**Writing for Blogs**

Andy Coverdale

There is more to blogging than writing. For one thing, blogs are becoming increasingly multi-modal - my blog includes links, tags, RSS feeds, images and video. Blogs are also powerful socio-cultural tools with strong links to biography, personal journalism and social commentary. But it is the textuality of blogging I wish to focus on here, and how blog writing conventions and practices may influence, contribute to, and distract you from your PhD study and doctoral experience.

If we are to conceptualise blogging as writing across boundaries, then these boundaries define academic communities, disciplines and literacies, and delineate pluralistic conventions such as formal and informal learning, old and new media, personal and professional practice, and private and public life.

I started my PhD blog in the first month of my doctoral studies. I'd blogged before, and I had regularly read blogs related to my field. But this is the first time I have developed a specific study-based blog.

Writing for a PhD is essentially a disciplined process. As a regular activity, blogging can hone writing skills, and keep you focused on the 'meta-narrative' of your PhD; particularly useful during periods when you may not be writing (e.g. during data collection or analysis).

No writing undertaken during a PhD should exist in isolation. Blogging allows experimentation. You can use your blog to shape ideas, formulate thoughts, concepts and work in progress, which may provide raw content for your thesis, or a journal article or conference paper. This process can work equally in reverse. I may take a topic, problem or argument from a formal written piece of work and 'blogify' it; perhaps with an emphasis on personal experience, or in a different writing style, or to a wider audience. And if you think about it, blog-length texts are prevalent in academic writing: in drafts, proposals, poster texts, abstracts and biographies - in fact anywhere where you need to summarize, or focus on a specific argument.

I would suggest blogs represent a largely risk-free environment. This does not mean you are not exposing yourself to scrutiny and critique from your peers - that's the whole point. Nor is it an excuse for sloppy writing, bad grammar or poorly constructed arguments. Blogs represent a largely risk-free environment because there is an inherent cultural bias towards informality, transparency, openness and experimentation.

Most PhD students have access to formal support structures in which they can get feedback on their writing and research from experts and peers - such as supervisions and conferences - but these are limited in both and scope and regularity. Blogs provide the opportunity to establish sustainable channels of discussion, peer support and feedback systems that extend far beyond your immediate research community and the walls of your learning institution.

Finally, blogs accumulate to represent a narrative of your doctoral experience, and as such can provide a powerful (and searchable) tool for documentation of process and reflection.

***Andy Coverdale****is a PhD Research Student at the University of Nottingham and blogs at*[*http://phdblog.net/*](http://phdblog.net/)