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ARTICLE

How To Do Academic Blogging

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Abstract

Academic blogging is a digital platform for "doing" knowledge translation in the humanities. Knowledge translation is the process of communicating research outcomes outside academia so the public can benefit. While science communication is widely recognized as a medium for communicating science, technology, engineering, and mathematics knowledge with the public, formal mechanisms for knowledge facilitation in the humanities are not as well established. Academic blogging is core to the social value and impact of the humanities, representing an important open access entry point into humanistic scholarly debates. Drawing on a developing literature about academic blogging as well as a survey we conducted with readers, authors, and editors of academic blogs, this article shows how doing knowledge translation with academic blogs can support the three core domains of a university's mission: research, teaching, and public outreach. With your research, you can use academic blogs to facilitate networking and collaborations; with your teaching, you can use academic blogs as tools to introduce students to a new topic; with public outreach, doing academic blogging enables you to connect with diverse readerships. Academic blogs contribute to knowledge translation for and about the humanities, from foundational concepts to new research and the more hidden aspects of academic practice.

Keywords: academic blogs; academic practice; digital humanities; higher education; public outreach; social justice; teaching

1. Introduction

Academic blogging opens up the humanities to a far wider spectrum of readers than is possible through traditional scholarly writing. Readers range from researchers, educators, and students to those who are not embedded in academia. In the disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, science communication is widely recognized as an important conduit for communicating knowledge.[1] In the humanities, the need for

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[1] Burns et al. 2003.

knowledge facilitation is less well established, and the practical skills for communicating knowledge are unsystematic at best.

While blogs are acknowledged to have "made scholarly work accessible and accountable to a readership outside the academy," academic blogging needs to be actively framed as an important open access entry point into humanistic scholarly debates.[2] Blogs are for knowledge translation, a process described as "moving from what has been learned through research to application indifferent decision-making contexts."[3] Knowledge translation moves research outcomes outside of academic settings, adapting how we communicate academic knowledge to meet the needs of a range of non-academic readerships. Public humanities is similarly about engaging diverse publics in the research traditions of disciplines such as history, literature, and cultural heritage.

Academic blogs are core to the social value and impact of the humanities: the genre serves an important yet under-acknowledged knowledge translation function within public humanities. Positioning academic blogging as an impactful mechanism for knowledge translation, our insights in this article are informed by reflective and empirical scholarship but also draw directly on our 2023 survey of readers, authors, and editors of academic blogs. This approach offers a greater understanding of their use and impact across the three core domains of a university's mission: research, teaching, and public outreach.[4] After translating this knowledge about knowledge translation, we will present some practical guidance about how you can do academic blogging.

2. Understanding academic blogging

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, blogging developed alongside other Web 2.0 technologies.[5] Originally described as "weblogs," the blogosphere became an alternative space of knowledge production that was both beyond and in conversation with the mainstream media.[6] While early blogs spanned any and all topics, academics started to gain greater visibility as authors in the blogosphere in the mid to late 2000s. Since the 2010s, academic blogging has become a distinctive feature of a changing academic publishing landscape, with benefits and limitations for academic practice.[7]

Certain contradictions underpin the terminology of "academic blogging," especially for academics who do not blog; historian and blogger Claire Potter suggests that early practitioners began to consolidate around "a collective sense of ethical practice," yet there was a broader acknowledgement – an excitement and a reservation – that academic blogging had "no rules, no style manual, and no peer review, all critical and defining features of respectable academic publishing."[8] Although the genre has long incorporated reflections that relate to the professional contexts of scholarly knowledge production, linguists Hang Zou and Ken Hyland now "restrict the term 'academic blog' ... to those written by active

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[2] Gregg 2006, 148.
[3] Curran et al. 2011, 174.
[4] Powell, Jacob, and Chapman 2012.
[5] Puschmann and Mahrt 2012.
[6] Mortensen and Walker 2002; Bruns and Jacobs 2006.
[7] Matthew-Jones 2016; Powell, Jacob, and Chapman 2012; Mewburn and Thompson 2013.
[8] Potter 2010, 186.

researchers and, more specifically, to those based on their own recently published research."[9]

