> Blogs are everywhere.
> They are easy to set up and use with our students.
> The work takes time (for the students), and reading them takes time (for them and us).
> Work that is done deserves feedback.
>
> # The question: **How should I assess student contributions to a blog?**

FNL and America: Working Toward an Essay and Understanding

Posted by Carl Rosin at 1/1/2013

You are going to be finishing your *Friday Night Lights essay* this week. Part of our goal as a class is to show what we know as a book, but an equally important goal is for us to show something that we know about the nation we live in.
You can start with: write a post in which you state what you think is the BEST connection between FNL and the nation in which it takes place. What is one way that this book represents something (either positive or negative) about our nation's values?
Ground rules: The main point of a blog is for people to talk with each other. You are expected (1) to post *at least* twice, (2) to quote at least once, to give an example in support of your posting, and (3) to make at least one substantial (not trivial) and specific reference to something that someone else posted -- because you're making more than one post, you don't have to refer to another person's posting *each* time *you* post. (4) Finally, keep it brief: really long postings are harder to read. The ideal posting is more than four lines -- it has substance and is specific -- but less than 15. (5) Both agreement and disagreement are welcome, as long as you are respectful -- "flaming", profanity, and other Bad Netiquette will not be tolerated. If you post things that disrespect a classmate or another member of this school community, expect it not to be tolerated.

You have to put in a name to get credit; we suggest that you use your first name and last initial. There will be a small grade for this, by the way.

41 Comments

emily
on January 2, 2013   Reply

one of my American values is loyalty.I picked loyalty because of the loyal fans that follow high school football in the town of Odessa. Page 38 describes the Watermelon Feed where several hundred people come to Permian High School to admire and show their support for the football players.

Mr Rosin
on January 2, 2013   Reply

That's a great example from the book. Anyone have an idea how Emily can show that loyalty is an American value, too?

← Link to [this Schoolwires blog](#)

Schoolwires is the easiest way to set up a blog. It can be done in a few minutes…but it has some limitations of which you want to be aware.

1. Formatting – colors are very helpful, but other elements are limited. You can create paragraphs and other useful formats in your posting, but the comments themselves are entirely flat: no special fonts, no links, no paragraphing, nothing.

1a. At least you can use "Reply" to link a comment to a specific other comment – until about a year ago, you couldn't even do that!

2. Set expectations in a lesson before they blog. This is more than just a lesson in your content – it is also helping them become accustomed to what is a basic competency on the Internet.

2a. Tell them about the limitations, so they are not furious when their attempts at paragraphing come to naught.

2b. Remind them that writing is about **communication**, and expectations for reading on the Internet are different than those for reading on paper.

Value of BLOGGING for student learning:

- Internet competency
- Collaborative skills
- Casual think-aloud
- Quick start-up, quick in, quick usage, quick out
- Discussion...but asynchronous
- In MANY blog systems – unfortunately, not currently available in Schoolwires, the ability to hyperlink into the web's various excellent resources. For a more heavyweight set of features, you may want to try a platform other than blogging: tumblr, wiki, Voice Thread, etc.

Strategies for scaffolding student work to deepen understanding:

- Modeling
- A clear rubric, and a (quick) lesson introducing it

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Part of the writing process: before the essay, the students share their best evidence, to build off each other. Reinforces that *writing is not only for the teacher to see*.

Explain what constitutes a valuable post.

Focus them on readability and communication: whitespace, text density, inclination for readers to shy away from large blocks of gray online.

Be explicit about the need for good digital citizenship. Regardless of the quality of the content, destructive tone leads to poor communication – in assessment parlance, that means a poor grade.
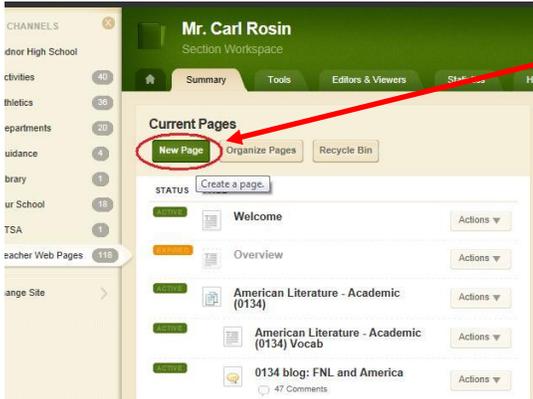
Tips/suggestions/lessons learned

