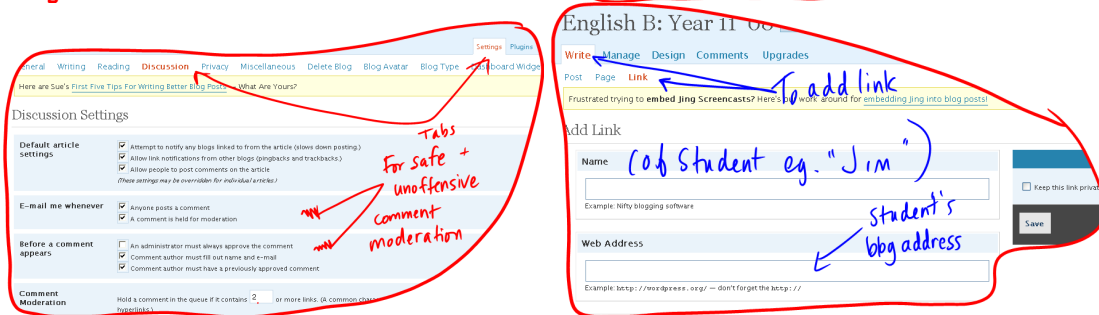
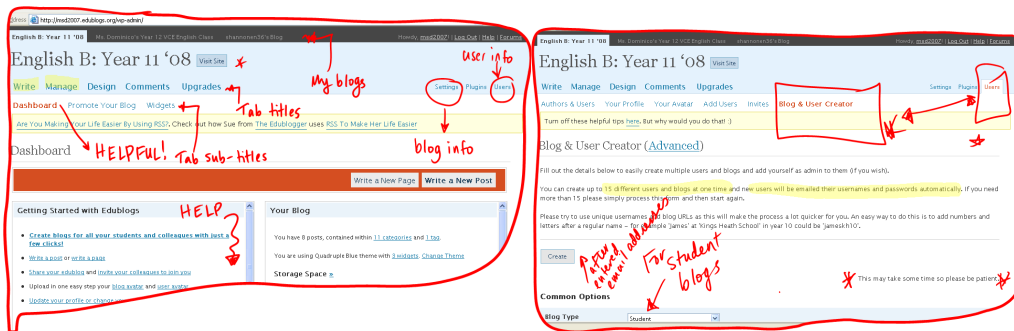


The "Know How" Guide to Classroom Blogging:

How to set it up, what to look out for...



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What the Heck is a Blog?

A blog is basically a personal website. It's unique in that every entry is time and date-stamped which means that they are automatically archived on your website and always available through a "search" option.

Why are people "Bonkers for Blogs"?

Blogs have become very popular because they are so simple to set up and manage—they become obsessions. Programs like **WordPress** (the one we'll be using) are modelled after Microsoft Word which means that they are built to be user-friendly.

In the wider world of the web, bloggers are unique to other websites because of their ability to develop trust with their readers: their information is current, first-hand opinionated (people actually *love* this!) and personal.

Gossipy or not, we learn by stories. Blogging provides such a forum.

Why Blog in the Classroom?

I first got interested on blogs by accident. I was researching online, and came across a post that incited heated debate. Within 24 days, 43 comments had been posted—essay-long responses. It was not for school, it was not for any purpose than people just arguing the logic of something. There were so many different points of view and so much rhetoric being hurled around, like many educators before me, I was incited to find how I could affect the same enthusiasm in my students.

But the integration of it has proved to be a little more complicated. See below.

[ADO's list of The 'Pros and 'Cons' to Classroom Blogging](#)

Pros

- Online Resources for teachers and students which means that you can share and save information easily
- Accessible on internet from anywhere (home/school) which means that your students, colleagues (and parents) can always know what is going on in your course
- Online Course Organiser for staff and teachers which means that you can model organisation for your students
- Many accessible mediums and teacher-approved sources of information (video, audio, text, photo complements) which means that you can integrate many intelligence types and differentiate learning styles
- Peer and Self-Assess learning can occur within the work each lesson
- Blogging can appeal to the "mosaic mind" of Generation Y's thinking
- Teachers can easily set up, collaborate and "control" their students' blogs

Cons

- Students have to be taught to use the blog – they will figure out some things, but need guidance to make it educative *and safe*.
- *If it's not fun, easy and relevant*, it becomes just "another thing they have to do" (which is not educative)
- Web Copyright is traceable and different to Print Copyright; it needs to be taught
- Using a blog takes time and passion; researching and learning new skills and tools should be ongoing (that's how the "web" works)
- Students can feel their work is constantly "on display" and their need for perfectionism (reinforced by the values of school assessment) prevents them from understanding that even incomplete work is still very valuable. They need to feel safe and confident to not be discouraged

from completing work

- Blogging in Classrooms takes a learning curve on behalf of the “traditional” teacher
- Sometimes the kids laptops and internet problems interferes with learning

Table 1: Classroom Blogging Pros and Cons

WARNING: Introducing blogging to your students

Your students need to discover blogging in a similar way that I did: genuine interest. The benefits must be evident beneath the ‘flashy’ surface.

