

How to Write for an Academic Blog

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*Blogs are increasingly relevant to researchers and, for those starting out in contributing to them, it can be useful to reflect on the differences with other outputs, writes **Anthony Salamone**. He sets out some suggestions on how to approach writing for an academic blog, including how to gain the most from the experience.*

As academia becomes ever more integrated into the digital environment, researchers will increasingly benefit from the ability to write for different formats. Academic blogs in particular have grown to become one of the mainstays for analysis, commentary and the exchange of ideas in many fields of study. If you are new to writing for blogs, it can be worthwhile considering how the medium varies from others (especially from longer 'standard' academic texts) and how to make the most of a blog contribution.

In the first instance, it is important to keep in mind that academic blogs can be diverse in terms of their purpose, style and audience. When writing for (or reading) a blog, these factors should inform the approach that you take. Generally speaking, however, academic blogs are defined by relatively short written contributions and an open audience which can range from academics to practitioners to interested members of the public. For university blogs, at least, most are run by editors and have their own contribution guidelines, publication policies and editorial structures.

The normal length of an article can range from around 500 – 2000 words. Particularly for pieces on the more concise end of the scale, this brevity requires that you prioritise the key points that you want to make, along with any relevant evidence. It follows then that you must have a clear sense of what you want to communicate, and that you keep to it – the limitations leave little room for tangents (however interesting). If you are unsure of how to organise your ideas for this format, figure out what single takeaway you would want someone to leave with after reading your article, and make certain that the piece as a whole reflects that message.

Adapting to this form applies not only to your ideas, but also to your writing. Contributions are most often effective with shorter, concise sentences and smaller paragraphs. Moreover, a blog piece does not require substantial signposting. Broadly speaking, this sentence and paragraph structure is somewhere between that of a newspaper and an academic journal. Regardless of whether this philosophy is preferred by a particular blog, it is to your benefit to become familiar with writing in this style and to employ it in blog contributions.

The way in which you approach referencing is another component to consider. In general, the preferred form of citation is an [in-text hyperlink](#) (as shown here). Since blogs are

webpages, footnotes are not possible – equally, many platforms either discourage or will not publish endnotes. Substantive points need to be incorporated into your article itself. References should only be represented by the hyperlink or with minimal in-text citations as an indicative guide, since most platforms will not publish lists of references at the end. In this sense, think of your contribution more as a column in a newspaper or magazine. Certain sites do allow endnotes and references, but they are exceptions – and it is beneficial to develop the skill of working without them.

When writing a contribution, the title is of course an important consideration. Craft a title which is short (it should fit on one line) and explanatory (it should make clear either your main argument or the principal question you address). Some platforms use descriptive titles – a short sentence which summarises your article. It is also relevant to keep in mind the likely readership of a particular blog. If your article will be read by a broad audience, technical concepts should be made accessible. If your contribution will be read by colleagues or those with requisite knowledge, avoid explaining basic parameters and concentrate on your arguments.

With these points of form and style in mind, attention turns to the content of your contribution and how to maximise its value to you. Overall, blog articles can be divided into two main categories – analysis/comment and research/exchange. Analysis pieces offer informed discussion and commentary on aspects of current affairs in general or contemporary issues in the field of study. As with any academic endeavour, it is advisable to focus contributions on your expertise – your areas of research, study and experience.

Writing about research in a blog can be a worry for some – particularly if work has yet to be published in a journal or book. However, it is perfectly possible to write about your research in a constructive way. Before publication, you can use blog contributions to preview your work, setting out some of the background ideas of your research. After publication, blog pieces can enable you to increase the impact of your research by distributing it to a wider audience (including through links to full publications). Additionally, when you give a talk or speak at an event, translating your remarks into a blog can be a convenient way of sharing them further in written form.

In terms of where to submit a contribution, consider which blog platforms might suit the objectives you are looking to achieve, in terms of likely readership, possible feedback or discussion, or increased recognition within a particular community. Before sending your article to a blog, take the time to read its style guide and look through some of its recent articles, to ensure that your submission fits that style. For instance, if all the articles on a blog include a summary at the start, write one yourself in the same format. While your contribution will be evaluated on the basis of its arguments and how well they are communicated, ensuring that your article meets all the stylistic standards can expedite publication.

Instead of submitting a piece directly to a blog, you can also contact the editors first to make sure that your proposal sounds relevant to them. This feedback can enable you to tailor your contribution as needed, and to check, for instance, that you are not submitting

something on a topic for which they already have material to publish. You might also be able to agree delivery and/or publication times, which can be useful for planning. Once you have submitted a contribution and it has been accepted, expect to receive suggested edits, which you will have to work through with the editors.

After your article has been published, take the time to publicise and record your work, from sharing it on social media, to including it on your online researcher profile, to telling your department/institute so it can be included in the next newsletter. Many blogs publish with Creative Commons licenses, which allow material to be freely republished on the same terms, so it might be the case that your article is reposted elsewhere. Blogs also commission contributions, particularly from previous authors, which can bring further opportunities to you.

Academic blogs are an important vehicle for sharing your research with and offering your analysis to colleagues and the wider world. While blogs remain largely supplementary to other forms of academic writing, their shorter format, potential reach and faster publication times make them an important part of contemporary research life.

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