

# Teaching Tips

A Forum for discussion and tips for advancing teaching and learning at Mona

Instructional Development  
Unit UWI, Mona



## Special points of interest:

- The **Teaching Tips Newsletter** is a publication of the Instructional Development Unit (IDU) at the UWI, Mona.
- The Newsletter is published once per month and provides tips for improving teaching and learning in higher education. It is available online (<http://myspot.mona.uwi.edu/idu/>) as well as in the office of the IDU.
- If you have an area that you would like to explore using this medium, do not hesitate to contact us at the IDU.

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## Whither Academic Writing?

Exploring the use of the Blog in the  
UWI Classroom



In some academic circles there has been a debate about academic writing and this has given rise to new terminology for instance “old literacy” - a reference to the more traditional forms of discourse and training and “new literacy”- often-times used to describe media in current use including the blog, twitter, Facebook and multimedia presentations with PowerPoint and the audio essay.

Blogs have great potential as we seek to innovate and collaborate in our classroom learning experiences. They can be used in several ways as we seek to improve learning. These include:

- ◆ Individual posts that highlight personal contribution to a conversation.
- ◆ Individual posts that call for definite interaction and participation.
- ◆ Individual posts that are done after serious reflection on issues.
- ◆ Posts that can be used to demonstrate over time the growth in a student’s writing development.
- ◆ Posts that offer the student an opportunity to voice his or her own opinion and in time come to terms with one’s own voice.
- ◆ Posts that push students to utilize their creative faculties.

## What Kind of Writing Assignments Do You Set Your Students?

### Traditional essays? Term papers?

In recent times some educators have been experimenting with the use of new media. The blog for some is the way to go. It provides a public platform for discourse. In some classrooms at universities abroad, students are asked to publish a 500 - 1500 word entry to an internal class blog instead of presenting a term paper. The use of a blog for academic writing might be one way to transform the UWI classroom.

### Evaluating



If you decide to use a blog as part of your course, you may want to find ways to evaluate student participation and learning. For the blog to become a teaching and learning tool, evaluation of the process and the end product must become part of the course requirements. Many students already know how to use blogs for social computing. This might help them to appreciate blogging for academic purposes but it is not a done deal. You will need to sell the idea and prepare the students. You will also want your students to take from your course an understanding of how a blog can be used in their careers.

Determining and creating the evaluation instrument for the class blog begins BEFORE you create the blog. This will help you develop your expectations for the students and will provide a clear look at how you will manage the evaluation. Management is the key word here. The number of students you will be evaluating will help you to determine the blog requirements.



facebook

## Important Questions when Developing Your Blog



The following questions should be reviewed and answered as you think about developing your blog:

- ◆ What is the rationale for choosing a blog for this course?
- ◆ What free blog service will I use? (Perhaps you will want to use the blog available through MITS/ OurVLE. You might also ask colleagues who are already using free blog services to recommend one, or search the Internet for more information.)
- ◆ Will each student set up their own blog or will the class have one blog that everyone has access to?
- ◆ Will the blog(s) be private or public?
- ◆ Who will add posts?
  - How many posts will be required per student?
  - What are the criteria for language usage? (Will you insist on Standard English? Will students be allowed to use Jamaican and texting “language”?)
  - Should all posts raise issues and questions relevant to the course?
- ◆ Who is responsible for comments?
  - How many comments will be required per student?
  - Should the entries posted demonstrate reflective engagement on, and with the posts?
  - Should the entries convey knowledge obtained through the readings?
  - Do entries show reflection and understanding of the topic?

## Using Games in the UWI Classroom



Games might be used in the classroom to promote interaction and participation. You might also want an activity in a lecture so consider using games to promote learning in your classroom. Download games for use in your class from the internet. The following links are helpful:

<http://jc-schools.net/tutorials/ppt-games/>  
<http://www.point4teachers.com/>

### Games offer multiple benefits:

- ◆ Creates opportunities for active learning.
- ◆ Assists in recall/ memorization.
- ◆ Fosters more positive attitudes towards classroom activities – might help students to pay more attention.
- ◆ Encourages analysis, evaluation, synthesis and generally creative abilities.
- ◆ Motivates learning .
- ◆ Enables a common experience to be shared among students.
- ◆ Improves retention, decision making and comprehension skills.
- ◆ Encourages cooperation.
- ◆ Provides intrinsic rewards.

### Consider the following when Using Games in the Classroom:

- ◆ Provide learning outcomes for the class.
- ◆ Ensure that the games offer challenge that will keep the class engaged.
- ◆ Use games that will help students achieve success and provide positive reinforcement.
- ◆ Select games that will tap into students knowledge store and not mere luck.
- ◆ Decide to use cooperative teams sometimes.
- ◆ Create opportunities for debriefing after the games session.
- ◆ Offer students the chance of generating questions and receiving feedback from peers and facilitator.

### Check out our publications at

[myspot.mona.uwi.edu/idu/publications](http://myspot.mona.uwi.edu/idu/publications)

which features our monthly *Teaching Tips*,  
Newsletters and Assessment Handbook.

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