I suggest going to www.technorati.com, searching on a subject of interest (eg. mine might be “teacher blogs”) and scrolling through the sites that come up.

The *coolest* part about blogging is the immediacy with which you can **comment** on someone else’s post and participate in the discourse. **Reading, reflecting, writing and responding** (sound like education in the 21st Century?) to comments is one of the most beneficial aspects of classroom blogging. But, **BONUS:** you can incorporate other medium and learning styles at the same time.

Core Principle of Blogging:

“We all have something interesting to say about our interests!”

I’ll Give it a Whirl – How do I do it?

STEP 1: Set up a blog for yourself at: <http://edublogs.org> .

Why “Edublogs”?

- 1) Because they use the best blogging software: WordPress;
- 2) Because they are teachers;
- 3) Because they will always help you if you get stuck or want to know something.

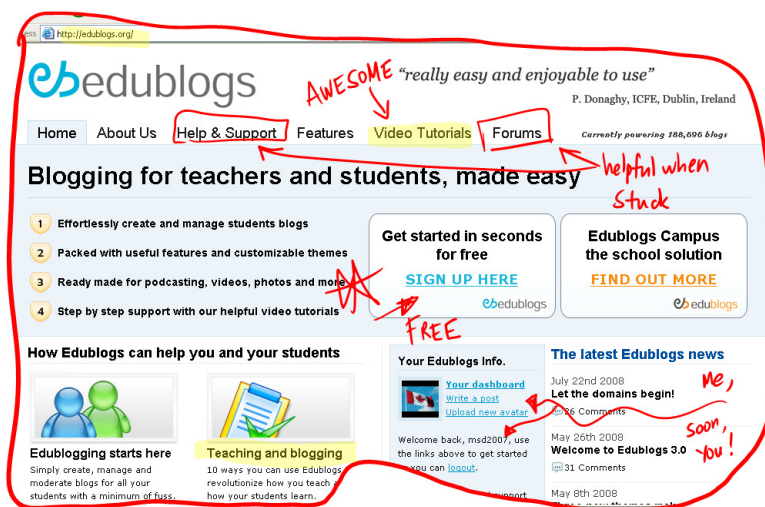


Figure 1:Edublogs Sign up

STEP 2: Setting up your Blog

Tips:

1. Choose a Username you won't be ashamed of: "msd2007" was a mistake that I cannot change.
2. Log-in to Edublogs to adjust your blog: <http://yourusername.edublogs.org/wp-admin>

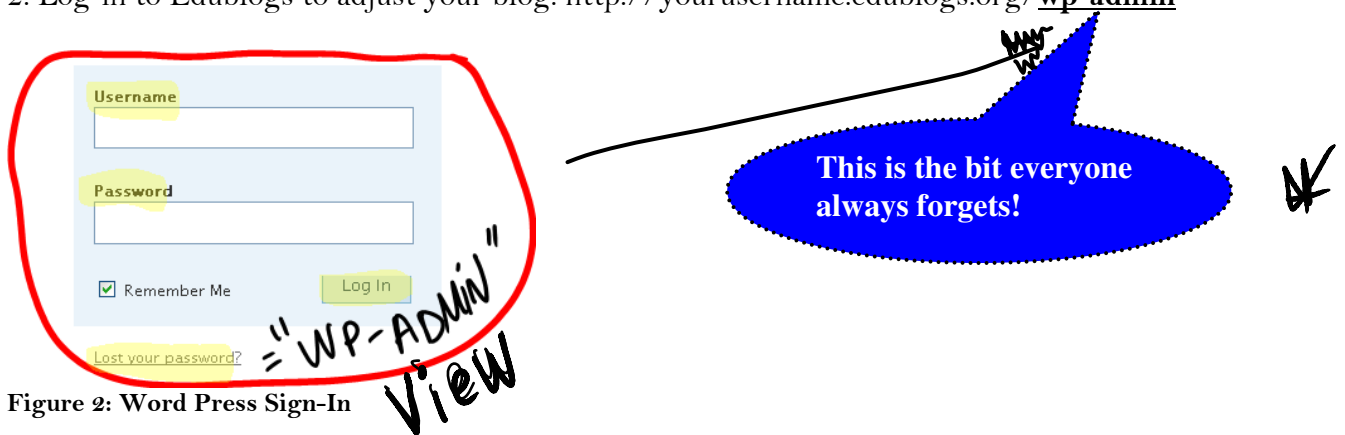


Figure 2: Word Press Sign-In

STEP 3: Learn the basics of WordPress

- <http://edublogs.org/videos/> = Videos are quick, awesome tutorials
- <http://msd2007.edublogs.org/blog-help/> = my WordPress Instructions

