

Academic blogs and why you should start one!

Academic blogging can be a creative way for you to share, explore and develop ideas related to your academic work through a format and language totally different to the one you use in conventional academic publications. Because blogs have the potential to reach a wide and diverse audience (and, for this reason, are an important knowledge mobilization tool!) they tend to be written in lay-person language that avoid the use of jargon. Academic blogs also tend to take on a different tone than academic writing; for example, a blog may use common language, include respectful humour as well as photos and other images to engage readers in the content. The type of writing style you choose all depends on who you want your audience to be and what purpose you see your blog serving for your audience.

One common complaint about blogging is that it's time consuming. While this is true – blogging does requires frequent effort and ongoing commitment in order to be successful – there remain several good reasons why developing your own academic blog may be well worth your investment. Academic blogging can have the following benefits:

- connect you to a wide range of audiences you may not normally have access to, including other researchers and/or future research participants;
- introduce readers to your research and other academic related work;
- help develop your writing skills, including your ability to express ideas quickly and frequently, write for diverse audiences, and summarize academic work into brief and easy to read blog posts;
- play an important role in your knowledge mobilization strategy;
- become an outlet for your creativity and help you explore, develop, and test ideas;
- help build your social media profile;
- can be used to market other publications/resources/products you have developed.

Post often but keep it short

Blogging consistently is considered an essential strategy of successful bloggers. This means posting once or twice a week so your blog remains “fresh” and engaging to your readers. It is also helpful to post around the same day/time each week so that your readers begin to see your blog as reliable and regular. While maintaining this level of blogging activity may seem daunting at first, the good news is that each blog does not need to be a novel. A minimum of 300 words is recommended for each post (so that your blog is indexed by search engines) although, after this number, it is best to keep it short.

Presenting one main idea at a time in each post (rather than bamboozling readers with a ton of brilliant ideas at once!) can be a good way to ensure you do not overload your reader and that your blog remains clear, concise and easy to read. This will also leave you with plenty of ideas to write about in future posts.

Choose an engaging topic & headline

As an academic, you are always working on papers and presentations, developing ideas for lectures and engaging in dialogues with colleagues and students, which is a process that serves potential bloggers well as it will provide you with a wealth of interesting topics to choose from. Moreover, your blog will likely be more successful if you are personally interested in the topics you choose. Not only will your enthusiasm come across in your writing but you will be more likely to post regularly. You will also want to consider which topics are most engaging to your audience. If you already use other types of social media (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc...) these can be good places to discover which topics are hot and which are not. For example, which tweets or posts have people commented on or otherwise engaged with? This gives you a clue about the topics that may generate the most interest. You can also “test” out potential topics on social media before blogging about them by simply tweeting a relevant quote and observing the kind of reaction (if any) it receives.

Once you have chosen a topic, make sure to develop an eye-catching headline for each blog post. The headline is the first thing subscribers will see (or potential new

subscribers will see if you share a link to your blog on social media), so make sure it grabs their attention and motivates them to click on the link to your blog. For suggestions on how to write a catchy headline, visit: <https://blog.bufferapp.com/a-scientific-guide-to-writing-great-headlines-on-twitter-facebook-and-your-blog>

Build your readership base & encourage repeat visitors

Keep in mind that your blog readers will expect your blog to include valuable content if they are going to subscribe (or continue subscribing) to it. For this reason it is important to consider who your readers are, or who you want them to be, and what personal or professional needs you will be meeting with your blog. The tone and voice you choose to use in your blog is also important. Top bloggers point out that subscribers are more likely to follow people, rather than websites. Ensuring your blog has a respectful and personal voice to it, rather than an emotionless corporate feel, can be an important way to increase readership.

You will also want to build up your blog email subscriber list and RSS (“Rich Site Summary”) feed subscriber list, which will send regular blog updates to your followers directly. These are terrific ways for your blog subscribers to stay informed about the latest content you have posted on your blog. To encourage readers to subscribe to your blog, one tip is to show readers how they will benefit from subscribing. For example, instead of writing:

Click [here](#) to subscribe to my blog...

You may want to choose phrases such as:

Get the latest research about [X topic] by email or RSS feed: [here](#).

Get top tips about [X topic] by email or RSS feed: [here](#).

Building up your readership base is important but so is maintaining your current subscribers. Inviting your audience to actively participate in your blog may encourage higher engagement and repeat visitors. For example, you can end blog posts with engaging questions such as:

What do you think about...?

Do you believe...?

In your experience, how have you handled...?

These questions can lead readers to comment on your blog posts and, once they do, it is important that you respectfully respond to individuals who have taken the time to engage with you. Additionally, you can encourage your audience to further share and connect via social media:

If you enjoyed this blog post, please consider sharing it on [X social media]: [here](#).

I would love to connect with you on [X social media]: [here](#).

To help your readers get more from your website, you can end blog posts by directing readers to useful past articles related to the topic you have just posted on.

For more information on [X], see previous posts [a, b, c]: [here](#).

For another perspective on this, see January's guest post by [name of guest blogger]: [here](#).

This is also a useful strategy for connecting readers to other publications/ resources/ products you have developed. You may find adding a link to your newly published research articles is not only interesting for your blog readers but helps increase the number of people accessing these other resources.

Get started!

There are many free blogging tools available to help you get started and a quick internet search using the terms "free blogging tools" will point you in the right direction.

Wordpress, Blogger, and Tumblr are just three of the many platforms available.

Did you find this tip sheet useful? Let us know!

on Twitter: @KNAER_RECRAE

This tip sheet draws from the following sources:

Advice for potential academic bloggers

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2013/01/14/advice-for-potential-academic-bloggers/>

16 Top Tips from Blogging Experts for Beginners

<https://blog.bufferapp.com/blogging-advice-for-beginners-from-16-experts>

Bloggng: How to make it work

<http://journalauthors.tandf.co.uk/beyondpublication/bloggng.asp>

Info graphic – Why do academics blog? An analysis of audiences, purposes and challenges. <http://journalauthors.tandf.co.uk/beyondpublication/bloggng.asp>

For more knowledge mobilization tips and resources visit our website:

<http://knaer-recrae.ca/>



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