The Children's Partnership

Creating a Blog: A Workshop for Teens

Weblogs (or "blogs") have become a popular way to publish your own material on the Web. Blogs are Web pages, usually made up of short messages (like diary entries) that are arranged in chronological order, can be created quickly, easily, for free and with little technological expertise. Blogs can be especially meaningful to young people, as they offer nearly endless opportunities for self-expression. This workshop gives you the information and materials you need to teach a group of teenagers how to create and maintain their own blogs.

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Materials:

1. Step-by-Step Blog Creation Instructions
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Why has The Children's Partnership focused on blogs?
In March of 2000, The Children's Partnership (TCP) released a study, *Online Content for Low-Income and Underserved Americans: The Digital Divide's New Frontier*, which illustrated the lack of Web content that is accessible and relevant to underserved individuals.

In response to the study's findings, in 2002 TCP launched Contentbank, a Web site (www.contentbank.org) and advocacy program aimed at encouraging the development of needed Internet content. We did so with the understanding that these necessary online resources must not only be created by major content producers, but also at a local level. We recognize that for communities to fully benefit from the opportunities offered by computers and the Internet, they must be given the tools to be producers of content themselves, allowing them to participate in the shaping of this new medium.

What kinds of opportunities do blogs offer?
Blogs are content creation tools that offer several benefits:

Blogs make content creation inexpensive and easy.
Creating online content through traditional Web site development can be expensive (you must pay to have the site hosted) and requires a substantial amount of expertise (you must know html or have other coding skills). These requirements are major barriers in the development of needed local content. Blogs, however, significantly lower these two barriers, because they are free and require very minimal technological expertise.

Blogs facilitate community-building.
Individuals can join together around interests or issues that are important to them and use blogs as a way to communicate their views through writing. The blogging format encourages linking between various blogs and sharing content, creating online dialogue. In addition, blogrings, or groups of blogs that are linked together around a certain topic or characteristic, create networks of bloggers online. For example, Xanga.com offers a directory of blogrings on topics ranging from computer games, to photography, to Asian culture, to religion.

Blogs can be tools for advocacy.
Organizations and individuals can use blogs to articulate their position on an issue, to bring public and/or media attention to a cause, and to enlist support. A handful of organizations have begun to use blogs as an advocacy, organizing, and information tool. *Wired News* has featured articles on how the staff of a refugee aid organization use blogs to record and share their experiences directly from the field, and on how environmental activists living in redwood trees to protest timber harvesting blog from their laptop computers. (See the articles: http://www.wired.com/news/culture/0,1284,59557,00.html and http://www.wired.com/news/culture/0,1284,56660,00.html.)

Blogs can be used for content creation & social change at a local level.
The Children's Partnership believes this tool is ready to be taken to the next level and to be expanded to facilitate social change at a local level. We envision connecting community residents themselves with the technology of blogs in a step toward giving them the power and tools to improve their lives and neighborhoods. For example, a blog could be used in these ways to address issues of importance to a community:

- As a forum for residents of a housing community to record maintenance needs and make landlords more accountable;

- As a support group for new parents to share advice and information about local resources and services;

- As a crime watch list for neighborhood residents to record and share suspicious activity, crime alerts, or safety tips; or

- As a space to notify others of upcoming area events or neighborhood activities.

These are a handful of possibilities offered by blogs. Blogs are such a valuable tool because they take the potential and power offered by the World Wide Web and put it into the hands of those who may not have an abundance of technology expertise, time, or money.

Why does this workshop focus on youth?
The Children's Partnership sees blogs as a good tool for youth in particular to use in making their own unique contribution to the World Wide Web. The blog format can have significant and positive benefits for youth in four key ways:

1. Blogs offer them a tool for self-expression. Our research has shown that more than adults, children and young people want to express themselves on the Internet. Blogs give them a chance to do so in many ways. They can share their political commentary, journal writings, poems, short stories, reviews of books or movies, and much more.

2. Blogs allow them to participate in the social debate. Blogs give young people a free and easily available space to publish their own thoughts and ideas and have them be received by a broad and diverse audience. They can comment on the world around them in an immediate, direct, and honest way. Furthermore, content can easily be syndicated (or shared) among blogs, allowing bloggers to both feature (and respond to) the posts of others and share their own posts more widely.

3. Blogs can strengthen their writing and communication skills. Blogs can be a tool to encourage teens to write because they can choose to write about the issues and topics that engage and inspire them most.

4. Blogs connect them to a community. Bloggers are well-known for actively participating in online communities and connecting with others with shared interests. It is standard practice for those who maintain blogs to link to numerous other blogs on their site, blogs they either enjoy visiting or that focus on a similar topic. Those other blogs often link back in return, and lively conversations emerge. Or, more formally, bloggers can join (or create their own) "blogrings." Like Webrings, which link together a collection of Web sites around a common theme, blogrings join together related blogs.

