

Let's Blog!

Blog. You've heard the word. It topped Merriam-Webster's word-of-the-year list in 2004 and entered the Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary in 2005. It's official and here to stay. Whether you already blog or have simply thought about blogging, the questions and answers below may be of interest.

What is a blog? A blog (web log) is basically a journal that is available on the web. The activity of updating a blog is "blogging" and someone who keeps a blog is a "blogger." It's a popular way to share information and organize communities online. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and media related to its topic. As of December 2007, blog search engine *Technorati* was tracking more than 112 million blogs on the internet!

Blogs are often written by one person and updated regularly using software that allows people with little or no technical background to maintain it. Postings are usually chronological with recent additions featured most prominently. Older postings go into the archives on the blog site and are easily accessed on the sidebar. The ability for readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs. A great way to learn about blogs is to read a few. Leave some comments, ask questions and bookmark your favorites.

Are there different kinds of blogs? Many blogs provide commentary or news on a particular subject; others function as online diaries. There are blogs on virtually any topic you can think of,

from politics to photography to spirituality to recipes. Entire blogging communities have sprung up around some of these topics, allowing people to learn, share ideas, make friends and even do business with those with similar interests from around the world. Most blogs are primarily text, although some focus on art, photographs, videos, music or social networking.

Why should teachers blog?

There are a number of good reasons why teachers should blog. Blogging is an up-to-date means of sharing academic information, documents and other resources with your students and colleagues. Blogging is a means of extending classroom lessons and conversation. It can be used as a coaching tool with students and colleagues, a means of articulating or refining what might have been hazy in class, and a tool for modeling reflection and journaling with your students.

Educators do need to ensure that they blog responsibly since they can be held liable for the content. For an informative article on educators' blogging and a list of popular teacher blogs around the U.S., go to the USA Today website http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/2006-09-17-teacher-blogs_x.htm.

How do I start a blog?

1. Find a blogging provider that appeals to you. Some might include MuseCrafters.com, Livejournal.com, JournalHome.com, Blogger.com, WordPress.com, TheDiary.org, Mindsay.com, Diaryland.com, Blogdrive.com, or Xanga.com. Most sites are free and offer pre-made templates and

push-button publishing that don't require much technical know-how.

2. Decide whether or not you want your blog to be private or personal: do you want any Internet visitor or just your friends and family to be able to read it? Most blog sites offer the ability to password-protect your published posts so only those you approve can view what you've written.

3. Once you sign up, select a template and personalize it. Add your name, interests, images, etc. You can include free features like buttons, blog chinks, imoods, tagboards, guest maps, guestbooks and comment boxes to allow readers' input. Decide how you want your blog to look. You can pick a color scheme and layout. Most sites come with a set of predefined layouts and schemes that you can choose from, or edit your own.

4. After you've set up your blog, write a few posts to test it out, and make any adjustments to the layout or style that you see fit. Write about your day, your thoughts, events, ideas, fears, pleasures, the news, current affairs, art, or anything you are interested in! Remember, educators can be held accountable for postings on private blogs, too.

5. Visit other blogs to build a blogging network. When you leave comments, add your blogging address so readers can visit you. Advertise your blog by sending the URL to friends or publish the URL on your website.

(excerpted from <http://www.wikihow.com/Start-a-Blog>).

Asperger's Syndrome at a Glance

Asperger's Syndrome is a disorder characterized by poor social interactions, obsessions, odd speech and mannerisms. The syndrome is part of the spectrum of pervasive developmental disorders (PDD) and is sometimes referred to as "high-functioning autism." Children with Asperger's syndrome have difficulty with social interactions. They have the most difficulty with interpreting nonverbal cues from other people such as facial expressions and body language. Direct eye contact may be difficult. As a result, they have a hard time

forming friendships with their peers. Unlike children with other forms of PDD, those with Asperger's syndrome do not have obvious delay in language development. They often have large vocabularies that seem advanced compared to other children their age. In addition to their problems with social interactions, they have an obsessive interest in a particular subject and very little interest in much else. Learn more about this and other developmental disorders at the SETC Special Education Conference announced to the left.

Save the Date!

May 22, 2008

8:30 AM—2:45 PM

Melville Hilton

Meeting the Challenge:

Success for Special Needs Learners

For more information about this SETC-sponsored

conference, go to

www.seteachercenter.org

Teacher Resiliency

When one feels strong, creative, and confident, one has the energy to deal with whatever classroom problems arise. But around this time of year, the challenges and demands one faces in the classroom can take their toll on any teacher. Just in time, here are some tips from the February issue of Performance Learning System's newsletter to manage stress and improve resiliency. More information can be found at www.plsweb.com/enews.

Strategy No. 1: Plan, Prioritize, Organize and Simplify

— *Plan*: Managing your time is really about managing your energy. The key is to gain more control of both by learning to plan appropriately. Set realistic goals. Rather than thinking, "I will grade 25 papers tonight," grade five per night over five nights. Setting and meeting small, attainable goals is often more successful and less stressful than setting one big goal.

— *Prioritize*: An essential part of reducing stress is learning to set and maintain priorities. If it is helpful, you could: make a "to do" list; purchase a personal organizer; learn to say "no"; avoid procrastinating.

— *Organize and Simplify*: You can improve the quality of your life by organizing and simplifying such areas as your lifestyle, personal time, shopping, work, finances, and health. For example, could you track your finances and pay your bills on the Internet to save time? Is it critical that you bake six different types of cookies for the school bakeoff?

Strategy No. 2: Relax. Relaxation is a powerful antidote to stress. Relaxing is not always as easy as it may seem. You may have to learn to give yourself permission to relax and just be. The following activities have proven to be effective for deep relaxation.

— *Meditation*: Meditation relaxes your mind and body. It can lower blood pressure, heart rate, breathing rate, and adrenaline levels. Even if you can find only a few minutes between classes or before school, meditation can provide a benefit.

— *Deep Breathing*: When you are under stress, your breathing becomes more shallow and rapid. Therapeutic breathing is one of the easiest, most effective, and most cost-efficient means of reducing stress anywhere, anytime. Practicing slow, deep breathing techniques can help promote a sense of well-being.

— *Physical Relaxation*: The purpose of physical relaxation is to increase your awareness of being in your body rather than focusing on the external distractions of everyday life. Through heightened body awareness, you can gain a sense of relaxation.

— *Guided Imagery*: Guided imagery, sometimes called "visualization," was pioneered by French psychiatrist and philosopher Pierre Janet in the 1890s. It developed from the discovery that a person's imagination can affect his or her inner state of being. Certain images stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system to experience feelings of calm and well-being.

Strategy No. 3: Get Support. In times of stress, support is a necessity. Many individuals do not realize how important it is to have someone with whom they can share their emotions and inner reality. The inability to express emotions in healthy ways is directly linked to a rise in stress levels. It is also linked to an increased incidence of certain diseases, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, and cancer. Having a support network can play a valuable role in the process of learning to release emotions in a positive way.

— *Support Systems*: No one should have to cope with stress alone all the time. Create a strong support network for yourself and draw comfort from it in times of stress. Support systems include healing professionals, friends, family, support groups, pets, and hobbies.

— *Peer Coaching*: Peer coaching involves a collaboration between a teacher and a respected colleague. The process of peer coaching enhances the development of teacher performance and job satisfaction. It also creates valuable opportunities for teachers to be favorably recognized—for both their accomplishments and their perseverance.

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