

Distance Learning Systems

Teaching Tips #11 — Weblogs for Education

If you pay much attention to news and discussion concerning the Internet, you've probably heard of the *weblog* (or *blog*) phenomenon. Even if you're not quite sure what they are, it's hard not to know that weblogs are big news. And if you are familiar with them, you may not have thought about their pedagogical potential.

Weblogs Defined

The term "weblog" encompasses a range of ideas and implementations. For our purposes, a weblog is a regularly updated page or section of a site that is maintained through a simple web interface. Most commonly, these updates appear on the site in chronological order. The administrator or owner of the weblog might be the only person adding content, or it might be open to multiple authors, even a whole class. You can see an example of a typical weblog (in fact, a weblog created as the final project for a USC class in weblogging and journalism) at: <http://journalism.berkeley.edu/projects/biplog/> — the main weblog is the white column on the left.

The Weblog Advantage

Weblogs, and the software that powers them, provide a number of important advantages over traditional web publishing options and work well in tandem with learning management systems like Blackboard. The most important qualities being:

- Easy publishing through a single login and a simple web form
- Multiple authors can publish to the same weblog

Since adding new material to a weblog is so simple—requiring no knowledge of HTML or other nerdy skills—and you can easily allow a group of students to contribute, it is easy to create a classroom learning community around whatever topic you need without the extra overhead of learning a complex technology. Creating a community for your students is an excellent way to improve their learning experience.

What to Weblog

Weblogs can serve many roles in the classroom. At their simplest, they are a simple mechanism for posting news, announcements, and ad-hoc materials. This can be a boon for the instructor who is not using the web at all (or only minimally), but is of limited value to a Blackboard user. The more important uses are those which capitalize on the interaction and multiple-author capabilities of the weblog to do things like:

- Create a collaborative topical resource
- Provide peer coaching and interaction
- Build research and product portfolios
- Stimulate topical discussions
- Assemble student journals
- Contextualize curriculum

Get Started with a Weblog

We have much more information on weblogs, including links to tools, resources and further examples at: <http://distance.uaf.edu/dls/resources/tt/weblogs/> or contact us for personalized assistance in bringing this useful tool to your class!

For more Teaching Tips and other Distance Education information, please visit the new and enhanced Center for Distance Education Distance Learning Systems website at:
<http://distance.uaf.edu/dls/>