Digital cultures scholar Jill Walker initially observed scholars "doing" academic blogging in three different contexts: public intellectuals maintaining a platform for debate relating to their discipline; research logs featuring completed research and possible ideas to pursue; and pseudonymous blogs about academic life offering insight into the so-called "ivory tower."[10] Nearly a decade later, social scientist Patrick Dunleavy created a new conceptual schema that reflected the increased uptake and visibility of academic blogging: solo blogging is undertaken by an individual author or co-authors and published on a personal website; collaborative blogs are run by an authorial team who generate most of the content; and multi-author blogs are led by an editorial team who regularly commission blogs by multiple authors.[11] Publishing on the *LSE Impact of Social Sciences Blog*, Dunleavy's research demonstrated the growing exchange between formal and informal academic publishing. Increasingly, academic blogging came to be situated as having a distinctive position in knowledge production. Information specialists Julia W. Martin and Brian Hughes described this as a "middle ground" between peer reviewed scholarship and informal academic writing.[12]

Many academics express concerns that academic blogs are undervalued because of a perception that they are disconnected from scholarly knowledge production and lack the authority of peer review.[13] As historian Rachel Leow reflects, "academic thinking [in blogs] seems to be caught in the act of undressing: half-formed ideas whip round and gasp, clutching at awkward sentences to cover their nakedness."[14] Yet academic blogging has increasingly come to complement traditional publishing through a commitment to accessible scholarship: blogging about journal articles significantly increases abstract views and downloads.[15] Academic blogging is considered one of the broad spectrum of activities that falls under the growing area of digital humanities, although blogging's low bar to participation in terms of technical skill has seen some scholars distinguish it from the more technically labour-intensive "computing humanities."[16]

Humanities scholars who reflect critically upon academic blogging span the disciplines of cultural studies, history, literary studies, social work, and women's studies, just to name a few.[17] The *Journal of Victorian Culture* has arguably been at the forefront of provoking such reflections.[18] Its academic blog forms part of the journal's website, *JVCOnline.* Established in 2009, *JVCOnline* brought the Victorianist community – both within and beyond the academy – together through its website and social media.[19] Literary scholar Lisa Hager observes that *JVCOnline* "fosters a global community of scholars and engagement with the broader public, both of which are essential for the continued development of our discipline

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[9] Walker 2006; Lindemann 2010; Zou and Hyland 2019, 713.
[10] Walker 2006.
[11] Dunleavy 2014.
[12] Martin and Hughes 2012.
[13] Lovink 2008; Adcock et al. 2016.
[14] Leow 2010, 235.
[15] Gregg 2006; Powell, Jacob, and Chapman 2012; Green 2015.
[16] Vanhoutte 2013, 145.
[17] Gregg 2006; Potter 2010; Adcock et al. 2016; Stoneman and von der Krone 2021.
[18] For example, see: Hagar 2013; Matthew-Jones 2016.
[19] Rogers 2016.

and the humanities in general." Accordingly, Hager goes so far as to suggest that academic blogging is a digital innovation for the public humanities.[20]

3. Doing knowledge translation

Today, knowledge translation is arguably taking place when editors, authors, and readers are "doing" academic blogging to a far greater extent than we might think. Medical scholars Douglas A. Powell, Casey J. Jacob, and Benjamin J. Chapman proposed that academic blogs can support academics with their research, teaching, and public outreach.[21] Therefore, we surveyed academics about this and draw on some of the findings below. Most of the academics who took part were based in the humanities disciplines of history, heritage, and archaeology, followed by the social sciences discipline of education.

3.1. Research

Academic blogs support knowledge translation in research. In 2010, the *Journal of Women's History* curated "Women Gone Wild: Reflections on the Feminist Blogosphere," a roundtable that considered academic blogging to be "a game-changing moment for scholars and feminists."[22] This roundtable acknowledged that academic blogging is distinctive, describing the genre as "a literary practice, or tradition, that we are also inventing."[23] Exclusively based on reflections from authors of solo blogs, these "liminal spaces" between formal research and the wider blogosphere created communities that facilitate open discussions about the unspoken and more political aspects of academic practice.[24] These authors were blogging about research-related reflections that may not otherwise be published.[25] Yet academic blogs also became a platform to publicly write through work in progress while remaining attentive to the potential for criticism.[26] Being involved in such dialogues was considered a contribution to the "collective production of knowledge," even if you are a reader rather than an active participant.[27]

You can also use blogs as an entry point to a research topic, potentially learning about key players in the field, and engaging with the scholarly outputs you need for your own research. Nearly, two thirds of the respondents in our survey reported that reading an academic blog had provoked them to seek out traditional scholarly publications by the author. In addition, one observation that arose from our survey findings is the extent to which academic blogs can distill information into an abbreviated format. Similarly, medical scientist Dilshan Ishara Pieris highlights how the short length of blog posts compared to most journal articles means they can be read more quickly and therefore published within a shorter turnaround time.[28] Blogs can act as a gateway into any given topic while potentially encouraging exploration of an author's scholarly publications beyond their blogging.