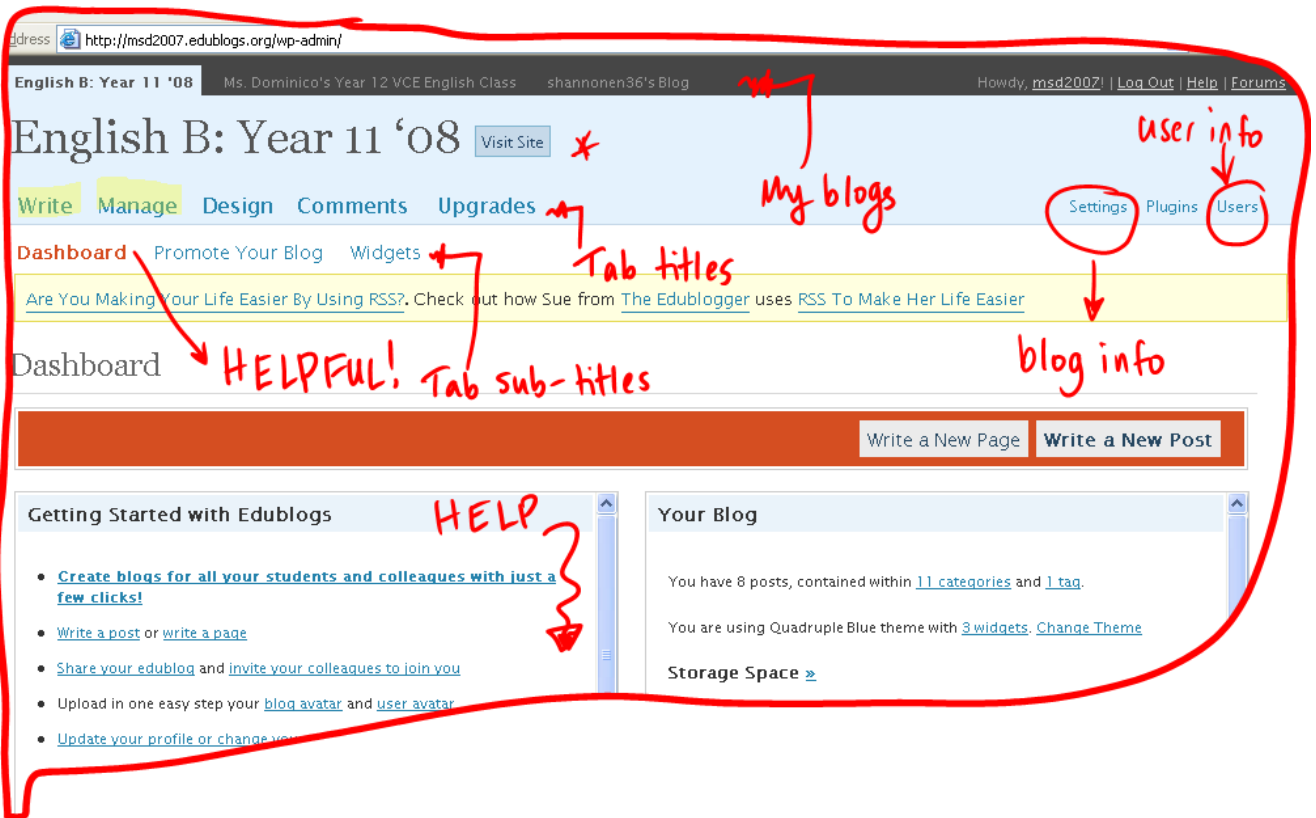


Figure 3: WordPress Admin Basics

STEP 4: Read The Edublogger and other Teachers' Blogs regularly

Sue Waters' site (<http://theedublogger.edublogs.org/>) will help you gain the necessary confidence and excitement to set it up in your classroom. I highly recommend mapping out the purpose of the blog. I wanted one central place to check HW. It worked for a while, but I'm still finessing this concept.

