

The public blog project asks students to create and maintain and 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:

	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 <i>why</i> the source is valuable to the reader. For connection posts, the explanations clearly explain <i>how</i> the sources are connected and <i>why</i> this connection matters.	The provided explanation attempts to accomplish the tasks outlined for the "excellent" level, but perhaps includes distracting information, unprofessional grammar errors, or unclear language.	The explanation is absent, unconvincing, inappropriate for the blog's 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.

Filter and Connector posts:

	Excellent	Good	Needs Improvement
Argument	The post makes a clear, specific, defensible <i>claim</i> . 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 grammar and usage rules. The tone and word choice are appropriate to the student's blogging community.	The post follows all appropriate grammar and usage rules, and is clearly written, but does not establish a compelling voice or uses some language inappropriate to the student's blogging community.	The post makes grammar errors that prevent understanding, is unclear and difficult to read, or very inappropriate to the needs of the blogging community.

Critic and Advocate Posts No credit will be assigned to posts that are incomplete, or use sources in an unethical and unacknowledged manner.