

QuickIdeas Grades 6-8

Running a Classroom Blog

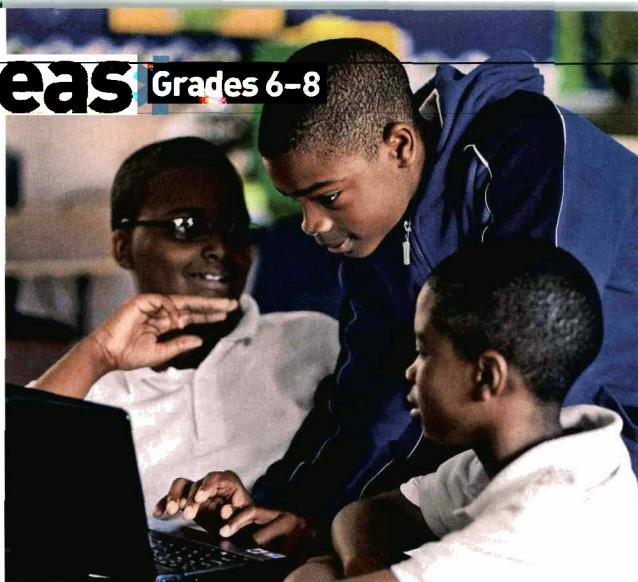
Two teacher experts are here to help you get started.

» How can I make sure that students' privacy is secure?

This is a top concern for teachers new to blogging, but—good news!—it has an easy fix. "Either assign each student a number, have them use their first and last initials, or use a combination of their initials and a number," says Tracie Heskett, a former teacher and author of *Blogging in the Classroom*. For example, a student might post as SD17 or HeskettKid44. Susan LaFaso, a technology teacher in Waretown, New Jersey, agrees, and adds that usernames should not reveal students' gender.

» How can I keep track of what everyone is writing and delete inappropriate comments?

LaFaso closely monitors what students post. "Use an educational blog that allows students' posts to appear after they have been preapproved by a teacher," she says. "That way you're also aware of exactly who is doing the blogging and how often." Heskett agrees. "Having comments go through a moderator is a bit more reading for the teacher,



but you'll quickly catch on to which students won't pose a problem."

» Students aren't leaving comments on our blog. What can I do to boost participation?

It's true that your students may rather be on the Jonas Brothers message boards. But that doesn't mean you can't develop your own online community. "Have students' first log-in of the day be to the classroom blog," suggests Heskett. "Put it in an easily accessible folder, and have students go through that folder before they can do other Internet tasks." You might also add an element of competition. Heskett likes to create a points system for posting to the

blog, while LaFaso challenges students to post three original comments and reply to five other peers' comments.

» What are some ways to create an inviting, kid-enticing blogging community?

"In any good blog, content is key," says Heskett. It's what keeps readers coming back again and again. That's why Heskett encourages students to take the reins when it comes to choosing topics for blogging. "Perhaps the only thing a student expresses interest in is the movie he or she saw the previous weekend," she says. "Have the student post not just that all their friends should see it, but why they should watch it, and

BLOGGING ALTERNATIVES If your class is comprised of students who struggle with writing or learn visually, you might try one of these alternatives to blogging.

POWERPOINT

An oldie but goodie, PowerPoint challenges students to arrange their thinking sequentially. Since PowerPoints generally have less text than blog posts, they are good for emerging writers.

GLOGSTER

This site enables students to make digital posters. Teacher Susan LaFaso uses it as a reward, permitting students to display all facts learned in any style they want.

WIKIS

A wiki is a site that allows contribution and editing by multiple users. You may be familiar with text-heavy Wikipedia, but LaFaso has struggling writers use pictures and images to create wikis.

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encourage the writer to incorporate new vocabulary to describe the movie—or have students compare movies. That's just one example. I had a student once write an essay about ATVs—he had a great time writing about his favorite pastime, and I learned a lot!"

>> Is there a way to have students help manage the blog? Would you suggest creating a student-teacher-run blog?