- Be absolutely explicit about expectations.
- Check out some other blogging rubrics for some language that will be useful. Mine is above, for an Academic-level class (although I have used very similar verbiage for CP and even honors). For a higher-level class, or a higher-order-thinking-skill exercise in any class, I liked this, from a literature professor: http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/a-rubric-for-evaluating-student-blogs/27196.
- Tally up each student's posts toward an overall grade. A simple Excel file grid makes it easy to keep track:

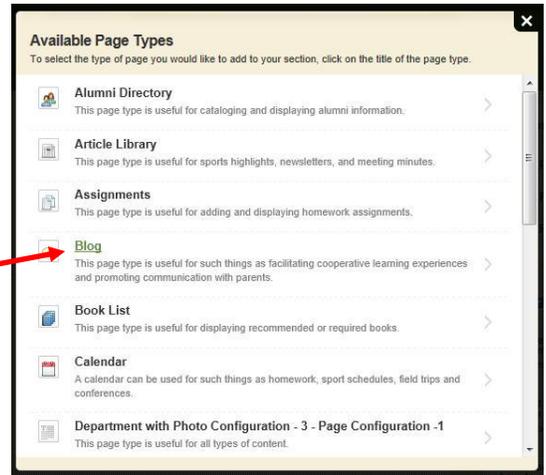|	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	period 1 student	grade	1	2	3	4
2	gonzo	0				
3	scooter	a-	q+	+		
4	janis	a-	q+			
5	fozzie	b	r+	+		
6	dr teeth	8	late q+ late r			

Rating	Characteristics
4	*Exceptional.* The blog post is focused and coherently integrates examples with explanations or analysis. The post demonstrates awareness of its own limitations or implications, and it considers multiple perspectives when appropriate. The entry reflects in-depth engagement with the topic.
3	*Satisfactory.* The blog post is reasonably focused, and explanations or analysis are mostly based on examples or other evidence. Fewer connections are made between ideas, and though new insights are offered, they are not fully developed. The post reflects moderate engagement with the topic.
2	*Underdeveloped.* The blog post is mostly description or summary, without consideration of alternative perspectives, and few connections are made between ideas. The post reflects passing engagement with the topic.
1	*Limited.* The blog post is unfocused, or simply rehashes previous comments, and displays no evidence of student engagement with the topic.
0	*No Credit.* The blog post is missing or consists of one or two disconnected sentences.

Need help setting up a new blog?

1 To set up the blog, click "New Page" and Type = "Blog"

Available Page Types

To select the type of page you would like to add to your section, click on the title of the page type.

Alumni Directory
This page type is useful for cataloging and displaying alumni information.

Article Library
This page type is useful for sports highlights, newsletters, and meeting minutes.

Assignments
This page type is useful for adding and displaying homework assignments.

2 **Blog**
This page type is useful for such things as facilitating cooperative learning experiences and promoting communication with parents.

Book List
This page type is useful for displaying recommended or required books.

Calendar
A calendar can be used for such things as homework, sport schedules, field trips and conferences.

Department with Photo Configuration - 3 - Page Configuration -1
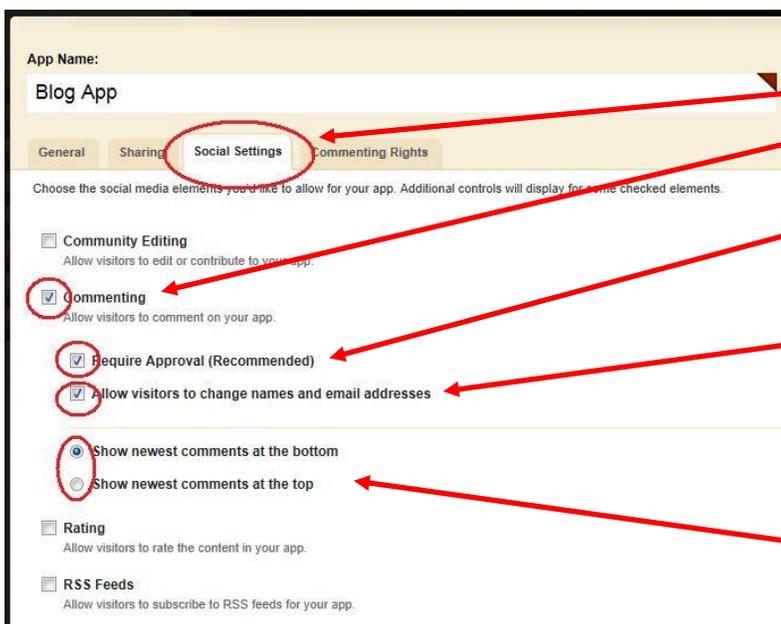This page type is useful for all types of content.

