

Title: “You can’t write a load of rubbish”: Why blogging works as formative assessment

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Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Adopt an evidence based approach to blogging as formative assessment
- Understand practical steps to reduce high summative assessment loads
- Introduce a feed forward approach to feedback
- Set up blogging tasks using a series of practical steps to increase digital literacy
- Understand assessment methods that create an open dialogue around academic writing, build writing confidence and increase engagement with reading

Session Outline

Research and evaluation of the effectiveness of blogging as formative assessment arose through participation in the FASTECH project, funded through the JISC Assessment and Feedback Strand (2011-14). This paper uses evidence from two blogging case studies, one on an undergraduate module and the other on a postgraduate module. The researchers used ‘think aloud’ methodology at three weekly intervals to collect data. Students were required to complete weekly written tasks (based on the module topic) and publish to their own personal blog space encouraging assessment effort distribution across weeks. They created an online identity as educational professionals (a key sphere of Digital Literacy) and used the taught sessions to critique and develop their writing in groups which provided timely tutor and peer feedback on their work throughout the assessment. This work then directly contributed to the summative submission for the module.

Some findings show that student blogging:

- encouraged deeper engagement with readings and literature, wider knowledge and breadth/depth of study
- clarified understanding through a combination of formal comments, informal examples and face-to-face discussion
- works well with Google Blogger and Wordpress rather than the institutional VLE
- is a stimulating and exciting assessment format

The presenters will share their experiences of teaching blogging, outlining challenges and highlights. The discussion will draw on the feature of the technological tools of Google Scholar and Wordpress to scaffold the pedagogical view that personal and peer-to-peer feedback on draft writing develops academic independence, confidence and identity. Practical insights in how to structure activities will enable participants to make links with their own practice and disciplinary contexts.

The session will be interactive with questions, tasks and inductive strategies to engage participation threaded throughout. For example, participants will have the opportunity to discuss artefacts (Example blog posts and their comments) and through their active participation, reflect on the influence of the blogging medium on effort, engagement and students' learning.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

Indicative questions

What constitutes high quality formative feedback, what does this look like?

How can we build digital literacy skills through assessment design?

How does student progression with blogging build over the course of a module?

What does writing with a high level of criticality and a professional approach look like?

How could you introduce this model to your context?

Activities will include:

- Reflection on own practice with formative feedback
- Discussion around appropriate tools and practical set up of student blogs
- Analysis of examples of student writing and tutor feedback in order to identify strengths and weaknesses
- Interaction with think aloud methodology
- Exploration of the growth of a professional voice and identity in writing
- Modelling how blogging could work in participants own context

Indicative timings:

1. Introduction to Underlying Principles and Practical Application 15 mins

- *what is best practice formative feedback to you/blogging models/ our research findings*

2. What does it look like in practice? 10 - 15 mins group work

- *exploratory task based on blogging artefacts and student voice data*

3. Structure of the blogging learning task across a module

- *including intricacies of blogging with large groups/ challenges/ barriers/ applying it to your context*

4. Summary and take home points 10-15 mins

References

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