⇥ OBJECTIVES

By the end of this workshop, participants will:

• Understand what blogs are and recognize examples;
• Become familiar with the variety of ways blogs can be used to publish online;
• Know how to create blogs using free Web-based software (Blogger);
• Create a blog and an initial post;
• Understand how to update and modify their blogs; and
• Be aware of strategies that can be used to promote their blogs and network with other bloggers online.

↦ PREPARATION

Before conducting the workshop, you will need to be familiar with what blogs are and how people have used them as a way to create content on the Web. The amount of time required to prepare for the workshop may be from 1 hour to 2 hours or more, depending upon your familiarity with blogs.

What is a blog?
A blog (short for Weblog) is a Web page of usually short messages (like diary entries) that are arranged in chronological order.

Why are blogs useful?
Blogs can be simple tools for creating Web sites. Many blogs are free or inexpensive, and they generally don't require html knowledge or Web-building expertise. Blogs can include links to other sites, diary entries, poetry, fiction, updates, reviews, and more.

Visit the Toolbox section of Contentbank (www.contentbank.org) for articles and resources with more information about blogs and how they can be used:

Use the checklist below to prepare for the workshop:

❏ Thoroughly review the steps of the Lesson.

❏ Review the free Web-based program this workshop uses to create blogs, www.blogger.com, and create a simple blog of your own using the "Step-by-Step Blog Creation Instructions" so that you are familiar with the blog-creation process.

❏ Select examples of blogs that you will share with the workshop participants. Try to choose examples that are relevant to the participants' experiences. For example, if you are teaching the workshop to high school students, show examples of blogs created by teens close to their age. You may want to visit some of the blog directories (included on the "Maintaining and Promoting Your Blog" handout) to see lists of blogs organized by topic.

❏ Make copies of both handouts ("Step-by-Step Blog Creation Instructions" and "Maintaining & Promoting Your Blog"), as well as the Evaluation Form, for each participant.

❏ Set up and test the projector and screen.

❏ Ensure that the Internet connection on the demonstration computer and participants' computers are active.

★ Remember, whenever young people are putting their own content online, remind them about staying safe and protecting their privacy. For example, recommend that they do not include their first and last names in the posts of their blogs. View "Teen Safety on the Information Highway" at http://www.safekids.com/safeteens/safeteens.htm, and visit www.getnetwise.org and www.wiredsafety.org for more.

⇥ LESSON

Total time required: 2 hours (including Wrap Up)

Age level: Best for those ages 13-21.

Equipment required: Projector, screen, computers with Internet access (1 computer per participant is ideal, but they can work in groups of 2 or 3 if necessary)

Handouts:
• Step-by-Step Blog Creation Instructions
• Maintaining & Promoting Your Blog

Discussion: (30 minutes)

Ask participants "What is a blog?" Allow those who have an idea to share what they know. (5 minutes)

* refer to "Preparation" for background information

Ask, "What are your favorite Web sites?" and "Why are they your favorites?" Also ask them if they visit any blogs regularly. (5 minutes)

Instructors can explain who they are and talk about their own blogs (if they have them), blogs they visit regularly, or what they like about blogs. (5 minutes)

Show examples of blogs to the group on the projector. [Try to show blogs that are most relevant for the group in the workshop. Be clear that some blogs are more sophisticated than others and require some html skills, while others can be created without html, just using ready-made templates. Below are a few examples to get started.] (15 minutes)

Examples (Note: The sites below are intended to show the wide variety of blogs that exist online. Since content on the Web can change at any time, be sure to evaluate them yourself for availability and content before you share these examples with your students.)

http://www.blogsisters.com A group of women that post to a community blog

• Feature to notice: The site features archives, links and content syndication.

http://www.mattykabam.blogspot.com Teenage boy, blogging about his school, friends, and life

• Feature to notice: The site has a list of links, archives, and is hosted at Blogspot.com.

http://www.hiphopmusic.com Blog of the Underground Railroad radio show

• Feature to notice: The site has content syndication, links to recent comments, and links to recent posts.

Planning: (20 minutes)

1. Ask "What would you do with a blog?" Everyone takes a minute to think about the subject of their blog and then those who want to can share their ideas with the group.

2. Have students discuss the titles of their blogs. Give some examples of good titles; ask the group if they can think of any good titles for the subjects mentioned. (5 minutes)

3. Give out step-by-step instructions for setting up a blog, explain the activity, and answer any questions they might have. Walk them through the instructions before they go to the computers. (5 minutes)

* Distribute "Step-by-Step Blog Creation Instructions" handout.

