Blogging 101

What is Blogging?

Blogs are extremely popular in today's digital world. They act like journals published on the web. Blogs are usually written by one person, although in the case of an organizational there are often multiple writers. Some blogs feature guest writers. Featuring guest writers can allow a literacy agency or other non-profit to offer a new or different perspective on their blog. It can also provide a break for staff members who normally write the blog's content! If a guest blogger comes from a partner agency, it can also be a good way to promote the partnership and the various benefits each organization offers to current and potential clients.

Blogs are easy to set up and use and are often free. They may be set up to be either public or private and may be used as a tool for one-way conversation, or to encourage input and participation and engage a wide range of people. Blogs posts may contain text, pictures, videos, audio, embedded links and other useful content. Keeping a blog private isn't a very good marketing idea – after all, you want to promote the work you are doing through your blog! Blogs written by students, however, may be kept private if they are being used as a teaching/learning tool and to protect confidentiality.

Blogs can be used for social media marketing by adult literacy agencies (and other non-profit organizations) in a variety of creative ways, including fostering discussion about literacy issues, or sharing information and resources about literacy in general or about specific agency programming.

Blogs can also be used to promote fundraising or social events, or to celebrate milestones and special activities. They can be used to host promotional resources, flyers, brochures, or a calendar of agency events. Many organizations use their blogs to link to (and to promote) their other social media marketing profiles, such as Facebook and Twitter. In short, blogs are very versatile and can be used for a variety of different marketing purposes.

If you already use Facebook and Twitter, you might wonder why you should also have a blog. Blogs allow you to write about topics in more detail and blog postings have a great sense of permanence. For example, Twitter posts (or tweets) are limited to 140 characters. You can link to your blog entry from your Twitter feed so that people who are interested in a particular topic or news item can then read about it in detail. While Facebook allows for longer posts than Twitter does, it really doesn't lend itself to lengthy posts. However, you can promote your blog entry via your Facebook feed. Also, not all of your target audience uses Facebook and/or Twitter, and a blog can be a useful way to establish a web presence where stakeholders can engage with you via social media.

It may seem like additional work to maintain a variety of social media accounts, but the fact is that your followers (and especially your potential followers) use different tools. In order to reach all of your target audiences, you need to use a variety of tools too. With some practice and planning, you will work out an effective way to share your message using multiple social media tools. CLO recommends starting small – think about your organizational capacity and the needs of your target audience, and select one or two types of social media that are the best fit for you.

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How Do I Use Blogs?

You can access many different types of blog hosting platforms. We have listed four of the most commonly-used platforms below. Each link takes you directly to the blogging platform. They all ask you to get started right away, which might be a bit intimidating! But don't worry – setting up an account doesn't mean that you have to publish your blog right away. You can take some time to get familiar with the features and learn your way around before you actually publish an entry.

We have not provided "how to" information in this module as the specific steps will vary depending on the platform you choose. However, each blog provider provides helpful set-up information.

We recommend setting up an organizational account for your blog. That way, you can easily allow multiple staff members to have access. Another benefit is that if a staff member leaves the agency, access to the blog doesn't leave with them. Please note that Blogger is a Google product, so if you already have a personal Google (gmail) account, you will want to sign out and create a new agency account. For example, you can easily set up an email such as yourliteracyagency@gmail.com and use that email only for administration of your blog and other Google products, such as YouTube. (For more information, please see our the YouTube section in our Video 101 module.)

Here are four common blog hosting platforms:

- Blogger

- WordPress

- Tumblr

- TypePad

Different platforms offer different features. For example, WordPress can be used as a blog, but it is also sophisticated enough to create a website. It is important to note that, in recent years, the lines between blogs and websites are blurring and sometimes (as with WordPress) blogs can be incorporated into websites.

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The actual platform you choose is a personal choice, but the process to set up and use your blog is virtually the same. You need to set up an account (all of the above offer free registration), choose a template from the samples provided and start posting. It's as simple as that. You can change the template at any time and add your own customizations as you become more familiar with the platform and with blogging. To find out more about a specific blogging platform, be sure to watch or listen to the "getting started" tutorials that are provided by each blogging platform. You can also Google for how-to instructions and videos. For example, be sure to watch the helpful YouTube video called Create a New Blog on Blogger.

Of course, setting up the blog is just the first step! You'll want to think about what approach you are taking – are you going to blog about events and programming, or are you going to blog about literacy in general? You also need to think about how often you are going to post a blog entry – daily, weekly, monthly or some other schedule. Having a content schedule can be very beneficial when it comes to sharing the workload, featuring guest bloggers, and keeping your blog current and up-to-date.

