The informed researcher is both a consumer and producer. Writing a blog is like creating a personal webpage. It can be useful to record ideas, emotions and findings.

Why blog?

You could use this for promotional purposes or reflection on the research process. It may be that you want to share your thoughts and develop a following. Alternatively, your blog could act as a private journal that helps remind you what you have read and thought about when it comes to writing up.

Blogs should be personal and provide a human perspective on the research process.

Reflective blogging

Traditionally, researchers have kept field journals to record every stage of the research process. The blog can act in the same way, with the benefit that it is online, close to hand whenever you need to add to it.

By making the blog private in the settings, it could contain your latest finding and drafts emerging ideas. It provides chronology of your thoughts. Alternatively, it could also serve as a useful sounding board, a safe forum in which to express your anxieties, frustrations and celebrate achievements.

There is something cathartic about writing this down, but it will also be a useful reminder to you during the writing up stage, and beyond, about the process that you have been through. Not everything you are thinking seems relevant at the time, but it could well provide the missing jigsaw piece when writing up.

This is called reflective practice. A toolkit is available to help you develop this writing style https://libguides.cam.ac.uk/reflectivepracticetoolkit or you can watch a Moore Methods video specifically about reflective blogging : https://tinyurl.com/moorereflectivepractice

Developing a following

You will need to define your audience first: are you looking to promote your research to others in the field or to reach out to engage with non-academic audiences? This will impact on the content and style of your blog.

Regular blogging is the key to keeping your audience interested. Aim for a post every week or two and stick to it. Ensure that they can sign-up to receive alerts.

Remember to promote your blog. If you actively engage with Twitter, use this to let people know when you’ve posted about a conference you attended, a book you’ve just read, the struggle you’re having with writers’ block, or the latest article you’ve just published. Link to your blog from your university or LinkedIn profile and put it on your email signature.
Reading and following blogs

If you aren’t keen on writing, blogs are valuable tools to keep you informed and connected. You can follow blogs written by individual experts and groups in your field and receive an email notification whenever new content is posted, helping you keep up to date. Others will give you personal insights and are, very often, more informal than websites. It is helpful to know that others are going through the same process as you and they may well be able to share tips on how to make the most of the research experience.

Search blogging platforms for blogs related to your interests. Additionally, academic staff may include a link to their blog on their personal website or departmental profile page. Look at the Scholarly Kitchen or Thesis Whisperer for blogs about academic life or follow specific publications such as The New Scientist or Phys.org.

If you follow lots of blogs, use the reader in your platform or an aggregator like Feedreader, Feedly or Feedspot to manage new posts.

Platforms

More than a quarter of blogs use Wordpress, significantly more than any other platform. It is free, well supported with lots of guides, looks great on mobile devices, and very easy to use.

However, there are other free tools available too:

- **Blogger**—Google’s platform
- **Medium**—an online magazine styled for writers, thinkers, and storytellers
- **Tumblr**—variety of post options
- **Weebly**—aimed at e-commerce but with blog functionality
- **Wix**—known as a website builder, has a dedicated blog feature too

All are very intuitive; just create an account, choose a theme (how you want it to look), and get posting.

Posts are automatically ordered chronologically, so think about using tags to help you and your audience find related material.

Most will support multimedia so you can use it like a scrap book of ideas or make it more interesting for readers. Likewise, insert a calendar function or Twitter-feed to make it dynamic.

E-professionalism

This is the way you engage yourself online in relation to your academic role, including your attitudes, actions and your adherence to relevant professional codes of conduct. You should consider the ethics of public blogging before posting anything online.

You should not reveal the identities of research participants. However, you can of course openly blog about fieldwork highs and lows in general; peers are always keen to know that someone, somewhere is going through the same challenges as they are.

If you are blogging about others in the academy, only be prepared to put something on a blog that you would say to may stay visible when you have left Cambridge and are looking for a post elsewhere.

In general it is better to be clear and open about yourself and your academic position. It’s also important to make clear whether you are writing on behalf of your university or as an individual.

Tips

- Blog because you want to, not because you feel you should.
- Post regularly and blog with purpose.
- Make it visually appealing and write accessibly.
- Find your voice, though it may take some time. Your blog will evolve as you discover your style, which might be short topical pieces or long reflective essays (or a combination of the two). Read other academic blogs and you’ll quickly see the range of voices people use.
- If you want to be found, make sure your blog uses keywords in titles and that you use headings to help search engines know what your posts are about.
- Make links to your blog wherever you can.

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