4. Allow participants to ask any questions they have at this point. (5 minutes)

Creation: (40 minutes)
1. On a piece of paper or on the computer, each student writes:
     Blog Title
     Blog Description (1 sentence)
     (5 minutes)

2. Have them set up their blogs by following the step-by-step instructions carefully. [Remind them to write down their name and password. Or, you may even want to collect names and passwords in case they forget them later.] Instructors should move around the room to make sure everyone has written down their username and password and to see if they need any help. (20 minutes)

3. Have participants write their first real blog entry. Instructors may choose to have all students write a standard first entry, for example "Hello, my name is _____ (for privacy and safety, use a screen name) and I am creating a blog about _____ because _____." (10 minutes)

4. If the students are interested, have them come back together as a group and take time for anyone who wants to demo their blog for the group using the projector. (varies)

Maintenance: (10 minutes)
Have participants come back together as a group to talk about promoting blogs through registries, directories, or link exchanges. Have them brainstorm ways to increase traffic to their blogs. (10 minutes)

* Hand out "Maintaining & Promoting Your Blog"

↦ WRAP UP

1. Allow participants to ask any final questions about the lesson or their blogs. (5 minutes)

2. Distribute evaluation forms, have students fill them out, and collect the forms. (10 minutes)

3. Wrap up and adjourn. (5 minutes)

The Children's Partnership hopes that you have found this workshop helpful. We value your input as we continue to look for ways to improve our work. Please send any feedback to comments@contentbank.org.

Additionally, we encourage you to share with us the evaluations that the workshop participants complete. You may fax the evaluations to (202) 429-0974, or mail them to:

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Washington, DC 20036

⇥ IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE

Much of the real learning and fun of blogs will come after the workshop is over. Help participants stay excited about their blogs with the recommendations below:

- Part of the appeal of blogs is that they are so easy to update with new content. Encourage your students to add entries to their blogs on a regular basis. Perhaps set goals with them of weekly (or even more frequent) updates to their sites. Check in with workshop participants in a couple weeks and see how they have maintained their new blogs.

- Collect all of the participants' email addresses and give them your email address to make an email group. This way, you can stay in touch about blogs and exchange links to stories or interesting blogs you find in the future. Participants may also want to keep each other updated on what's happening on their own blogs.

- After students have experimented with the Blogger.com software, encourage them to explore other blogging sites like Diaryland.com, Xanga.com, and others. Different sites offer different features and levels of sophistication.

- Direct students who know no or very little html to Web resources like Webmonkey (http://www.webmonkey.com). (In the How-To Library (on the right side of the page), under the "Authoring" section, check out html Basics to find a list of places you can go to learn some html you can add to your blog.) Even simple html code can make a big difference in a blog's design and impact.

- As a follow-up exercise, have participants create a brief marketing plan for how to share their blogs with others. They can include telling their friends and family about their blog, submitting their blog to an online directory, swapping links to their blogs with friends, etc.

- Have interested students install a counter on their blog, which records how many visitors come to the site. (The code for these can be downloaded for free online.) Students can keep track of the traffic on their site, or even have a contest to see who can attract the most visitors.

- After students have created a text blog with a tool like Blogger, have them explore other types of blogs — like photoblogs. Free photoblogs can be created at www.fotolog.net, which allows you to post up to one image per day for free.

- Have participants surf the Web to find examples of blogs or photoblogs that they like and have them share the reasons why either in writing or aloud with the group.

Step-by-Step Blog Creation Instructions

❑   Go to http://www.blogger.com.

❑   Click where it says "Create Your Blog Now."

❑   Fill in a user name (can be anything), password, display name (which is used to sign your blog posts), and email address. (Your email address is for registration purposes. You can decide if you want your email address to appear on your blog in the Settings section.) **Check the box** to accept the "Terms of Service" after reading them. Click **CONTINUE**.

[Note: Your "username" must be something that no one else has chosen. If the name you select has already been taken by someone else, try adding a number, or change the username in some way and try again. Write down your username and password so you do not forget them.]

❑   Fill in the title for your blog, and choose an address for your blog (URL). Pick something that is not too long, so you can easily tell people your blog's address. Whatever word(s) you choose will be followed by ".blogspot.com" to create the Web address (URL) of your blog. (For example, http://www.myblog.blogspot.com.) Some addresses may already be taken by other people, so have a few ideas in mind. Click **CONTINUE**.

❑   Choose a template for your blog. You can modify this look later if you know some html. Click **CONTINUE**.

❑   After your blog has been created, click **START POSTING**.

❑   Write your first post in the text box.

❑   Click **PUBLISH POST**. Publishing your post will make it live on your blog and visible on the Web. (Each time you add a new post to your blog, you have to publish it before it goes up on the Web.)