Before you actually start writing, it's a good idea to do some reading. Look around at some blogs (we've included some samples in the following pages) to get a feel for how it's done. You can learn about tone, length, topics, adding photos and links, etc. A good place to start is by checking out some of the Top 150 Nonprofit Blogs. For more specific examples, try some of the suggestions from North Carolina Reading Association's Three "Must Follow" Literacy Blogs. When you're visiting other blogs, don't be shy! Feel free to follow, comment and engage with bloggers, especially if you want others to engage with your new blog. As with any social media tool, you need to remember the social aspect in order to be successful.

Run your first few blog attempts by some people to get their feedback on your blogging style. When it comes to content, start with what you know. Tell your agency's story. Blog about what you do and the impact you make. Showcase videos that you or your students have created (with permission of course). Blog about literacy and its importance, and provide links to important statistics and information. Share learner success stories (with permission or with personal identifying information changed or omitted).

Remember to include opportunities for reader engagement and feedback. Ask your readers and followers to comment on your blog entries and include specific questions to encourage them to post. Remember to respond to others where appropriate.

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If you get attacked by an internet troll with unwarranted negative comments, you can delete those comments. You can also adjust your blog settings to disable comments entirely if need be. Depending on the blog platform you choose, you may be able to ban problem commenters so that you can, once again, open up commenting – after all, blogging is a form of social media, and commenting is part of the social aspect. Also, you can adjust your blog's setting so that all comments must be approved before they are visible to the public.

Target Audience

Blogs do require a certain level of literacy to both write and to read. Using clear language and nonwritten information through photos, videos and audio podcasts can help your blog be more accessible to more people, including literacy students and potential students. For example, you can embed a YouTube or other video file directly into your blog.

There are two ways to approach creating a blog – choose the audience first or choose the topic first. If you are focusing on general literacy advocacy, you will want to promote and target your blog to the public at large, to potential partners and donors, and perhaps to employers. If you are focusing on what your literacy agency offers, you will more likely want to target referral agencies, as well as current, former and potential volunteers and students.

Use the tools from your blogging platform to find out how many people are following your blog. Check your Facebook and Twitter profiles to see who shared or retweeted posts about your blog. If your blog is open to comments, respond to them and listen to commenters' constructive ideas and suggestions to help develop further posts.

Whatever your blog's focus, and regardless of the audience you are targeting, remember to include links to your website and to your other social media profiles.
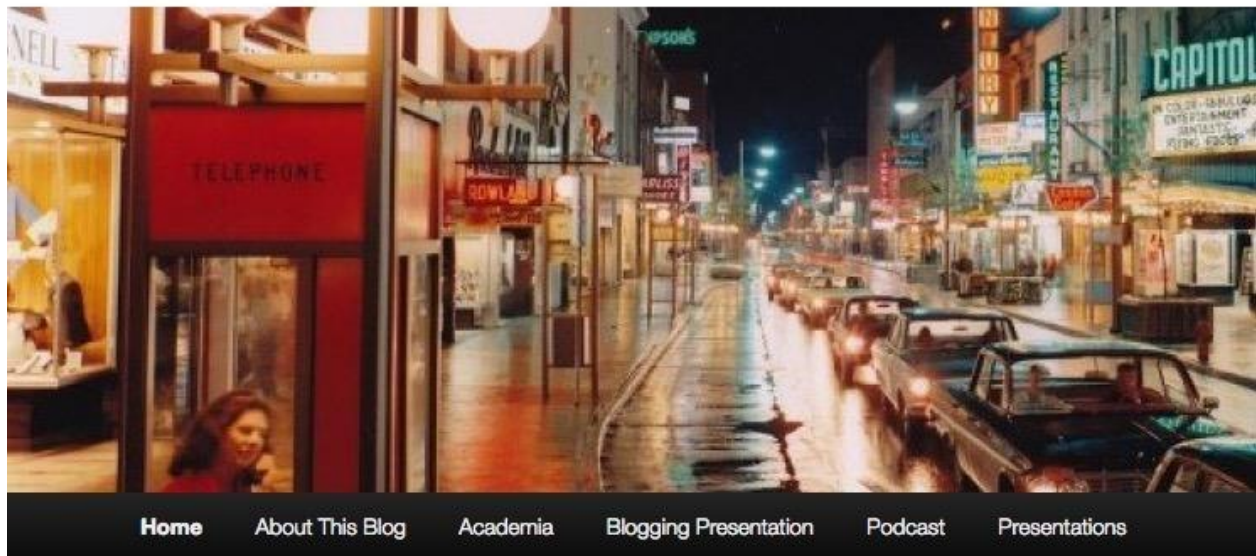
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Examples of Blogs

In this section, we share some examples of good general interest blogs. Be sure to visit our _Blogs for Marketing_ module for more details and examples about using blogs as a marketing tool.