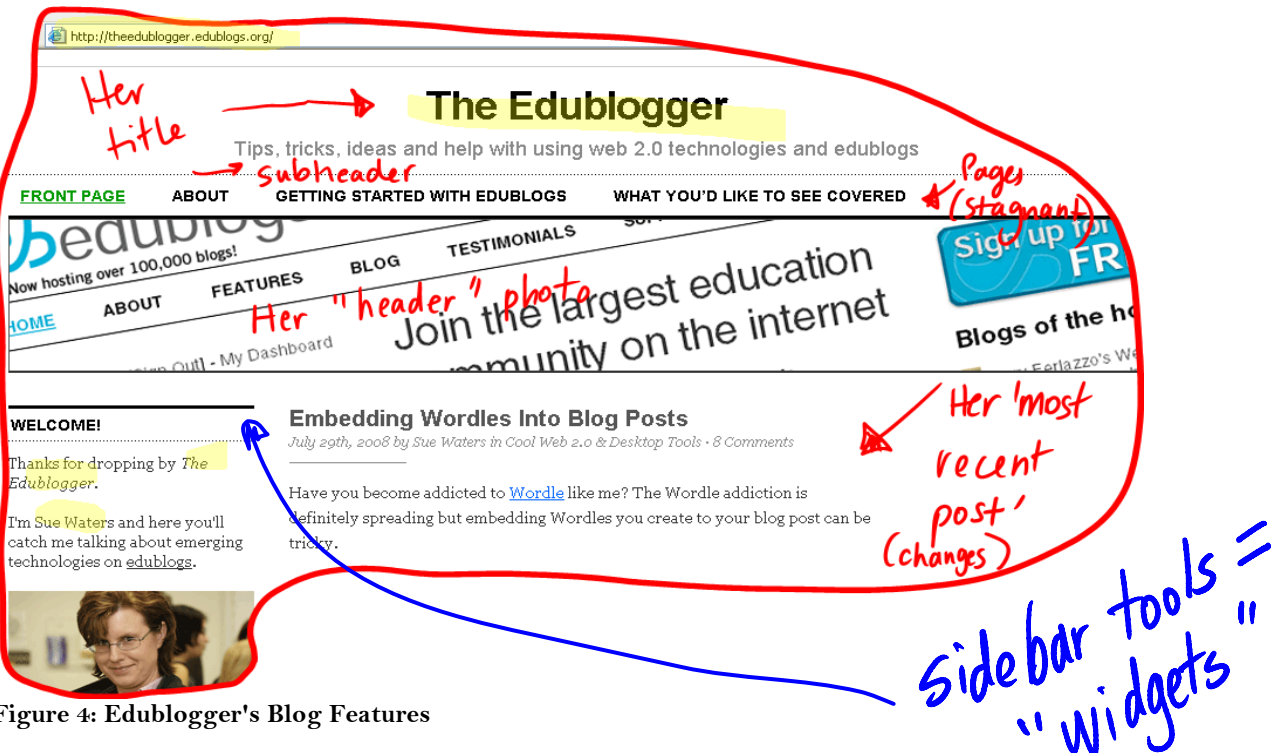


Figure 4: Edublogger's Blog Features

STEP 5: Set-up Blogs for your students

There are two ways to do this:

Method 1 = via "Dashboard"

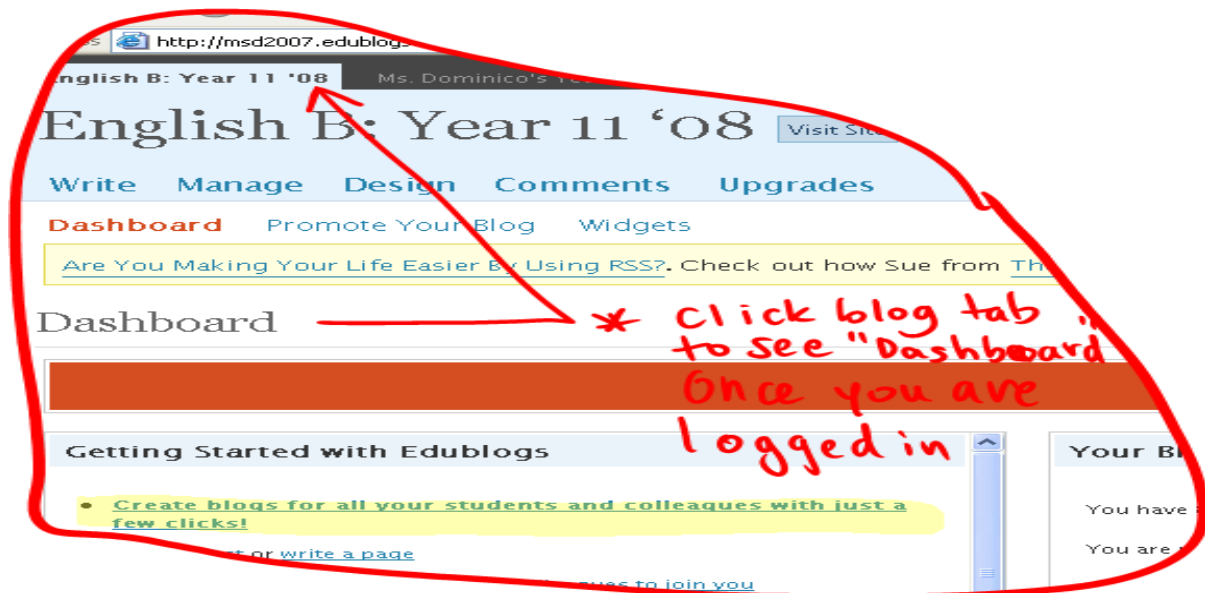


Figure 5: Finding the Dashboard to set up blogs for your students (Method 1)