How do I add a new post?
1. Go to http://www.blogger.com.
2. Type in your usename and password then click SIGN IN.
3. Click on the NAME OF YOUR BLOG.
4. Under the "Posting" tab, click CREATE.
5. Add your post in the white box.
6. Click PUBLISH YOUR POST to make it live on your blog and visible to anyone who types in the Web address.
7. Click VIEW BLOG to see that your new post has been added.

How do I edit old posts?
1. Go to http://www.blogger.com.
2. Type in your usename and password then click SIGN IN.
3. Click on the NAME OF YOUR BLOG.
4. Under the "Posting" tab, click EDIT POSTS.
5. Find the post you want to edit, and click EDIT.
6. Make changes in the white box.
7. Click PREVIEW YOUR POST.
8. When you are done, click PUBLISH YOUR POST to make it live on your blog and visible to anyone who types in the Web address.
9. Click VIEW BLOG to see that your new post has been added.
10. If you have other edits to make to your posts, repeat the steps above.

How do I view my blog?
1. Either type in your URL: http://www.NAMEOFYOURBLOG.blogspot.com.
2. OR, you can go to http://www.blogger.com.
3. Type in your username and password, and click SIGN IN.
4. Click on the NAME OF YOUR BLOG.
5. Click on the VIEW BLOG tab at the top of the screen.

How do I change the title and description of my blog?
1. Go to http://www.blogger.com.
2. Type in your username and password, and click SIGN IN.
3. Click on the NAME OF YOUR BLOG.
4. Click SETTINGS and then click BASIC.
5. In the white boxes, type to change either the title or description.
6. Click SAVE SETTINGS. (Here, you can also choose if you want your blog to appear in Blogger's directory of sites.)

How do I change the html in my template?
1. Go to http://www.blogger.com.
2. Type in your username and password, and click SIGN IN.
3. Click on the NAME OF YOUR BLOG.
4. Click TEMPLATE, and type in the changes you want in the white box.
5. Click PREVIEW to review your changes.
6. Click SAVE TEMPLATE CHANGES.

If you don't know any html or would like to learn more, check out the How-To Library at Webmonkey (http://www.webmonkey.com). For all other questions, take a look at the Blogger Knowledgebase: http://www.blogger.com/knowledge/

Add Your Blog to a Directory	
www.Nycbloggers.com	Site for bloggers who live in New York City, organized by nearest subway stop
www.Globeofblogs.com	Directory of blogs from around the world – bloggers have their sites featured on the homepage on their birthdays
www.Weblogs.com	Lists the most recently updated blogs – you can set your blog to alert the site when you've added an entry
www.blogwise.com	Blog directory – in exchange for being listed, you must link back to blogwise.com
Join a Link Exchange	
www.Bloglinker.com	Post links to others' blogs in exchange for their linking to yours
http://blogsnob.idya.net/	You add a link to another member's blog, they in exchange add a link to your blog
www.blogrolling.com	Sign up for a free account, then search for others with similar interests and swap links with them
Join a Blogring	
http://www.xanga.com/blogrings/blogring.asp?id=165541	Class of 2006 blogring
http://www.itlnet.net/users/K2L/BlogOK/	Blogring for those who blog in or about Oklahoma
http://www.ringsaround.net	Directory of blogrings
Other Strategies	
Email signatures	Have a link to your blog appear below your name each time you email someone
Awards/Contests	Enter Web contests to get your site noticed
Update your blog frequently	This is one of the best ways to increase your Web traffic

Creating a Blog: A Workshop for Teens: Evaluation Form

Name (optional): _____   Date: _____

Please put a check mark by all of the statements below that are true.

Before this workshop…
- ❑ I knew what a blog was.
- ❑ I had seen examples of blogs on the Web.
- ❑ I understood the different things I could do with a blog.
- ❑ I had thought about creating a blog of my own.
- ❑ I had created my own blog.
- ❑ (If I had my own blog), I knew how to update it with new posts.
- ❑ (If I had my own blog), I knew how to promote it so others would see it.

After this workshop…
- ❑ I know what a blog is.
- ❑ I have seen examples of blogs on the Web.
- ❑ I understand the different things I can do with a blog.
- ❑ I have thought about creating a blog of my own.
- ❑ I have created my own blog.
- ❑ I know how to update my blog with new posts.

What did you like best about the workshop? Why? _____
_____
_____

How would you improve the workshop? _____
_____
_____

Do you think teens should know about blogs and what they can do with them? Why do you think so?
_____
_____

Do you plan to post more information to your blog?
❑ Yes   ❑ No   ❑ Maybe

If yes, how often do you plan to update it?
❑ Everyday   ❑ A few times a week   ❑ A few times a month   ❑ Other _____

Would you recommend this workshop to a friend?
❑ Yes   ❑ No   ❑ Maybe