

Public Blog Proposal

Before beginning work on the [public blog project](#) students must complete a short proposal, explaining their desired blog topic and listing some preliminary resources the student will draw on as examples and sources as they start writing.

Students will complete many of the pieces of the blog proposal as homework assignments during the first weeks of class. **The final proposal simply asks you to collect these pieces, along with some new work, and submit them to the instructor via elearning for feedback.**

Blog concept paragraph

Write a single paragraph (150-200 words) explaining what you want to blog about and why. Review the "blog topic" section of the public blog assignment before beginning. When you first draft this paragraph, at beginning of week 2, you will likely be just beginning to think about your blog community. That's ok. By the time you turn in the final draft of your proposal, however, you should be sure to have selected a specific topic within a well-established blog community.

Your concept paragraph should answer the following questions:

- What will your blog be about?
- Who do you expect to read your blog?
- How will you distinguish yourself from other bloggers working on similar topics?
- Why will readers choose to read your blog, as opposed to another source of information?

Annotated twitter list

During week four of class, you will prepare a list of seven twitter sources relevant to your topic. Following good sources on twitter can be a great source of timely information for your blog! For your proposal, include your

list of seven twitter sources, along with a brief explanation of what makes each source valuable. For example, if you were proposing a blog on popular science and wanted to include Phil Plait as a twitter source, you might write:

- **Phil Plait**(@BadAstronomer): Phil Plait is a well-known and outspoken astronomer and skeptic. He blogs for Discover magazine on science topics.

Complete one entry like the one above for each of your seven twitter sources.

Annotated blogroll

It is vital that you find high-quality blogs in your topic area to use as examples for your blogs, and as sources of information! We'll discuss how to winnow your list down to the highest quality blogs near the end of week four, but to succeed, you should really start looking for blogs to serve as examples much sooner, as soon as you have an idea for a concept. Use the search techniques discussed in three in your search.

For the blog proposal, include a list of five high-quality blogs in your topic area. For each blog, give an explanation of why you think it is a high-quality site and a good example for you to follow. For example, if you were proposing a blog on technology and geek culture, and wanted to use the blog BoingBoing as an example, you might write:

- **BoingBoing**(<http://boingboing.net>) BoingBoing is an extremely well known and well-regarded technology and geek culture blog. BoingBoing is consistently linked to by other well known, high-quality blogs in the community, including Slashdot, io9, and gizmodo. The blog's authors include: nationally known science-fiction author and copyright law critic Cory Doctorow, who has published many award winning books with major publishers, and Xenia Jardin, who has a heavily followed and often quoted twitter presence and has been quoted as a source on technology and culture issues by national news organizations including CNN. BoingBoing links to high-quality sources including major news outlets, government documents, and other high-quality blogs.

BoingBoing also provides unique and informative commentary on the material they link to. For example, one recent post discussing alleged bad deeds Google committed while dealing with a Kenyan charity not only linked to a reliable story on the case, but also included Cory Doctrow's analysis of the story in his own words. This analysis showed the reader Doctrow's expert opinion on the matter. BoingBoing also published updates informing readers of Google's side of the story.

Write an entry like the one above for each of your five example blogs. Be sure to include the blog's name, URL, and a description like the one given in each entry.

Public Blog Assignment

The public blog project asks students to create and maintain a publicly accessible blog on a subject of their own choosing. This blog will be accessible to a real audience, a community of bloggers and readers interested in the blog's topic. Working with a real audience will give students important experience in the skills necessary to be successful producers of online content.

Blog Topic

There is no set list of “acceptable” topics for this assignment. Blogs cover a vast area of topics, and students are free to choose a topic that interests them. However, to be successful, blog topics should follow the guidelines listed below:

Be connected to an active blogging community: Students will need to locate high-quality blogs to use as examples for their own projects. Many, many topics have active blogging communities associated with them. You will need to locate and document the community you want to join as part of your public blog proposal.

Be specific: It is vital for public blogs to occupy a unique niche in the blogging community they join. For this reason, students need to select as specific a topic as possible for their public blogs. For example, a “sports blog” would be too broad, a blog devoted to a particular sport, team, or region would be appropriate. You will be asked to describe your specific topic, and how it fills an un-met need in your blogging community, in your public blog proposal.

Be exciting: You will be working on your public blog for many weeks, and writing multiple pieces per week on the blog during this time. This schedule will become exhausting if you do not select a topic you are excited about. That said, since this is a class about both research and writing skills, it may be better to choose a topic you have not yet mastered completely. You will be expected to research your topic and learn new information in the process of writing your posts, and asked to reflect meaningfully on this topic. This will be difficult to do unless you pick a topic where you still have new things to learn!