That depends on the abilities and tech know-how of your students. "If students have some Internet experience and in-class training, as well as the ability to take responsibility, they can be set up as administrators or in other roles to help moderate comments on the blog," says Heskett. "A student-teacher blog can be very effective. The more students can be involved in the blog, the more they will take ownership and contribute content,

posts, and comments." If students are newer to blogging or if you just want to get the hang of it before inviting them to help manage the site, you can always start with a teacher-run blog and gradually step up students' involvement.

>> Should I grade spelling and grammar on entries and comments? If so, to what extent?

Many teachers are drawn to blogging because of the authentic writing opportunities it offers. On one hand, harping on punctuation has the potential to deflate students' enthusiasm. On the other, blog posts are essentially published writing—why wouldn't students put their best foot forward? "It might be best, especially when first starting out, to grade primarily on content, if grading the blog at all," says Heskett. "However, reminders that others will read their work can serve as incentives for stu-

dents to proofread." Heskett suggests finding examples of other blogs in which spelling and grammar have not been proofread and then asking students their opinion of the blog regarding reliability of information, overall impression of the writer, etc. "Discussions about these issues can be beneficial, especially for older students who will have more authentic interactions on the Internet beyond conversations with friends," she says.

"I think grades depend on the purpose of the assignment," says LaFaso. "Sometimes trying to get the correct grammar and punctuation reduces the creative flow of the writing assignment. However, it is important for students to realize that real-world writing is a necessary component in their writing repertoire and they also must be able to write without using their texting writing styles." —Margie Gelwasser □

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Standards

Use this index to match the ideas in this issue to national standards.

READING AND WRITING

Gr. PreK-K Our Favorite PreK Authors (Page 68)

With prompting and support, asks and answers questions about key details in a text

Gr. PreK-4 Teachers' Picks: Books (Page 26)

Actively engages in group reading activities with purpose and understanding

Gr. K-8 Talk About Writing (Page 66)

Responds to suggestions from peers and adds details to strengthen writing as needed

Gr. 3-8 Diagram a Sentence (Page 67)

Explains the function of nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs in general and their functions in particular sentences

Gr. 6-8 Running a Classroom Blog (Page 76)

Uses technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing

MATH AND SCIENCE

Gr. PreK-5 100 Days Mosaics (Page 9)

Counts to 100 by ones and by tens

Gr. K-5 Shape Up (Page 66)

Analyzes and compares two- and three-dimensional shapes, in different sizes and orientations

Gr. 1-2 The Human Heart (Page 71)

Knows that living organisms have distinct structures and body systems that serve specific functions in growth and survival

Gr. 3-5 How High Is a Million? (Page 73)

Solves problems involving the four operations, and identifies and explains patterns in arithmetic

Gr. 3-5 Penny Shine-Up (Page 74)

Plans and conducts simple investigations

Gr. 4-8 Study the Periodic Table (Page 67)

Knows that many elements can be grouped according to similar properties

SOCIAL STUDIES

Gr. K-5 President's Day Ideas (Page 14)

Understands how important figures were significant to the history of our democracy

Gr. K-8 Read About Black History (Page 34)

Understands how people have struggled to

bring to all groups in society the liberties promised in the principles of American democracy

Gr. K-8 Share the Love (Page 29)

Knows opportunities for leadership and public service in the student's own classroom, school, community, state, and the nation

Gr. 3-5 Dollars, Cents, and Presidents (Page 73)

Knows the history of American symbols

ART

Gr. K-5 Valentine's Day Mailboxes (Page 10)

Understands and applies media, techniques, and processes related to the visual arts

Gr. K-5 Cardboard Square Painting (Page 48)

Selects prospective ideas (e.g., formulated thoughts, opinions, concepts) for works of art

Gr. K-8 Cool Winter Arts and Crafts (Page 44)

Knows the differences between art materials (e.g., paint, clay, wood), techniques (e.g., overlapping, shading), and processes (e.g., addition and subtraction in sculpture)

Instructor uses the national standards developed by the Common Core State Standards Initiative (corestandards.org) and McREL (mcrel.org).



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