Literacy Examples

Barker Blog (Putting the "racy" in "literacy" since 2008). Not only does this blog have a great tag line, it also has thought-provoking and informative content with a mix of informational postings, reflections from Ms. Barker's classroom and teaching tips and resources.

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Working in Adult Literacy is an inspirational and useful blog written by retired Canadian educator, Kate Nonesuch. It includes useful information, ideas and reflections for teachers of not only adult literacy but also adult basic education in general, GED preparation and second language teaching.

AlphaPlus has been blogging for many years. Their blog entries are very informative and educational; they provide links to useful resources as well as information about literacy, technology and more.
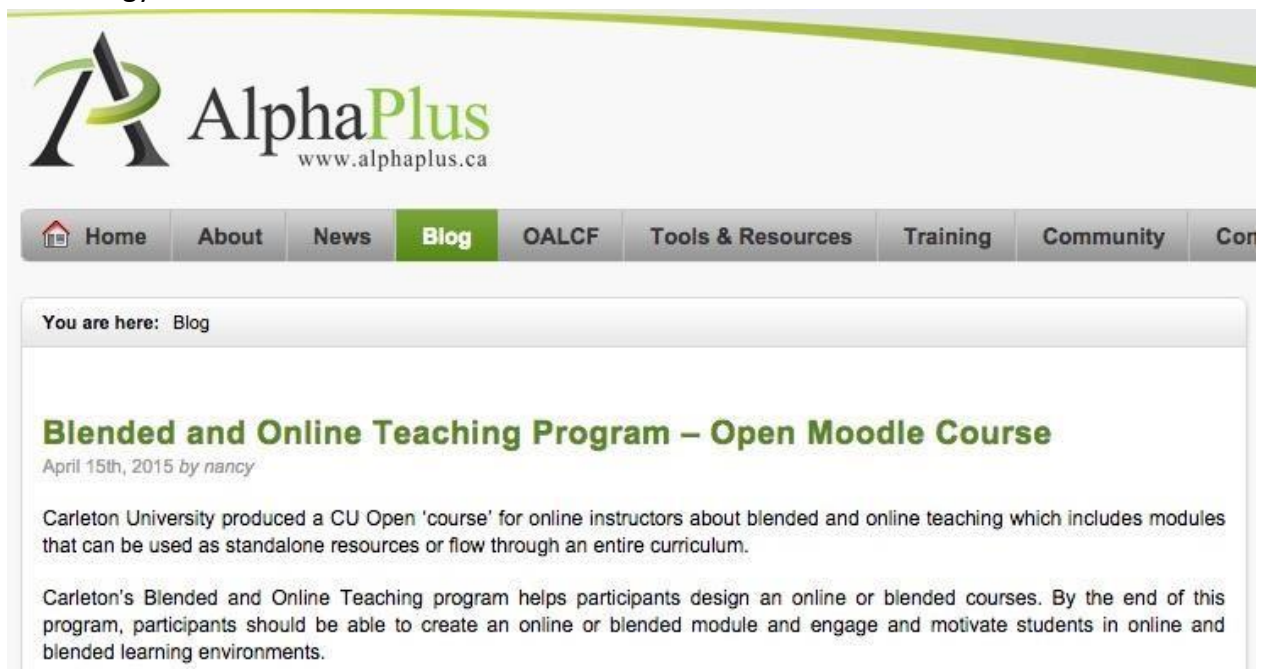
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The Adult Learning Centres Grey-Bruce Georgian use Blogger for their Twenty-First Century Learning Series, which includes a module on blogging.

Twenty-First Century Learning Skills

Learn 2.0 teaches internet skills using a variety of popular and useful Web 2.0 tools. Learning to use these tools online helps you to navigate the internet and develop the skills you need to succeed in today's classroom or workplace.

This blog is based on the work of Helene Blowers. Her 23 Things has been used and adapted by hundreds of libraries, schools, businesses and non-profits. Thank you Helene for changing the world!