3 When you create a Blog, you'll be asked to create a **New Posting** – that's what appears as the blog. There are a few key settings you'll need...and they're not easy (in Schoolwires) to find.

- If you set up a blog in another environment (Edu20, GoogleGroups, etc.) you'll need to consider the same things, but the setup will be arranged in different places.
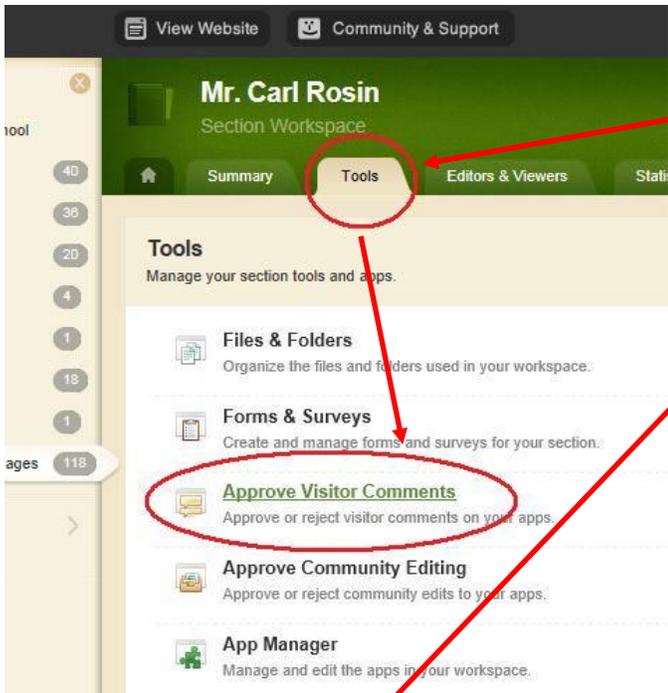
4 The "Options" flag, off to the right side of the page, is where you will find these settings

5 In "Options":

A. Click the "Social Settings" tab.
B. Check "Commenting" – that opens up the set of features shown at left
C. You probably want to DESELECT "Require Approval", even though it is Recommended...at least for now.
D. Allow visitors to change names UNLESS you have sign-ins for them all.
   a. You'll probably answer this differently for GoogleGroups and Edu20, and anything else where a login is used (possible for Schoolwires too)
E. I always snow newest comments at the bottom, although there are advantages to either option here.
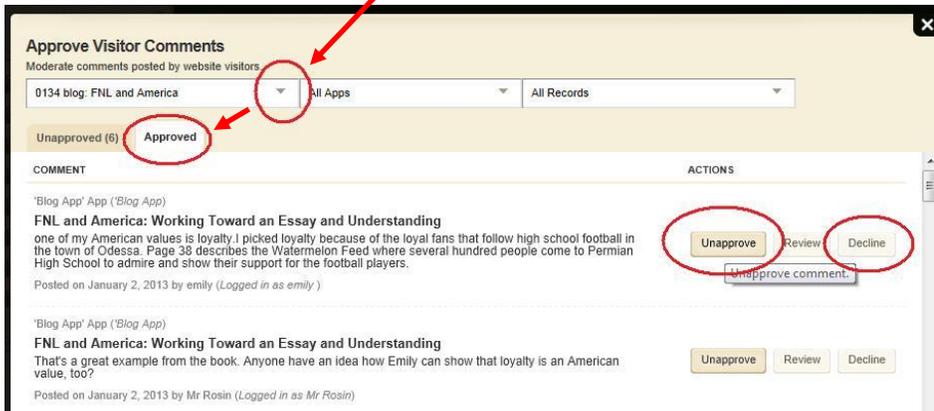
(6)

After the kids have worked on it, you'll need to Approve comments (if you "required approval" back in 5C).

If (like me) you DON'T require approval, you need to be ready to UNAPPROVE comments that are inappropriate or duplicative.

★ When you are done with your blog, DEFINITELY go to 5C and require approval, for *troll-prevention* purposes. If your setup requires signing-in, this probably won't be necessary.

(7)

It's easy to miss the dropdown on this screen: use it to select your blog (from among all of your blogs…if you have more than one), then click over to the "Approved" tab. That's where you'll "Unapprove" or decline any comments that you want to hide.