



EngagED Network

**Writing personal stories to think
academically: Blogging workshop for
students**

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Workshop Objective

- Students to think about their writing in a more creative and personal way to make academic writing perhaps more fun, engaged, and fluid.
- Diary-like writing as a way to explore lived experience and emotional engagement, to tune into our emotional and spiritual intelligence (something the academic space does not always allow)
- Seeing how blogging can help shape the essence of an argument that can then be polished into academic writing
- Practice writing
- Provide opportunities for publishing a blog post

What is Teaching Matters?

Teaching Matters blog

Promoting, discussing and celebrating teaching at The University of Edinburgh



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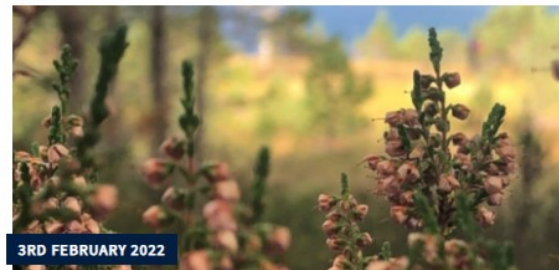
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Why student writers?

You have valuable insights and experiences of teaching and learning at University of Edinburgh that staff need to hear!

Students are increasingly involved and in the driving seat of innovative learning and teaching practices

Outline

- Intro: What is blogging?
- Examples of four Teaching Matters blog posts to inspire writing
- Exercise: 20 minutes of writing
- Discussion
- Next Steps

I. What is blogging?

- What's the difference between a diary, journal or blog?
- Characteristics of a blog post: a single idea, short, personal, incomplete
- What makes a good blog post?

II. Examples of four Teaching Matters blog posts to inspire writing

1. Departing from an artefact to develop a thought

Spotlight Series on Voices of Movers and Shakers: The Power of an Image



Image Credit: Mark Haupt Unsplash

This post is part of the Spotlight series on Voices of Movers and Shakers, a series showcasing reflections from scholars of the [Mastercard Foundation Programme](#) on the intersections between learning, activism, race, and belonging. In his post, Brindley J Fortuin a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh, Centre of African Studies provides a personal reflection on the power of representation, art and political activism as a space of imagining and resistance...

One day a former partner and I walked through the Scottish National Portrait Gallery and an image struck me. It was an image of an interracial, mature gay couple. As I was standing there, gazing at the portrait I exclaimed to my ex 'This is profound!'. Until that day I have never seen an image of an interracial, mature, gay couple. This sense of awe completely took me by surprise. I am a Queer activist and an aspiring academic who has experimented with art-based research practises before. Acknowledging the power of art is part of me. Yet, that day, I experienced the liberating power of art most peculiarly. My ex-partner was white and as he led me to the staircase in the gallery, he asked me to share my thoughts. I am not surprised that he did not have the same reaction. Fundamentally, art appeals to our senses, senses which are cultural, political and economically honed. In his case, he is white and was raised in the UK. He has seen the diversity of queer couples. I, on the other hand, was born and raised in South Africa. A country where lesbians, gays and transgender persons are still being killed and violated, irrespective of our constitutional protections.

2. Using a conceptual idea and engaging with it personally

Searching for Sensational Living



Image Credit: Title: Fragments of Experience, Creator: Johnstone, William, University of Edinburgh Collections Catalogue No. 0016120

In this post, Josephine Foucher Co-Editor of Teaching Matters and a PhD student in Sociology in the School of Social and Political Science describes how to repair the Cartesian split and regain a sensational life in the midst of a global pandemic...

When thinking about this month's theme on mental health and new learning environments, I was inspired by [Sarah Ahmed's](#) concept of feminism being sensational in her book [Living a feminist life](#):

Feminism is sensational. Something is sensational when it provokes excitement and interest. Feminism is sensational in this sense; what is provocative about feminism is what makes feminism a set of arguments that is hard to deliver. We learn about the feminist cause by the bother feminism causes; by how feminism comes up in public culture as a site of disturbance.