Method 2 = Via "Users" tab

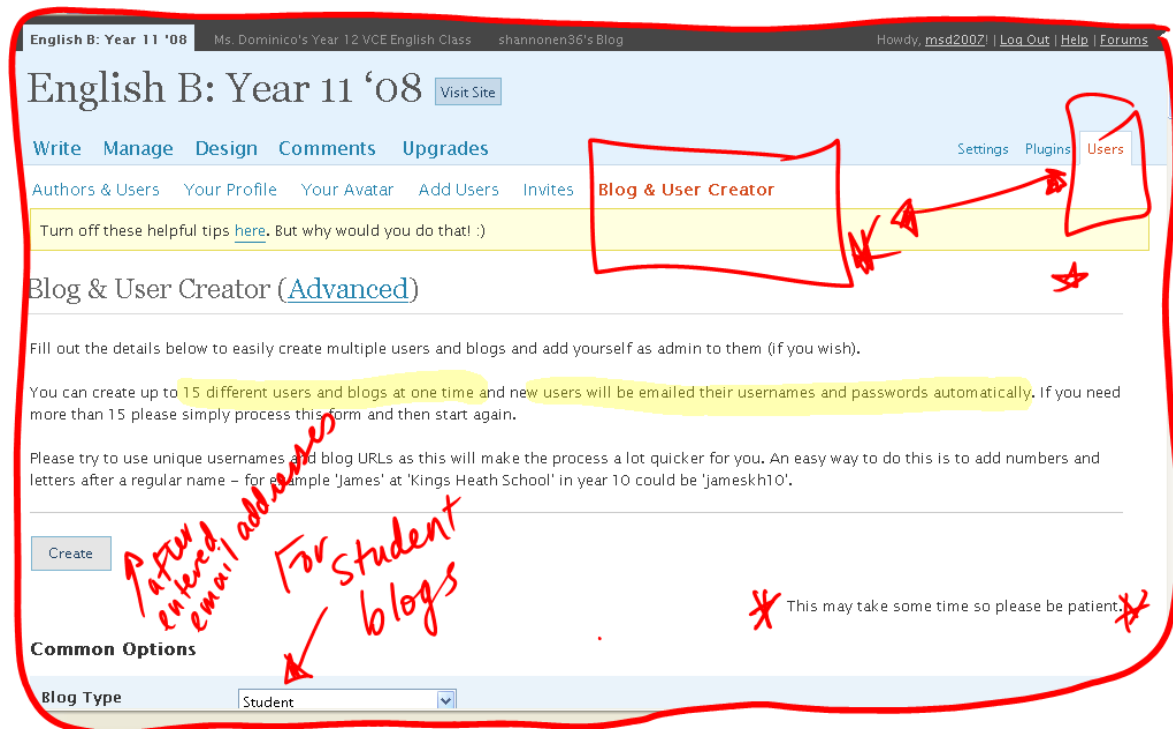


Figure 6: Setting up blogs for your students via the Users Tab (Method 2)

Regarding Creating Blogs for your Students...

You can create as many blogs as you would like; but you can only do 15 at once.

The screenshot shows the 'Create Blog' form in a WordPress admin interface. The form is titled 'Create' and has a 'Common Options' section. The 'Blog Type' dropdown is set to 'Student'. The 'Add Admin' dropdown is set to 'No'. The 'Blog/User Name' field contains 'jamesqt3'. The 'User Email' field is empty. Handwritten annotations in black and red ink are present: 'Do up to 15 @ once; then add more in a separate entry' with an arrow pointing to the 'Create' button; 'I put 1st name (no last names for safety!) + Course Code (no school ID for safety.)' with a blue box around the 'Blog/User Name' field; and '2:' at the bottom left.

Figure 7: Creating blogs for your students (15 at a time)

STEP 6: Add Your Students to your "Links" (aka. "Blogroll" or whatever you want to call it)

Your students will not appear on your blog. You have to add them as "links" separately.

Do this here:

The screenshot shows the 'Add Link' form in a WordPress admin interface. The form is titled 'Add Link' and has a 'Name' field and a 'Web Address' field. The 'Name' field contains 'cob Student eg. "Jim"'. The 'Web Address' field is empty. Handwritten annotations in blue ink are present: 'To add link' with an arrow pointing to the 'Link' tab; 'Student's bbg address' with an arrow pointing to the 'Web Address' field; and 'Save' with an arrow pointing to the 'Save' button.

Figure 8: Adding your students to your main page

And, Categorise your links:

The screenshot shows the WordPress 'Add New Link' form. The 'Name' field contains the handwritten text 'Student's eg "Joe"'. The 'Web Address' field is empty and circled in red. The 'Description' field contains the handwritten text 'Student blog or "the magic blog"'. The 'Categories' section shows a list of categories: 'Blogroll' (unchecked) and 'Student Blogroll' (checked). A red box highlights the '+ Add New Category' link, with a red arrow pointing to the 'Student Blogroll' checkbox. A red checkmark is next to the 'Student Blogroll' checkbox. The 'Save' button is visible on the right. The 'Related' section contains links for 'Manage All Links', 'Manage All Link Categories', and 'Import Links'.

