



The Writer's Compass

Briefing 4: The creative art of blogging Yemisi Blake

This briefing sheet draws on a workshop for writers run by Yemisi Blake in October 2008 as part of Baylit 2008: Shock of the New. Baylit is the annual bi-lingual festival of spoken writing held in Cardiff Bay by Academi, the Welsh National Literature Promotion Agency and Society for Authors www.academi.org. The workshop was mounted in association with literaturetraining and draws on a piece which was originally commissioned by the National Association for Literature Development (NALD) www.nald.org.

About the author

Yemisi Blake is a freelance creative, writer and social entrepreneur. He has recently been an Emerging Artist in Residence at the Southbank Centre where he collaborated with other artists, curating events and mentoring young creatives. In 2008 Yemisi co-curated a blogging project for the Southbank Centre's Poetry International Festival. He is currently an Associate Artist in Company and Practice Development with the North London based charity All Change. me@yemisiblake.co.uk <http://www.yemisiblake.co.uk>
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What is blogging?

A blog is a series of entries on a webpage, written in chronological order and usually displayed in reverse chronological order. Adding (or posting) entries is known as blogging, and the person who does this is called a blogger. Blogs allow you to easily post text, images, videos, audio and web links. Readers of a blog can also add comments on each entry. Although blogs are more commonly known personal diaries or accounts of people's lives, there are also other types of blogs such as industry and interest blogs.

How does a blog differ from a website?

A blog is a new type or form of website which uses some new and many existing features of traditional websites. However, the most classic features of a blog are:

- Content is an organised series of posts or entries
- Each post has a title and body
- Posts appear in reverse chronological order, the most recent at the top of the page
- Posts are ordered by category
- Readers can view posts by year

Why is blogging relevant for me as a writer?

Writing a blog is writing! It counts as practice. Many writers use their blog as a way of getting them started each day or just as a way to take a break from something they're working on. Much like a website, you can use your blog as a way to publish your writing online. As well as submitting to journals, and other publications, having your writing online is another way to attract attention to your work. Reading blogs other than your own can also help you as a writer. Just as each novelist has his or her own voice, the same applies with bloggers. Blogging doesn't only have to be for recounting everyday experiences. It's a place where you can make use of the literary tools you're familiar with, even mixing fact and fiction.

What's all this about using blogging as a creative space? Any examples?

Blogs are brilliant as spaces to play and explore. With the ability to post text, images, video and audio on your blog, you can try new things with your writing. Using your blog as a creative space is all about doing things you already do differently or trying something totally new. For example, you might be thinking about posting a nature poem online. Why not record yourself reading the poem and put that on your blog. Better still, you could go to your local park and record a video of your poem.

Here are some examples:

About me pages.

One of the first things you'll do as a blogger is write an 'About me' page. You could record a video instead. Sounds basic, yep. But check out Jay Bernard's first 'About me' video. It's short, snappy and it gets the message across.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d68uXkq6eAE&feature=channel_page

Themes

Choosing and following a theme on your blog can throw up many surprises and creative opportunities. During a visit to a music festival in 2005, the writer and blogger Karen McCarthy began taking pictures of people wearing t-shirts with words and slogans on them. <http://www.blaglady.com/2005/09/18/property-of-dustins-bar-mitzvah/>

What started as a simple idea for a series of blog posts developed into an idea for a poetry installation and performance project which has now been commissioned by The London Word Festival and will be featured in an event on 22 March 2009. http://www.londonwordfestival.com/?page_id=43#22

Lots to see, less to say

Sometimes we have experiences that don't leave us with many oral stories but fill our cameras with great pictures. Some of the best blog posts have little text and lots of pictures. The novelist Bernardine Evaristo has some great examples of this on her blog.

<http://bevaristo.wordpress.com/2009/02/22/arvonlumbhebden/>
<http://bevaristo.wordpress.com/2008/10/08/the-amazing-arctic/>

I'd like to read some blogs – how do I find them? Can you recommend any blogs by writers?

A search using Yahoo or Google will always bring up a good list of blogs. Google or Yahoo are good places to start. There are also search engines that specifically search blogs, such as www.technorati.com

If you want to find out whether a particular writer has a blog, you can search their name and the word blog e.g. 'Amy Tan blog'. You can also look at their main website to see if they link to a blog.

Here are some examples of blogs by writers:

Bernardine Evaristo	http://bevaristo.wordpress.com/
Karen McCarthy	http://blaglady.com/
Austin Kleon	http://www.austinkleon.com/blog/
Jay Bernard	http://brnrnd.wordpress.com/
Mark Doty	http://www.markdoty.blogspot.com/
Laila Lalami	http://lailalalami.com/blog/
Tayari Jones	http://www.tayarijones.com
Tom Chivers	http://thisisyogic.wordpress.com/

How do I set up my own blog?

Setting up a blog is very easy. The best option for those new to blogging is to use a free of charge publishing platform (blog hosting service). The two most popular with new bloggers are www.wordpress.com and www.blogger.com

How much time will it take?

The basic set up of a blog will take around 10 minutes. The time you spend on writing blog posts really depends on how much time you have to spare and want to dedicate to blogging. Some writers blog occasionally, maybe once a month or so. Other writers will blog daily. For example, you may choose to write a monthly update on your writing life or a daily entry on your favourite books. The time you spend can be as little or as much as you like.

How will a blog affect how I'm viewed professionally?

When writing on your blog, you should consider how the content will reflect on your professional reputation. Although you can restrict access to your blog, most writers choose to keep them open and accessible. Over the last few years, it has become commonplace for writers to have blogs and is often seen as a bonus, a chance to develop a readership not only of your published work but also of your thoughts and experiences.

Are there any copyright issues I need to consider?

You have full licence to use your own work as you wish. However, when quoting other writers or blogs, it's best practice to link to the article or to information about the subject.

How can I get people to read my blog?

Email – Send an email to your existing mailing or contact list, letting them know that you've started blogging and encouraging them to forward your link to friends.

Signatures & Stationary – add your blog URL to your email signature, headed paper and any other stationary you use.

Website – if you already have a website (or social networking page), you'll want to add a link to your blog.

Register – Add your blog to related search engines such as technorati.com

Word of Mouth – Tell people about it! People are most likely to visit your blog after having a conversation with you. Don't be afraid to let people know you have one.

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