Be evidence-based (at least sometimes): This class asks students to learn to read and evaluate sources and evidence, and to write arguments supported by a variety of forms of evidence. It is not that unusual for bloggers to rely solely on personal experience as evidence. For example, many food bloggers write pieces based entirely on their experience preparing or consuming food. However, while the public blog project will ask students to prepare a variety of sorts of posts, and some posts may call on personal experience as evidence, you should select a topic that will allow you to use other sources of evidence for at least some of your posts. For

example a pure movie review blog, which would contain only the student's personal responses to films, would be a bad choice. A better choice might be a blog that would combine the student's personal reviews of movies with pieces in which he or she would consider and respond to film history, other critics, and film scholars.

Project Instructions

We will spend weeks one through five of our class preparing to blog and completing the public blog proposal. Starting in week six, students will be expected to update their public blogs roughly twice per week. These posts will follow four basic templates, based on the four genres of blogging Howard Rheingold describes in *Net Smart*. The four templates are:

Filter Posts: The simplest style of post is the filter post. To succeed, a filter post needs to succinctly demonstrate the student's ability to select and pass-along other sources of information to his or her audience. Each filter post you complete should consist of a link and one or two sentences clearly explaining why the link is valuable and why your readers might want to visit it. Filter posts should be timely and link to sources relevant to current events. Filter posts should not exceed 200 words.

Connector Posts: The connector post is slightly more involved than the filter post. To succeed, a connector post needs to quickly demonstrate the author's understanding of how two or more sources are connected in the context of your blogging community. For example, a food blogger might compare the relative strengths and weaknesses of two different restaurant review blogs (maybe one has stronger images, and the other reviews more diverse establishments). Or, a political blogger might explain how a secondary source (like another blogger or journalist) helps us to better understand a primary source (like the text of a bill or law). Each connector post you complete should consist of at least two sources and three or four sentences clearly explaining the connections between the sources given. Like filter posts, connector posts should be timely. Connector posts should not exceed 300 words.

Critic Posts: The critic style post, like its cousin the advocate style post, asks the student to make a sustained, evidence-based argument. To succeed, a critic post should build a counterargument in response to another blogger in your blogging community, or another source. As Rheingold puts it: "You don't have to hate a meal or find an incorrect statement of fact to be a critic. Debate the logic or possible bias of an author. [...] Indicate what the author leaves out. Voice your own opinion in response." Each critic post should consist of a brief (no more than 200 words) summary of the argument being refuted, a link to the original source (or if the original source is not online, a link to a purchase link for the source on Amazon or a Wikipedia summary of the source), and a 350-500 word argument explaining what you think is wrong with the original source and why. Your 350-500-word argument should include at least two links to sources supporting your argument (or, if the

sources aren't online, references giving at least the title, author and date of publication). Critic posts should not exceed 700 words.

Advocate Posts: The advocate style post is structured as an evidence-based argument, just as the critic post does. However, instead of arguing against something the advocate-based post builds an argument in support of something. To succeed, an advocate post should build an evidence based argument in favor of something of interest to your blogging community. For example, a local politics blogger might write a post in favor of a planned new park, or a health blogger might write in support of a patient's right to access his or her own health records. Each advocate post should consist of a brief (no more than 200 words) summary of the argument being supported, a link to the original source (or if the original source is not online, a link to a purchase link for the source on Amazon or a Wikipedia summary of the source), and a 350-500 word argument explaining why you believe your readers should support the idea or plan proposed. Your 350-500-word argument should include at least two links to sources supporting your argument (or, if the sources aren't online, references giving at least the title, author and date of publication). Advocate posts should not exceed 700 words.

See the course schedule for details on assigned posts for each week!

Evaluation

The Public Blog assignment will be worth 30% of the student's total grade. Each post to the public blog will be evaluated according to the appropriate rubric below:

Filter and Connector Posts

	Excellent	Good	Needs Improvement
Source Quality	The sources included are reliable, appropriate for the blog's audience, and demonstrate the author's skill at curation.	The sources provided are reliable, but perhaps not the most appropriate to the blog's audience, or so widely covered as to obscure the author's skill at curation.	The sources included are unreliable.
Explanation Quality	For filter posts, the explanation quickly and clearly expresses why the source is valuable	The provided explanation attempts to accomplish the tasks outlined for	The explanation is absent, unconvincing, inappropriate for the blog's

	to the reader. For connection posts, the explanations clearly explain how the sources are connected and why this connection matters.	the “excellent” level, but perhaps includes distracting information, unprofessional grammar errors, or unclear language.	audience, or contains grammatical errors that seriously obscure meaning.
Timeliness	The sources provided clearly relate to discussions unfolding within your blogging community, or news and events relevant to the community.	The sources provided connect to current events of interest to your community, but the link is somewhat obscure or forced.	The sources provided are not connected to any current issues or concerns relevant to your blogging community.