Figure 9: Customising how blogs will appear on your blogroll

10 More Tips:

1. Use good **titles** and **sub-headlines** within each post = better reading on a computer screen.
2. To encourage reading, write each post in 1st person narrative (eg. “me”, “I”, “we” words)
3. Use **Categories**. Clicking on these will automatically sort all of the posts relevant to that “category” (a “topic”).
4. Use **Tags** (These are the words Google uses to bring up your blog).
5. Encourage Comment making by answering all comments and **leaving valuable** comments. Make sure that **you approve ALL COMMENTS** before they are posted (see illustration below).

All Websites Can Be Found:
Don't keep student/school details (anywhere) on the blogs to practice "internet safety".

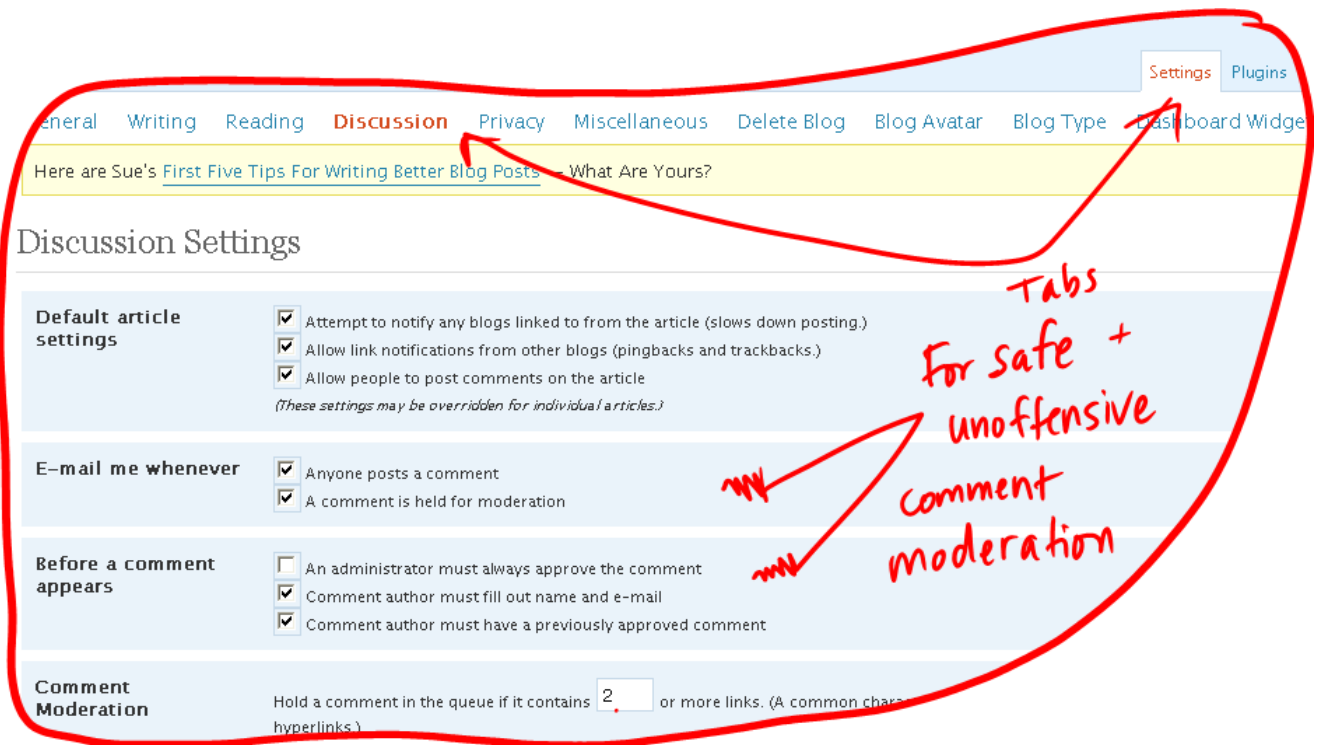


Figure 10: How to ensure comment moderation

6. Network with other classrooms and teachers.
7. Make the blog interactive by adding “polls”, “quizzes”, **Creative Commons** (= shareable) photos.

8. **Pages** (= Stagnant) vs **Posts**

“Blogging is a process, a conversation. Unfortunately, at the beginning of the year, my students tend to see each blog entry as the equivalent of a well-composed paragraph response or even an essay.”