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[20] Hager 2013, 273.
[21] Powell, Jacob, and Chapman 2012.
[22] Potter 2010, 85.
[23] Potter 2010, 186.
[24] Little 2010, 221; Potter 2010; Little 2010; Lindemann 2010.
[25] Ho 2010.
[26] Ho 2010.
[27] Friedman 2010, 198.
[28] Pieris 2019.

Nearly, half of survey respondents also recalled having contacted an author of an academic blog at some point. Blogs might therefore facilitate the building of networks and collaborations, becoming part of a community of practice.[29] Academic blogging is being used in a manner that suggests it has become part of the expected research publication infrastructure.

3.2. Teaching

You can use academic blogs to provide students with an introduction to a topic. Linguists Indry Widyasti Anwar and Sartika Putri Sailuddin similarly note that when students have a lack of background knowledge of a topic, they may have difficulties drawing inferences from academic texts, particularly when they have to determine the meaning of words they perceive to be difficult.[30] Academic reading challenges can be even more pronounced for students who have English as a second or third language; a lack of background knowledge and difficulties with vocabulary have been found to impact on their understanding of texts.[31]

More than half of our survey respondents who were involved in teaching reported using academic blogs in the classroom as teaching tools. About a third of the respondents reported that they had observed other academics using academic blogs as teaching tools too. Student-produced blogs have long been used as a learning tool in higher education to promote student interactivity and reflection.[32] However, academic blogs can also support knowledge translation for student study.

Journal articles can be particularly daunting for students to read.[33] As accessible scholarship, you can use blogs to engage university students in a particular topic before tackling more complex ideas and concepts in the peer-reviewed scholarly literature. Academic blogs can also facilitate classroom discussion, fact-check information, and question the reputation of sources.[34] Political scientists Reyhan Topal and Farzin Shargh outline a teaching exercise where they encouraged students to follow a regular academic blog to keep up-to-date with recent developments in their area. Later, students engaged in short group discussions about these developments.[35]

The writing style and length of academic blogs can engage students in a research topic, when traditional sources may seem dry and long by comparison. Focusing on academic blogs as a pedagogical tool, international relations scholar Laura Sjoberg aimed to provide students with "substantively interesting and stylistically entertaining introductions" to feminism and international relations. Sjoberg also argued that this helped clarify misunderstandings, definitions, contested concepts, and myths for students all while engaging them in real-world examples, grounded in contemporary theory. When compared with journal articles or book chapters, the shorter length of blog posts also means that you are more likely to engage students in a new topic area more quickly and give them opportunities to read multiple

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[29] Guerin, Carter, and Aitchison 2015; Mewburn and Thompson 2013.
[30] Anwar and Sailuddin 2022.
[31] Hirano 2015.
[32] Williams and Jacobs 2004.
[33] Akmal, Dhivah, and Mulia 2020.
[34] Topal and Shargh 2023.
[35] Topal and Shargh 2023.

posts in a short space of time. This should expand their understanding of the breadth of research in their area.[36]

More than half of our survey respondents who were involved in teaching reported using academic blogs in the classroom as readings, and half also had observed other academics using blogs as readings too. Thus, as proposed by respondents in our survey findings, including academic blogs on course reading lists could be highly beneficial; some students find reading lists to be outdated and include material that is too challenging to read.[37] Therefore, including academic blogs as readings can help you ensure currency and be a gateway to more equitable participation in university study.

3.3. Public outreach

In the same way that academic blogs can be useful to introduce complex topics and ideas to new students, you can also think about their potential to support fellow academics and the general public with understanding these same challenging areas. Researcher developers Inger Mewburn and Pat Thomson propose that academic blogs offer a solution to the "jargonistic and turgid" style of academic writing. They claim that:

> academics are poor at communicating with anyone other than other academics.... nobody reads academic journals [so] having to write for a wider public will force academics to write less obscurely.[38]

Similarly, Zou and Hyland examined the linguistic features of academic blogs and highlighted that academics can use them to recontextualize scholarly publications for a public audience.[39] Authors who gain the most prominence and generate the most traction may nevertheless be inadvertently replicating the existing power structures of academia.[40]

By virtue of the genre, academic blogging supports knowledge translation for research and teaching. When asked about their main reasons behind deciding to engage with academic blogging, our survey respondents ranked "engaging directly with the general public as a readership" most highly (see Figure 1). Therefore, they appeared to promote public outreach above aspects related to teaching and research, suggesting that they saw academic blogs as having most benefit beyond academia. When asked about the main value of academic blogging, they ranked "sharing research with the community for public engagement" as the joint highest reason (see Figure 2).

