
- Create polls and put different polls regularly. (<http://www.poll daddy.com/>)
- Give story starters and ask students to write their own stories. (<http://www.goodnightstories.com/index.html>)



## Moderating students' comments, correcting mistakes.

- o Before your students start writing comments and replying to your messages, teach your students the etiquette of online posting and set some blogging rules. Here are some good links for you to get ideas:  
<http://www.bpl.org/kids/netiquette.htm>  
[http://www.kidsdomain.com/brain/computer/surfing/netiquette\\_kids.html](http://www.kidsdomain.com/brain/computer/surfing/netiquette_kids.html)  
<http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/Guide/netiquette.html>  
<http://www.albion.com/catNetiquette.html>  
[http://www.budtheteacher.com/wiki/index.php?title=Blogging\\_Rules](http://www.budtheteacher.com/wiki/index.php?title=Blogging_Rules)  
<http://discovery0607.wikispaces.com/Discovery+Blogging+Rules>
- o It would be a good idea to go over the punctuation rules. Although students are writing for the blog, they shouldn't think that punctuation rules are not important. I prefer not to approve comments that are written carelessly, with lots of punctuation mistakes.
- o Mistake correction is a somewhat complicated issue. Some teachers may prefer not to correct their students' mistakes. I think it depends on the age and language level of the students. I prefer to correct the major mistakes and also I can't stop myself correcting spelling mistakes. I ask my students to view their comments after my approval and check if there are any changes. Although it is not very common, a few bright students copy their comments before they post; and after their comment is moderated, they compare the two comments to see if there are any differences. Another technique that I sometimes try is that I gather some student comments (without giving student names) on a worksheet and ask students to spot the mistakes in the class. Although this technique works very well, it is the most time consuming.

THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING MY SESSION. I WISH YOU A PLEASANT BLOGGING EXPERIENCE! PLEASE, DO NOT HESITATE TO CONTACT ME IF YOU HAVE IDEAS TO SHARE

My contact details:

E-mail: [akyol.burcu@gmail.com](mailto:akyol.burcu@gmail.com)

EFL Blog: <http://burcuakyol.edublogs.org>

Class Blog (2008-2009): <http://tedistanbul5thgraders2009.edublogs.org>

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