Critic and Advocate Posts

	Excellent	Good	Needs Improvement
Argument	The post makes a clear, specific, defensible claim. The entire post clearly relates to and supports this main claim.	The post makes a clear claim, but this claim is over-broad or difficult to defend. Some content may stray from the main claim.	Post lacks a clear main claim, or is badly incoherent.
Evidence	The post supports its claim with high-quality evidence. The links between evidence and claim are clear and well-established.	The post supports its claim with evidence, but not all of the evidence is high-quality, or links between evidence and claim are unclear.	Evidence is lacking or extremely low in quality.
Style	The post maintains a unique voice for the writer, while still following all appropriate	The post follows all appropriate grammar and usage rules, and is clearly written, but	The post makes grammar errors that prevent understanding, is unclear and

	grammar and usage rules. The tone and word choice are appropriate to the student's blogging community.	does not establish a compelling voice or uses some language inappropriate to the student's blogging community.	difficult to read, or very inappropriate to the needs of the blogging community.
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No credit will be assigned to posts that are incomplete, or use sources in an unethical and unacknowledged manner.

Platform Evaluation Presentation

For our last project in this class, students will work in groups to evaluate a digital platform, and report their findings to the class in the form of a presentation. The goal of this presentation is for students to put what we learned about online collaboration to practical use by researching a potential platform for digital writing and research and developing a plan for how to best engage with this platform.

Platform Evaluation

Your group will be assigned a particular platform, or digital media service, to evaluate. In our reading on Transmedia, Henry Jenkins explained how entertainment companies can spread a single narrative across a variety of media platforms to benefit from the unique capabilities of each, and ultimately tell a more effective and engaging story. Your group's job will be to research the platform, learn about its unique capabilities and how users are taking advantage of them, and craft a plan for how you could engage successfully with it as independent bloggers.

Coordinating Collaboration

Completing a strong evaluation and presentation will require your group to coordinate distant collaboration. This is part of the assignment!!

To accomplish this, follow the procedure below.

Use a collaborative document editor: The most common solution for this is Google docs, but other solutions are available, including Quip and PiratePad. Create a shared document to use in composing your written evaluation as soon as you begin the assignment and share this document with the instructor!

Break drafting the Written Evaluation into individual tasks, and set deadlines:

Split up the drafting of the written evaluation into smaller pieces, and assign one piece to each group member. The most common way to do this is to have one group member commit to complete each section of the written evaluation (described below). Have each group member commit to a deadline for completing his or her drafting well in advance of the final due date. Add the list of assignments and due dates to your shared document for group members and the instructor to see.

Schedule group meetings: Your group should meet to discuss progress and share information at least twice before the final due date. Group members unable to attend in-person meetings due to schedule problems may instead participate via Skype/Google Hangout or similar.

Schedule time for collaborative editing: Once drafting is complete, your group should schedule a few hours of time to work together on editing and revising your shared document. You may want to meet in person during this time, or use Skype/Google Hangout or a chat program to coordinate your work.

The Written Evaluation

The written evaluation is divided into five sections, listed below. Each section should be 600-800 words in length when complete.

I have listed a series of questions for your group to consider when composing each section. **Your final presentation should not consist of answers to these questions.** Instead, consider these questions carefully; decide which are most relevant to your platform, and present a synthesis that summarizes the most important information on the platform.

Section 1: Platform Background

This one is straightforward. Give the background of your platform.

- What is it?
- When was it created? Who created it? Why?
- How does it describe itself?
- What is its mission?
- What are some common uses of the platform?
- What can you find out about who the users of the platform are? What are their demographics? Interests?

Section 2: Example of Effective Use

Use this section to explain an example of effective use of the platform to your audience, and what this example demonstrates about how the best users employ the platform. To find an example of effective use, locate a user that demonstrates significant social capital, high visibility, and high reliability on this platform. Someone using the platform to successfully communicate with an audience. Evaluate what makes this user's communication effective. Consider the following:

- How do we see this user building and maintaining social capital on the platform?
- How does the user encourage collaboration from other platform users? How do they contribute to the work of others?
- How does the user direct the attention of his or her readers?
- How does the user establish a topical niche for himself or herself?
- What can we learn about the location of this user in the larger network of users on the platform? Is he or she effectively a supernode? Does he or she bridge significant communities of other users?