Essential Skills Training

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Bow Valley College's Adult Literacy Research Institute writes a blog called "Stories from the Field".
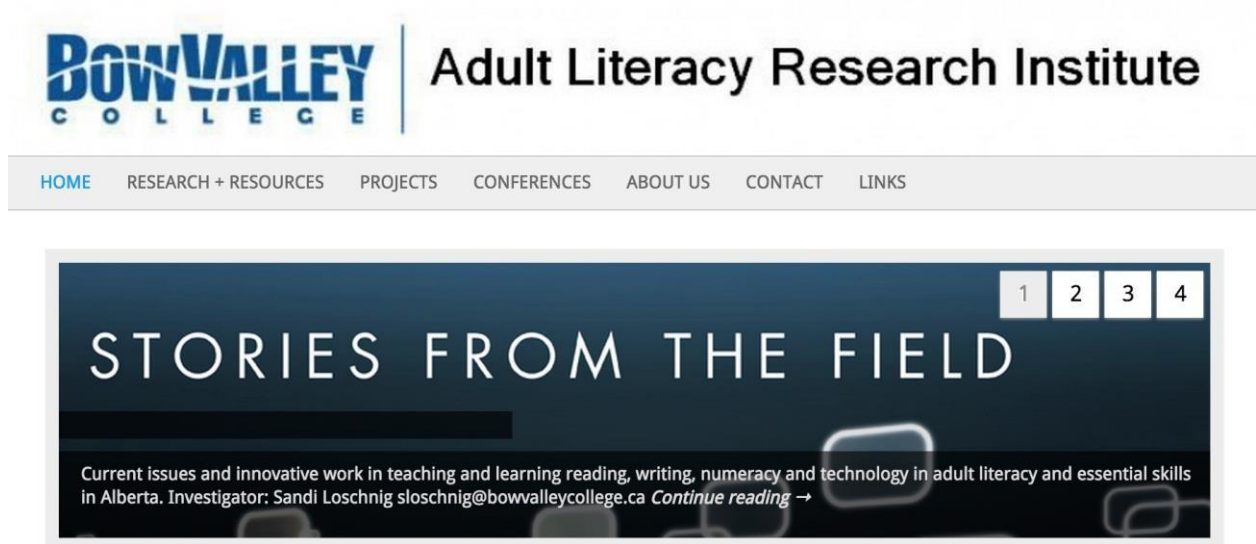
Ningwakwe Learning Press, in Owen Sound, Ontario, uses their First Nation Literacy blog to share information about literacy, cultural issues and more.

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Employment Ontario Examples

The Ontario Self Employment Benefit Program, in Durham, Ontario, uses a blog to promote the work they do and to highlight client success stories.

The YMCA of Simcoe/Muskoka uses a blog to share resources and promote their services.

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Non-Profit Examples

When you Work at a Non-Profit is a fun blog to follow. They share funny photos and captions, submitted by followers, about working in a non-profit.

WHEN YOU WORK
AT A NONPROFIT

ABOUT   ADVERTISE   SUBMIT   ARCHIVE   SEARCH

Over 8,000 people already get the best of these posts in a weekly email. Sign up today!

TechSoup Canada is a valuable resource for Canadian non-profits. They update their blog regularly to share resources and links to useful information.

techsoup
CANADA

| Register Here | Browse Catalogue | Learn | Community |

Home

Blogs

4 Key Questions to Ask when Redesigning your Nonprofit/Charity Website

The one step in redesigning your website that's easiest to skip is also the most important: start out with a clear vision of your needs and goals for the website. And by "your needs" I really mean your visitors' needs, since it's all about your audience after all!

The end of lost, reused and insecure passwords - a simple and practical approach

Did you know that "password" was the most popular bad password in 2011? And if you were trying to be clever and use "passw0rd" instead, I'm sorry to tell you that that's not much better.

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[Imagine Canada](#) updates its blog regularly with issues related to the nonprofit sector in Canada.

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Examples from the Social Media Greats

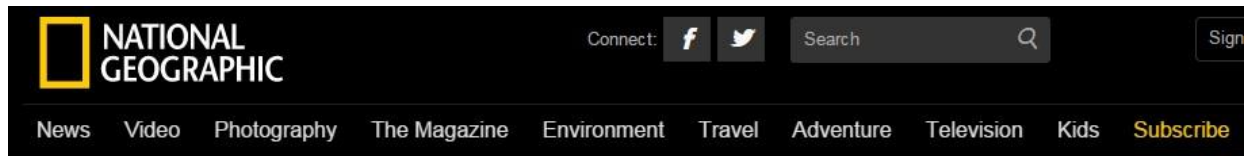Be sure to visit The Daily Tekk blog for an extensive list of the best blogs of 2015. There are plenty of interesting blogs to explore here!

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National Geographic magazine features a number of blogs on their website, including blogs related to travel, photography and the environment.

Parents Magazine presented its "Best Blog of 2014" award to Chasing Rainbows, an emotional blog written by Kate Leong.

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Resources To Learn More About Blogging

- GCFLearnFree is always an excellent source of information about digital technology and how to use it. Their site includes a six-part tutorial on using blogs.

- Blogs in Plain English is a helpful video tutorial from Common Craft which explains what blogs are and why they are important.

- Blogging Tips for Teachers is a helpful resource from The Cornerstone that explains setting up and designing a blog, creating content on your blog, and building a blog following.

- Educause Learning Initiative has a series of helpful resources called "*Seven Things You Should Know About*", including "Seven Things You Should Know About Blogs".

- The Blogger's Meal Plan: 5 Secrets for Well-Balanced Content from Mashable.

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