

Using blogs in the classroom - ten top tips!



More and more teachers are seeing the benefits of using blogs in the classroom to motivate pupils, improve writing (especially for boys!) and collaborate with other schools. Outlined below are ten top tips to ensure you get the most from blogging and make your class blog a success.

1 - Make your blog look attractive

Visitors to your blog will primarily come to view the content. However, first impressions last, so make sure your blog looks as good as possible. Most blog sites for children provide colourful templates for you to use. You might even include photos of children's work or pictures from the Internet, although make sure you have permission for their use (try stockfreeimages.com or sxc.hu for royalty free images).

2 - Posts should be regular and relevant

Like a traditional website, if the content isn't regularly updated, people won't want to visit again and pupils will soon forget about the blog. Ensure you regularly remind children about the blog and plan tasks to encourage interaction. Your blog can be particularly effective if integrated into your Literacy scheme of work or if its use is required for homework tasks.

3 - Don't limit yourself to the written word

Although your blog will include a significant amount of text, other content should be included to engage your audience. Videos produced by the children can easily be uploaded to most blogging sites, but check the site hosting the video (such as youtube.com) isn't blocked by your Internet filter. You may also want to include photos of the children or copies of their work. As with any content involving children, ensure your e-Safety and acceptable use policies (AUP) are followed, in addition to informing parents as appropriate (see points 8 and 9 below).

4 - Encourage comments

Without any feedback on your blog's posts, it can often be disheartening for pupils who have spent a significant amount of time producing content. Try to allow time for children and other people involved with the school community to comment on posts. Where appropriate, feedback from teacher marking could even be added, although care needs to be taken to ensure it is positive and constructive.

5 - Collaborate with other schools

A great way to share your blog posts is by partnering with other schools. Due to the nature of the Internet, these could be located anywhere in the world! In addition to comments from another school's pupils, teachers can collaborate on topic work. For example, a study of your local neighbourhood becomes far more interesting when compared to that of your partner school somewhere in a different continent.

6 - Set high standards for posts and comments

If students consistently produce writing of poor quality, bad habits can quickly form, which can be hard to get out of. By insisting on high standards from the beginning, pupils are encouraged to reflect on their writing and enhance their Literacy skills. It is also worth bearing in mind how the blog's content could reflect on your school if it is filled with incomprehensible text!



7 - Slowly give pupils more responsibility

In order to demonstrate the required quality and quantity of posts, your initial blog posts are likely to be from teaching staff, with comments provided by pupils. Over time, children can produce their own posts and, depending on age / maturity, help moderate comments. You might even put a reward scheme in place in which pupils earn, "blog posting rights", for the day!

8 - Stay safe online

Despite all the benefits of blogging with primary school children, e-Safety guidance still needs to be carefully followed. Advice such as not giving out personal information and not meeting up with people you meet online should be emphasised at regular intervals. Your school's acceptable use policy (AUP) also needs to be followed and it is wise to encourage parent involvement from the outset (see point 9 below).

9 - Strengthen links with parents

Parents are often keen to participate in class blogs. However, they can also need guidance on what blogging involves, what to contribute and how to follow safety guidelines. Kathleen Morris has produced an excellent, "guide to involving parents in your class blog", which can be found here: http://primarytech.global2.vic.edu.au/2013/02/09/a_guide_to_involving_parents_in_your_class_blog/ / It contains sample blog information, which can be given to parents, in addition to guides on navigating a class blog. To encourage involvement further, you could even hold a parents' evening or a blogging open afternoon.

10 - Spread the word

Your class might be producing some excellent blog posts, but people need to be notified they exist. Check your blogging site allows email subscriptions, which ensures a message is sent out when there's a new post. Twitter can also be used to promote your blog posts. Ideally, a link to your blog should be accessible through your school's website and mentioned in newsletters.

