

*As with any instructional technology effort, it is important to set up mechanisms for measuring blogging's effectiveness. This section of the guide discusses areas you should consider for assessment and highlights some valuable methods.*

## Assessment and Evaluation Strategies

Assessment can help you identify what a project has accomplished, what worked well (and what didn't), whether there were any unintended consequences, and where to improve. As you design and execute your project, there will be several opportunities for assessing it and its impact on student success. This unit provides some suggestions.

### Assessing the Overall Project

For the project to continue, it must provide value and be supportable. Consider using focus groups, observations, surveys, interviews, and faculty reports to better understand faculty and student perspectives. Your questions might focus on areas such as the value added, training, support, access, hosting solution, and so on.

Whether you use Web-based tools or use a campus-hosted blogging service, questions that explore faculty and student experiences might include:

- What worked? What didn't?
- What were your challenges?
- Where can improvements be made?
- Did blogging add instructional value?

Questions for students who read or post to individual or group/collaborative blogs might include:

- Did using blogs help you reflect on your learning? Your experiences?
- Did blogs help you better develop your critical-thinking skills?
- Was the blog writing you did more useful than other writing assignments, such as term papers?
- How useful was reading others' blogs?
- Did you have the support you needed to use the blogging tools?

Questions for faculty might include:

- What feedback have you received from your students?
- Did the use of blogs support your intended instructional objective(s)?
- Was the effort worth the benefits provided by blogs?
- Did you have the technical support you needed for the project?
- Do you have plans to use blogging in the future? If yes, how?
- Is there anything you would like to do next time that you are not doing now?

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*This section is part of the **EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative Discovery Tool: Guide to Blogging**. The guide is designed to help you explore blogging's potential and limitations, where it fits in the broader context of teaching and learning in higher education, and how you might approach implementation. Each section can be used independently to accomplish specific goals, or all units can be used together for a comprehensive process guide. Find the complete Guide to Blogging at [www.educause.edu/GuideToBlogging](http://www.educause.edu/GuideToBlogging).*

**ELI Discovery Tools** are practical resources designed to support the development and implementation of teaching, learning, and technology projects on campus. They are available to ELI members only.

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In addition to faculty and students, central and departmental IT units should be included in the project assessment. Noticeable increases in help desk calls or network activity may need to be addressed if the project continues or scales up. Some questions to consider include:

- Did the help desk experience an increase in requests for assistance from students participating in the project? From faculty?
- Did networking staff note any impact on the network?
- Did the computer lab staff observe an increase in requests for student assistance?
- What were the most common problems?

An obvious indicator of project success is how much the blogging service is used. With aggregation and Web-analysis tools, campus-based hosting services can document the number of blogs, entries, comments, tags, images, audio/video attachments, and authors, as well as aggregate the day's current posts and create directories to campus-based blogs. For example:

- UThink (<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/>), the University of Minnesota Libraries blog service, provides statistics on the numbers of blogs, entries, comments, and authors, along with links to recent images, active blogs, and blogs with most entries and/or comments.
- Warwick Blogs (<http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/>) at the University of Warwick collects information on what people are writing about, photos they are taking, or media they are reviewing.

## Measuring the Impact on Learning

As noted in the “How do I get started?” section, technology alone will not improve learning. However, access to technologies that enable new activities can support the learning process. As you consider what you hope to achieve, also consider how you will assess the impact of blogs in areas such as content mastery, technology skills, student skill development (such as communication, critical thinking, reflection), convenience, impact on learning, and impact on reflective thinking.

Before you began using blogs, you probably asked a series of questions exploring student technology skills, access to software and hardware, and comfort with blogging. You can gain additional information by conducting formative assessments as you go—questions that help you improve the project as it progresses. The simplest approach might be to periodically ask students if they have changes to suggest that could make blogging more valuable to their learning. Depending on your goals, you might also want to track changes in attitude, understanding, and comfort with the process of blogging and the software or blogging service used.

For summative assessment, or end-of-project measures, solicit faculty input on their observations of student learning, asking questions such as:

- What were your original learning objectives for using blogs? Were they met?
- What was the level of student engagement in posting to their blogs? Commenting on other's blogs?
- How often did students enhance their text entries with links to other Web-based resources or image, audio, and/or video attachments?
- What were the strengths of blogging? Weaknesses?
- Were there any unintended outcomes?