- <http://www.teachandlearn.ca/blog/2007/10/27/how-to-grow-a->

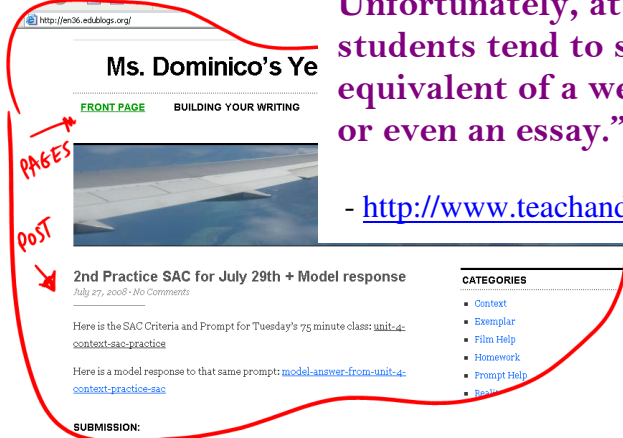


Figure 11: Pages vs. Posts

9. You can “save” a post to work on it later. Only if you click “publish” will it appear. If you want to find the post again, go to the “manage” tab and find the post by searching for its title. **Unpublished posts usually appear below published posts.** Also, you can work on a post and “publish it later” it to post at a certain time. (EG. Can be handy for SAC topics, which are released on a certain date.)

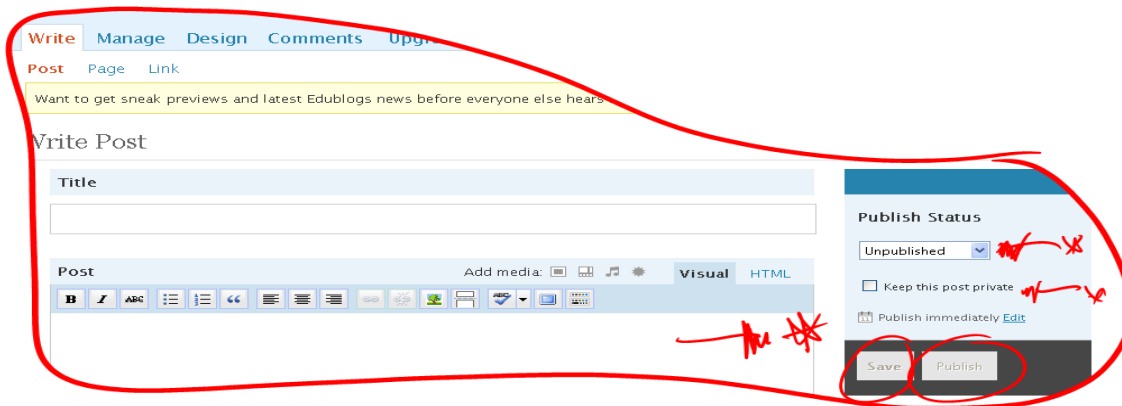


Figure 12: Writing a Post to Save it Later

10. You can choose which shows up on your front page quite easily. The “Settings” tab is very helpful to explore. BUT, always look to select “Save Changes” before moving to a new tab!

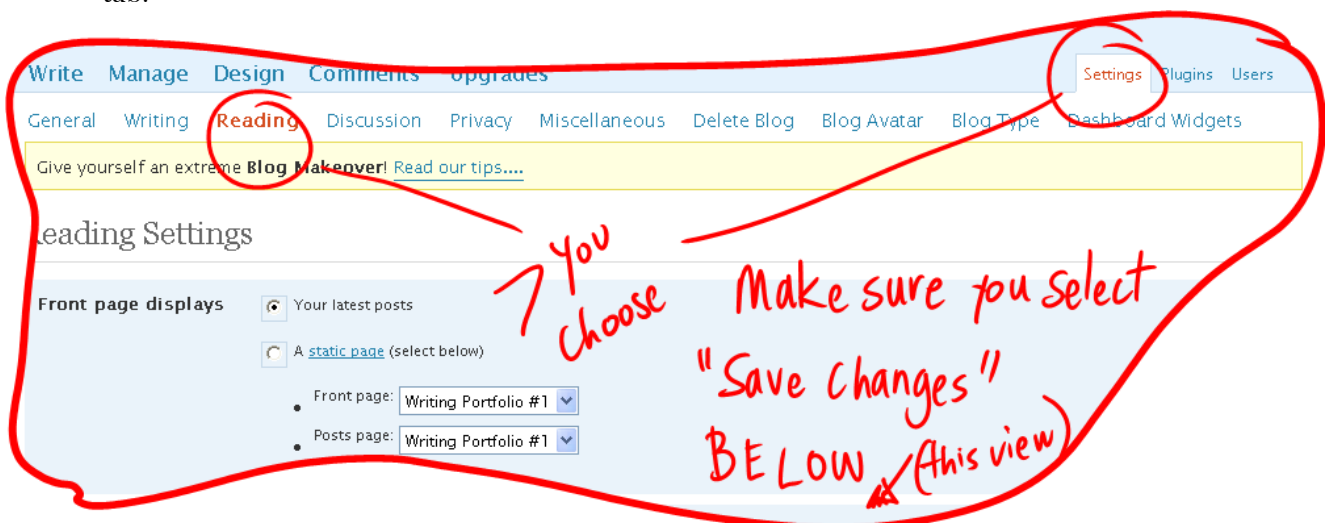


Figure 13: Changing the Main Page view

BONUS: #11:

If you want to know/learn about something: go to www.youtube.com and search for it; there is probably an instructional video. Eg. Type in “RSS” and learn about this awesome tool.

