

# Educational Weblogs: Whats & Whys

## What is a weblog & what can it do? [basic]

Weblogs (of a sort) have been around for a long time, weblogs are they are now being used haven't. Consequently, the best definitions of what weblogs are probably come from the companies that are supplying them and the people that are using them:

[A weblog program] enables you to write to the Web... A weblog is *just* a web site organized by time

[Radio UserLand](#)

[A weblog] offers you instant communication power by letting you post your thoughts to the web whenever the urge strikes

[Blogger](#)

And that really is the main game. If you have a weblog you can write what you want, whenever you want. As long as you've got an Internet connection it'll be on the Web within seconds. It's easier than using MS Word! Promise!

For example, I click an icon on my desktop



Type what I want to type

(I can give it a title & put in hyperlinks too, if I want)



Click on Post



And there it is!



## What is a weblog & what can it do? [advanced]

Now you're ready for the tricky stuff! Here a few other things Weblogs can do:

### Archiving:

Your weblog automatically gives each post its own 'link' and then archives posts by the day. You can refer to them anytime and link to individual posts or days with ease.

### Discussion:

Anyone can read your posts and then discuss issues by clicking on 'Discuss'

### Syndication:

Anyone can 'aggregate' your new content (a bit like collecting email) by clicking on your xml badge and telling their aggregator to look at it fairly regularly.

For example, here I have aggregated the latest content from a weblog called 'Elearnspace blog'



### Email:

Regular readers of the weblog don't even have to visit the site regularly, they can simply click on this graphic, fill in a few details and new posts (changes) will get emailed to them on a daily or weekly basis.

Please feel free to visit my weblog:

<http://radio.weblogs.com/0120501/>

To check out these examples.

If you don't have an aggregator, you can get a free one at:

<http://www.feedreader.com/>

## **What can you use a weblog for? Why would you bother?**

There are plenty of ways in which you can use a weblog (some of them fairly unsavoury too!) however in the educational context there are a few which could be particularly useful, so I'll focus on them:

### **A Virtual Learning Environment**

You can post text on your weblog and moderate a discussion related to that (in a similar way to Gilly Salmon's e-tivities <http://www.e-tivities.com>) using the discussion tools. Get students to post and moderate discussions. Ask students to maintain their own weblog as a reflective learning tool, or, if you're really adventurous you could try to structure a whole institution around it - look [here](#) or [here](#).

### **A Professional Publishing Tool**

Possibly the easiest and most effective way to share your thoughts, find people thinking similarly, participate in communities of practice and express yourself is through a weblog. Here are some people who excel in this: [Sebastian Fielder](#), [Sebastian Paquet](#), [Unbound Spiral](#), [Stephen Downes](#)

### **A News Ticker for You**

If you have a weblog (like [Radio Userland](#)) which contains a news aggregator then you can use that to sign up to weblogs and news sites that you are interested in. At a time of your choosing, check your 'aggregator' and read all of their latest posts (or just intros to them). If you don't have a tool like that then you can do this with a free one like <http://www.feedreader.com/>

### **A News Ticker for Your Course**

OK, you've got a wonderful WebCT course set up, how can you make it better? Well, how about adding a live aggregator continuously collecting news sources from sites that are relevant to your course (and they don't have to be weblogs, the NY Times do it too & more are coming every day)? This way you and your learners can visit your course in WebCT, click on an icon and review a wide spectrum of key recent developments in the field of your choice (you select what news 'feeds' you subscribe to). You can even post them on your front page, have them alongside or in a discussion or put them with your regular resources. You can even keep your own daily/weekly journal of your interests in the field and feed that in... you could be doing someone else somewhere a big favour as they aggregate your thoughts into their course.

### **A Knowledge Management Tool within Your Faculty**

You know all those emails that fly around with links to articles & resources. Put them on a weblog, they're stored forever & those who want to (or who you want to :o) receive the emails can sign up for email notification from the website. Multiple people can post, you can discuss the quality and ideas in the resources there and you'll probably find that learners and other teachers will take a great interest in this high-quality, up-to-the-minute resource site.

## **A Filing Cabinet**

Know all those e-things that you want to follow up on, don't want to bother printing or just want to keep without too much clutter. Just create multiple categories in your weblog (private if you want), post them there and then you can review them, link to them or share them at your leisure. No clutter :o)

## **A Course Website**

A weblog is a website, it's an incredibly sticky website as it is constantly being updated, it can contain anything (audio, multimedia etc.) that regular websites can contain. Who needs brochureware any more?

## **A Project Management Tool**

Can many people post to the same weblog? **Yes**

Can they 'report' on what they're doing? **Yes**

Can stakeholders read how a projects going & interact with it (using comments / discussion or email)? **Yes**

Can all the relevant project documents be stored on a weblog? **Yes**

Can a weblog be private (password protected)? **Yes**

Can you 'meet' virtually on a weblog? **Yes**

Will it make the coffee? **Probably**