Section 3: Platform Strengths

Use this section to analyze the platform's key strengths. Try to only discuss a few key strengths, say three or four, and explain each in some detail. Consider the following, but remember to develop three or four key points in your section:

- What tools does the platform give users for reusing and remixing material? For citing material and giving credit?
- What tools does the platform give users for building community and interactivity? How does the platform help users create interest-based groups?
- How does the tool allow users to build reputation?
- How does the tool allow users to direct the attention of other users and collaborate on shared tasks?
- What tools does the platform provide for tagging content and creating folksonomies?

Section 4: Dangers of Engaging With This Platform

Use this section to analyze the platform's key dangers. Try to only discuss a few key dangers, say three or four, and explain each in some detail. Consider the following, but remember to develop three or four key points in your section:

- What is the platform's business model? How might the priorities of the platform and the individual user diverge?
- What information does the platform harvest from the user? What privacy concerns might there be?
- How easy is it to move data contributed to the platform elsewhere? Are you "locked in" to using it, or could you "migrate" elsewhere if need be?
- What is the platform's reputation? Has it had privacy problems in the past? What complaints have there been about this platform?
- What does the platform's TOS agreement say?

Section 5: Engagement Plan

Use this section to present your engagement plan. Your engagement plan should explain how you intend to take advantage of the platform's strengths, and avoid the platform's weaknesses, while accomplishing the *purpose* and reaching the audience of one of your group member's blogs. Because of this, if you choose to have one group member draft this plan (see "coordinating collaboration," above), they will need to work closely with the members drafting the other sections. Consider the following when establishing your plan, but remember to select the most relevant ideas for the platform and synthesize a few action points for the final plan:

- How will you build social capital/reputation on the platform?
- How will you collaborate with others?
- How will you reuse the material others have added to the platform?

- How will you ensure that the author’s material does not become “locked in” to the platform? How will you maintain the author’s independence?
- How will you build connections with diverse parts of the network the platform enables? How will you make yourself a “bridge?”
- How will you take advantage of any tagging/folksonomy creation system the platform allows?

Presentations

During the last week of class, groups will present their evaluations to the class. Presentations should be fifteen minutes in length, and include both spoken information and visual accompaniment in the form of PowerPoint or Prezi slides.

Each section of your evaluation (listed above) should be included in your presentation. **Not more than two slides, and not more than three minutes of spoken presentation should be devoted to each section.**

Effective presentations will organize their information clearly for the audience. Each slide should provide one to three clear points and the spoken discussion accompanying this slide should clearly and directly follow these points. The same logical and verbal bridges used to tie together written pieces coherently should also be employed in your spoken presentation.

Effective slides will either succinctly outline key points of your argument, or provide a clear and easy-to-see visual example. **Do not include full paragraphs of text in your slides!**

Practice your spoken presentation to achieve even pace and tone, and remember to keep eye-contact with the class while speaking!

Again presentations should last exactly fifteen minutes. Presentations longer, or shorter, than this limit will be penalized. Practice your presentation with your group!

Groups should be prepared to engage in approximately five to ten minutes of Q+A with classmates and the instructor at the end of their presentation.

Evaluation

Groups will be evaluated on the content of their evaluation **and** their written, spoken, and visual communication skills. One score will be assigned to the group as a whole, though the instructor reserves the right to assign a lower score to a clearly non-participating group member.

	Excellent	Good	Needs Improvement
Evaluation Content	The group's evaluation is based on detailed, specific information about the assigned platform, and supported by citations to reliable sources and specific examples drawn from the platform itself.	The group's evaluation is based on information about the assigned platform, and supported by citations to reliable sources.	The group's evaluation lacks specific information about the assigned platform.
Written Organization	Each of the five sections of the group's written evaluation is focused and precise. Each section uses verbal and rhetorical bridges to connect its points, and transition to and from previous and following sections.	The group's written evaluation is organized into the five assigned sections, with each section effectively focusing on its topic.	The group's written evaluation lacks any discernible organization
Written Style	This group's written evaluation is clearly written, and shows the group has worked together to collectively edit the document and achieve a unified style.	The group's written evaluation is clearly written and lacks major errors in grammar and usage.	The group's written evaluation has many errors in grammar and usage which obscure meaning.
Presentation Organization	group's presentation is clearly focused on the key ideas of this section of the	The group's presentation is organized into five sections, each	The group's presentation has no discernible organization.

	group's evaluation. Verbal and rhetorical bridges tie different points together into a coherent whole.	focusing on the assigned topic.	
Presentation Style	Group members are prepared and active, and present with energy. They actively engage the class.	Group members maintain even pace and volume, and have prepared to present. They do not read from written materials or slides.	The group's presentation seems unprepared.