Key Blogging Terms:

The Basics :

- **Widget** = a tool in your sidebar .Eg. “Most Recent Comments”;
- **Text Widget** = an empty widget in which you can post the html code/java script for a video or just write stagnant plain text (eg. “About Me”).
- **Sidebar** = the stagnant area of your blog that appears on every page.
- **Page** = a stagnant page that is always visible on your blog.
- **Post** = an entry on a topic which receives a time and date stamp and is kept in your archives automatically by your blogging software.
- **Tag** = a set of “key terms” for each post. If someone were to search the topic(s) within your post in an online search engine, your post would come up as an authority on the subject.

- **Category** = a method of categorising each blog post so it is organised according to a larger topic; it also allows you to readily search all of the posts according to that topic when you click on a category within the ‘category widget’ in your sidebar.
- **Blogroll** = a set of links for blogs; as “links” is usually quite vague, WordPress lets you create categories for your links. You might have a “teacher blogroll” category (showing all the teachers’ blogs that might be useful) and a “student blogroll” category (showing all of the students’ in your class by first name). You can add these categories as widgets in your sidebar.
- **Theme** = under the “Design” tab, this allows you to change the look, colours and organisation of your blog; it’s essential to set this up so that it is most legible and suitable to your content.
- **Custom Image Header** = this is a feature available in *some* design themes that allows you to change the picture that appears at the top of your blog.
- **Manage** = this allows you to modify and delete previously written posts, pages and links.
- **Blogged Out** = feeling tired and sore from your blogging addiction!!! (my term)

What else would you like to see here? Drop me a line: <http://msd2007.edublogs.org>

Extras:

- **Plug in** = an additional tool you can install on your blog to help you do extra stuff like Google Analytics
- **Google Analytics**= a program that you can use to trace the people accessing your site, and where they are clicking most frequently, etc.
- **RSS** = a “feed” that can be read in a “reader” (which means that you don’t have to waste time returning to a blog to see if there are any updates; every time the blog changes (by posts; by comments) the updates on the blog are automatically sent to you.
- **Twitter** = A tool that traces all of your posts and comments.
- **Voki** = A tool that reads blog content aloud.
- **Avatar** = you can use a photo to suit your profile; this is handy because you learn the persona of the commenter by their avatar. You can have a “blog avatar” and a “comment avatar” that identifies your comments.

An Educator’s Essential Blogging Resources:

- <http://theedublogger.edublogs.org> = the blogging guru; she’ll answer every question you have (if she hasn’t already posted about it, post a comment and she will email you directly).
 - <http://theedublogger.edublogs.org/getting-started-with-edublogs/> = a post with all kinds of resources to further your Edublog learning (written by teachers FOR teachers!)
- <http://www.probblogger.net/31-days-to-building-a-better-blog/> = Darren the “Probblogger” really is that. He is fast becoming a “famous” blogger.
- <http://tcflvideo.edublogs.org/2008/07/17/our-japanese-culture-voicethreads/#more-23> This teacher uses “Voice threads” to make short videos with photos essentially.
- www.technorati.com = this is the “google” of blogs.
- <http://weblogg-ed.com> = a teacher discussing the pros, cons and the ideology of student learning in blogging
- <http://eideneurolearningblog.blogspot.com/2005/03/brain-of-blogger.html> = the brain of a blogger
- <http://www.commoncraft.com> = this couple’s excellent video series “in plain English” has helped me out of many “I don’t get it!” jams.

- <http://www.teachandlearn.ca/blog> = this PhD is a blogging guru whose philosophy and template tools to help a teacher do it better are really great. See also:
 - <http://www.teachandlearn.ca/blog/2007/10/27/how-to-grow-a-blog/> = an excellent post about how to make blogging a genuine learning experience rather than a “have to do” activity.
 - <http://www.teachandlearn.ca/blog/2007/04/25/replacing-grading-with-conversations/> = a post about the conundrum of “grades” vs “learning” and marrying the two.
 - <http://www.teachandlearn.ca/blog/2007/05/27/making-assessment-personally-relevant/> = a discussion and some strategies of working within the “grades = school” mentality. It has an excellent, meaningful tool for self-evaluation (avoiding kids being too easy or too hard on themselves).

What else have you found helpful?

Drop me a line:

<http://msd2007.edublogs.org>