Summative assessment is also useful for measuring student experiences such as ease of using blogs or usefulness/value for learning. A Likert scale can be helpful in gauging differences in student experiences. For example, the following questions could be posed:

- I posted to my blog [rarely] [sometimes] [often].
- I commented on classmate's blogs [rarely] [sometimes] [often].
- I incorporated links to other Web-based resources in my blog posts [rarely] [sometimes] [often].
- I incorporated images, audio, and/or video in my blog posts [rarely] [sometimes] [often].
- Blogging was valuable to my learning [not at all] [somewhat] [very helpful].
- Blogging was a convenient way to enhance my learning [disagree] [neutral] [agree].

Consider using open-ended questions as well, such as:

- What did you learn from posting to your blog?
- What did you learn from commenting on others' blogs?
- What are the strengths of blogging? Weaknesses?
- What aspects of the blogging did you find to be effective for your learning?
- How could blogging be improved to make your learning more effective?

### Authentic Assessment

There are as many types of blogs as there are forms of writing—from research, book reviews, and news reporting to creative writing, journaling, and opinions. Regardless of how you might use blogs for instruction, the process can be intimidating for students. Therefore it may be helpful to ask them to read and reflect on existing blogs as an introductory activity.

In his blog, *2 Cents Worth* (<http://davidwarlick.com/2cents/>), David Warlick assembles a list of questions called “Blog Whats?” that students ask of blogs written by someone else. These questions are designed to help them focus on the content as well as the process of blogging:

- What do you think is important about the blog entry?
- What are the different sides in this issue?
- What does the author want readers to know, believe, or do?
- What else would you say about this blog entry?

People posting to Warlick's blog also suggested these questions:

- Is the author's entry appropriate to the topic and the audience?
- Does the author clearly state his case?
- What sources are used, and are they properly linked?
- What do you know, believe, or want to do after reading the blog?

And, as students begin blogging, ask them to reflect on their writing:

- What experiences or insights have you shared that make this entry unique?
- How will you generate feedback from your readers?
- Are you upfront about your biases?
- How do you want to make your readers feel?
- What are you doing to make people come back to your blog? Do you care or should you?

The same questions students ask of existing blogs could be restated for instructor evaluation of student blogs:

- What is important about the blog entry?
- Are both sides of the issue covered?
- What else needs to be said?

Rubrics can define the assessment criteria for student blogs. Determine the categories you want to assess (such as content, accuracy, visual appearance, resource links, and so on), and then identify the specific criteria for each category along with performance levels (see Table 1). Communicate your expectations by posting the rubric for students to review in advance of the assignment.

**Table 1. Sample Criteria for Determining Effectiveness of Blogs**

Category	Criteria	Performance Levels (with examples)
Content	Organization of thoughts, use of interesting details	<p><b>Excellent:</b> Consistently maintains content focus, adding interesting details</p> <p><b>Average:</b> Reasonably maintains content focus with some interesting details</p> <p><b>Needs attention:</b> Needs to clarify content focus</p>
Accuracy	Vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, adherence to copyright guidelines, appropriate length	<p><b>Excellent:</b> Proofreading is thorough, with correct spelling and punctuation throughout</p> <p><b>Average:</b> Some distracting errors; needs more thorough proofreading</p> <p><b>Needs attention:</b> Frequent spelling, punctuation, and typographical errors; little evidence of proofreading</p>
Visual Appearance	Banner, images, background, font colors	<p><b>Excellent:</b> Unique banner, images, background, and font colors representing a well thought-out design</p> <p><b>Average:</b> Good selection of banner, images, background, and font colors</p> <p><b>Needs attention:</b> Little evidence of consideration to design</p>
Resource Links	Integration of other blogs, Web sites, images, video, audio	<p><b>Excellent:</b> Integrates links to relevant Web sites, other blogs, and media into blog posts</p> <p><b>Average:</b> Connects to other resources on occasion</p> <p><b>Needs attention:</b> Little evidence of links to other resources</p>

While the design, implementation, and analysis of assessments takes time, the results will help you improve your project and extend the role blogging can play in teaching and learning.