A guide for writing a "journal blog" or "reflective blog"

What is a reflective blog and why should you use one? (Adapted from Professor Wayne Iwaoka, the University of Hawaii at Manoa and UMaine's SMS 491,EDW 472 and COS 120).

The blog is used in this class as a modern replacement to the more traditional journal. It is an instrument for practicing writing and thinking. Unlike your typical class notes in which you "passively" record data/information given to you by an instructor your blog should reflect upon lessons you have learned-- a personal record of your educational experience in the class.

Maintaining a blog serves several purposes:

- A means of communication, conversation (e.g., between material and yourself, yourself and instructors).
- Provides regular feedback between you and the instructors and helps to match expectations.
- Platform for synthesis of new knowledge and ideas.
- Helps to develop critical thinking.
- Helps to elicit topics of interest, challenging topics that need improvement, etc.
- Help to clarify troublesome concepts.

The purpose of the blog is for you to self reflect about your own learning.

How to set a blog?
You can set a blog with many different companies. Below we provide instruction on how to do it with Google blogger.
1. Create a Gmail account if you don't have one yet (Google: Gmail). Note: a xxx.yyy@umaine.edu is a gmail account.
2. Go to www.blogger.com and enter your Gmail address and password
3. Follow the instructions: (a) sign up for blogger (b) click: create a blog and follow the instructions given to you. Click on start posting and your blog is ready.

To keep your blog private, go to "setting". Several questions will appear on the page.
- Change the setting for "add blog to our listing" from "yes" to "no"
- Change the setting for "let search engines find your blog" from "yes" to "no"
- Go to permissions: under Blog readers choose "only blog authors". This will permit only the course instructor to read and comment on your blog.
- Allow the course instructor to view and comment on your blog add him as an author using (use: emmanuel.boss@maine.edu).

For help: go to http://help.blogger.com/

When and what to write?
You are expected to write at least once a week.
Below are guiding questions that will help you with writing your blog and reflecting upon your learning experiences. You are *expected* to answer them in your blog:

1. "What have I learned this week?"
2. "What excited me about the week's activities and why?"
3. "What would I suggest to change if the class was offered in the future?"

Reflection about week's viewing/reading assignment:
4. "What have I learned from the movie/lecture/website reading I have seen/read this week?"
5. "How do I feel about the movie/lecture/website reading I have seen this week?"

In addressing these questions, record your own thoughts, ideas, responses and reactions to any of the week's activities. Make notes about concepts, questions you have, and any confusion you may have had. Record new insights and problem solving strategies realized during discussions with fellow students and instructors. The blog reflects your own thoughts and ideas. Be as original and critical (constructive) as you can. You can use whatever writing style you are comfortable with as long as it is clearly written and sensible.

What am I looking for when I grade your blog?
You will <u>not</u> be graded on the content of your ideas, and there will be no docking of points for poor writing or grammar (unless it is impossible to understand the content).

The bulleted list below presents the five "essentials" I look for in your blog:
- **Blog is readable and clear.**
- **Blog reflects upon *all* guiding questions above.**
- **Blog relates to *all* the readings.**
- **Blog is thoughtful**
- **Blog is posted on time.**

Rubric for blog grading

grade	Performance
A	All above bulleted components are present.
B	One component is missing or of poor quality, or blog is posted late (but within less than a week from due date).
C	Two or more components missing or of poor quality, or blog is more than a week late.
D	Three or more components are missing or of poor quality.

Below is an example for what I expect from your blog:

BLOG ENTRY EXAMPLE

•	What have I learned this week?
Programming is new to me. While working with Scratch I realized that programming is really a relatively simple task. It is a problem-solving method which involves breaking a large task into a series of small tasks (commands).

•	What excited me about the week's activities and why?
Realizing how programming is relatively simple suggests I could do it for my own needs (e.g. setting up a web site, etc'). I am realizing that software and programming are all around me and that if I take the time I can use programming to better control appliances and produce graphics closer to what I am imagining. Working in a group helps us solve problems quickly. I can see how it may be boring to work at it alone.

•	What would I suggest to change if the class was offered in the future?
I think a longer lecture about the history of programming may be useful to provide a historic context. If some readings were offered prior to class, we could jump straight to the project rather than begin in the middle of the period following the lecture.

•	What have I learned from the movie/lecture I have seen this week?
Watching Pausch's lecture provided me with the larger concepts associated with how a programming platform such as Alice came to be. It also made me aware of how individuals can make a huge difference while being focused on doing what excite them the most.

•	How do I feel about the movie/lecture I have seen this week?
'The last lecture' has made me revaluate future plans. There are many things I dreamed about as a kid and then put aside thinking there is no way I could ever achieve them. This lecture made me think about how I could make room in my future to achieve these dreams and how to be more assertive regarding achieving these goals.

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 This page was last edited on 1/20/18