If you truly manage to connect with diverse readerships as an academic blogger doing public outreach, you may find that there are two sides to the success. The *Journal of Women's History* roundtable confirmed that the genre facilitates community within academia but can also provoke outraged responses, especially from readers beyond academia.[41] True to character, the humanities can convey troublesome knowledge.

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[36] Sjoberg 2013, 391.
[37] Brewerton 2014.
[38] Mewburn and Thomson 2013, 1105–6.
[39] Zou and Hyland 2019.
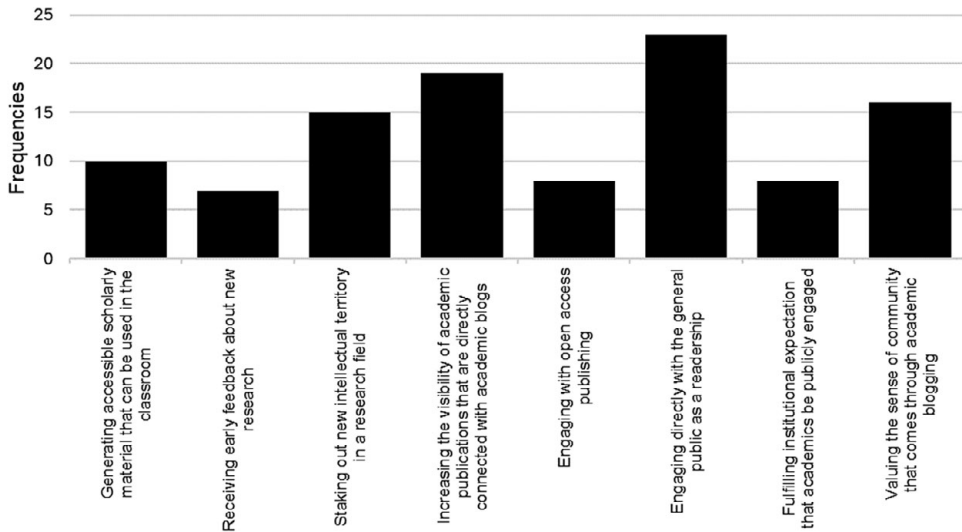[40] Leow 2010.
[41] Potter 2010; Little 2010.

Figure 1. Main reasons behind deciding to engage with academic blogging.
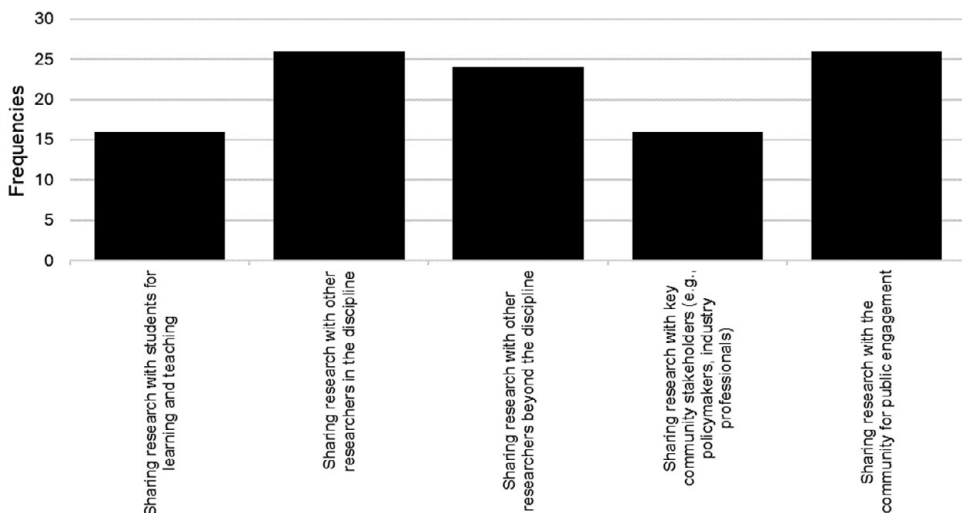

Figure 2. Main value of academic blogging.