And then she goes on to specify:

II. Examples of four Teaching Matters blog posts to inspire writing

3. Unpacking a critical incident

Mini-series: Learning from a critical incident in an internationalised classroom



Photo source: Unsplash, CC0 remix by Joe Arton

In this second post for the Mini-series "[Curriculum as a Site for Social Justice and Anti-Discrimination](#)", Omolabake Fakunle, Teaching fellow at Moray House School of Education and Sport, reflects on how uncomfortable questions posed by students can engender transformative learning and teaching practices...

It was supposed to be an innocuous classroom session for students to discuss their understanding of the impact of globalisation on education in different countries. Mid-discussions (in the front of the classroom), one student rather sharply uttered:

"Did you come to my country because of the tea?"

The question above was posed by a Chinese Masters student in my classroom. It was addressed to an American student when the latter made a statement about how globalisation has benefited every country.

The whole class fell silent the moment the question was posed.

4. From action to reflection, an auto-ethnographic approach

Pedagogies of the climate activism space



Image credit: unsplash, Mika Baumeister, CC0

In this post, Lisa Howard provides a feminist reflection on the climate campaigning space, and her thoughts on how a gender critical perspective can advance climate action that does not inadvertently reproduce colonialist, patriarchal power relation. This post is part of our November and December Hot Topic theme: [COP26 and embedding the climate emergency in our teaching](#).

I often feel that being a PhD researcher is a way of life rather than a job. As a sociologist, the curiosity and politics you develop as part of a critical social scientific journey do not just switch off along with your laptop at the end of the day. And for me, this way of life is brilliant and exciting because it means learning is a quotidian adventure.

This notion leads me to share with you my thoughts on just one of the many pedagogical spaces I've been able to enjoy now that the coronavirus restrictions on mobility have lifted. I recently joined a local environmental group (name withheld to protect identities) as I've been feeling increasingly desperate about the worsening climate and ecological crisis. Global leaders have for decades failed to bring about the rapid economic and regulatory change that this situation demands, and with the upcoming COP26 climate summit and critical attention on the UK, it felt like a good time to get involved.


III. 20 minutes of free writing

Choose one of the four approaches demonstrated to write about any topic related to learning and/or teaching





IV. Discussion

- What did this exercise feel like?
 - What is your writing process usually like? (i.e. talk about the environment you need to be in (music/no music, do you write in a specific place or can write anywhere, a time of day during which you write better?)
 - Do you think before writing or does writing help you think?
 - What distinguishes academic writing from blogging? What are some challenges of writing academically?
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IV. Discussion:


What the blogging space can do to “unstick” academic writing

- Democratizing:
 - From professors to students publish on Teaching Matters
 - Demystify academic writing: Saying “I” - sharing stories
 - Reflexive editorial standpoints and co-creation
- Disruptive:
 - Blog as disruptive technology – not a social network
 - Blogging as an experimental space: toying with emotions, vulnerability, uncertainty, sense-making, developing the angle from which to approach, engaging with art/other materials; playing with different styles, a great space for exploring one’s voice
 - Description is good!
- Pedagogical
 - A rehearsal space: nuanced thinking (anti-thesis of social media)
 - Teaches to write succinctly and reckoning with the frustrations of incomplete writing
 - Sparking dialogue and collaboration outside of online spaces → a bridge into offline discussions and actions
 - You’re not being assessed

“the simple act of recording anything on paper is already an immense transformation that requires as much skill and just as much artifice as painting a landscape or setting up some elaborate biochemical reaction. No scholar should find humiliating the task of sticking to description. This is, on the contrary, the highest and rarest achievement”. (Latour, 2005: 136-7)



Next steps

- Start your own blog → <https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/learning-technology/blogging>
 - Submit a blog post to Teaching Matters → <https://www.teaching-matters-blog.ed.ac.uk/>
 - Any illustrators?
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Questions?

<https://www.teaching-matters-blog.ed.ac.uk/>

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