4. Doing academic blogging

Below are some steps and recommendations for how you can begin an academic blog in order to facilitate knowledge translation in your academic practice:

1. **Find Models:** A good way you can start your academic blogging career is by identifying academic blogs already being published in your field. Today, many academic journals, university centers and departments, and professional networking organizations have blogs with dedicated subscribers. Look for blogs publishing research by scholars whose work is relevant to your own, and check out their

processes for pitching to them so you can leverage their existing networks to maximize your blog's outreach.

2. **Set Up the Space:** You can also establish and maintain your own independent blog using a content management system (i.e., WordPress, Squarespace) and a web domain service to create your URL. This means that you can have your own dedicated web presence and independent research profile to share academic blogs freely.

3. **Learn the Style:** The writing style for an academic blog is different to most academic writing. Prose should be clear and concise – short sentences, clear phrasing, and jargon-free language. While the imagined reader should be an educated layperson, think about the different audiences you might reach: students, high school teachers, university lecturers, practitioners, or the general public. Blogs will convey one idea at a time – one sentence paragraphs are your friend. Less is more!

4. **Start Strong:** As with media writing, in academic blogs you want to grab your readers' attention with a hook that draws them into the research narrative you are telling within the first 30 seconds of reading. Start with a powerful case study or anecdote, a gripping quotation, a surprising statistic, or something that links your research to a timely event or news story.

5. **End with Action:** Similar to the "hook," you want to leave your readers with "food for thought" at the end – often a call to action in terms of your research's implications for fellow researchers, policymakers, or the general public. It's also good to end with hyperlinks to longer research outputs (e.g., traditional outputs like journal articles) where you explore the issue further so that people can easily find these sources.

6. **Use Multimedia:** You can augment academic blogs with images. Open access or creative commons images are freely available and safest for authors to use. Good starting points include Wikimedia Commons, Flickr, and national or state libraries.

7. **Understand Search Engine Optimization:** Read up on search engine optimization (SEO) – that is, how to make your academic blog more visible or appear higher up in search engine results. Make sure that you include a wide range of keywords and possible search terms in your blog's title, prose, and image captions. Including hyperlinks to other websites that receive a high volume of traffic or are seen as respected knowledge entities (e.g., university websites, national or state libraries) also improves a webpage's SEO.

8. **Know the Process:** The contributions of authors and editors are almost exclusively unpaid. If you are an author submitting to a multi-author blog, you'll submit a draft to editors for feedback.[42] The editors are usually disciplinary experts rather than peer reviewers or subdiscipline experts. Be mindful that editorial feedback can still be rigorous, so remember: you are the expert on the topic, but the editors are the experts when it comes to knowledge translation. The best results will come when authors and editors are open and willing to work together.

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[42] For more detail, see: Adcock et al. 2016; Stoneman and von der Krone 2021.

9. **Spread the Word:** You should share academic blogs on social media (e.g., Bluesky, LinkedIn) to engage a wider readership. To promote your recent publications further, share your academic blogs within your professional networks and add them to your university's research repository.

10. **Measure Impact:** If you are running your own academic blog, install programs such as Google Analytics as part of the website's backend to keep track of the number of visits your blogs receive, and where people are clicking from. This can be used as evidence of public outreach, as well as working out how best to time and promote posts. Are your readers most active at morning tea, lunch time, or in the evening? Are they in your time zone, or spread around the world? If authoring for a multi-author blog, ask the editors if they are able to make these data available to you for your own records.

5. Conclusions

Academic blogging is a recent genre of scholarly publishing that has established an important place in research, teaching, and public outreach. Academic blogging opens the world of the humanities to readerships who are embedded inside and outside academia, as well as somewhere in between. As the importance of public-facing research is increasingly recognized, the knowledge translation function of academic blogging in the humanities also needs to be more widely recognized. Scholars who engage with academic blogging exhibit a commitment to social justice by valuing the genre's commitment to open principles, expedience, and clear communication. Blogs facilitate accessibility, engagement, and connections with diverse readerships. This contributes to knowledge translation for and about the humanities, from foundational concepts and troublesome knowledge to new research and the more hidden aspects of academic practice. Being mindful of these myriad possibilities is vital for new academics and practitioners who may be interested in entering the fray. When "doing" academic blogging, you – as an author, editor, or reader – are doing public humanities for the twenty-first century.

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