



***Blogs: Benefits,
Risks, and
Exposures***

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Overview

- The weblog can be a powerful tool for reflection, communication, and community building.
- However, blog authors must become aware of the potential risks to which they expose themselves by blogging

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What's a blog?

- Web-based publication of periodic articles, usually in reverse chronological order (Wikipedia)
- Often subject-based or in diary form
- Typically combine text and graphics, with links to other materials
- Easy web publishing without needing to know much HTML

Blogs vs. Wikis

- Blogs generally have a topical element and a single author (but not always)
- Wikis are designed to be easy to use collaboration spaces for storage of shared material.
- Blogs are more like journals; Wikis are shared reference sites

What's so great about blogs?

- Tool for personal reflection
- Citizen journalism
- Forum for publishing your views or expertise
- Reader feedback

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Blogging seminar

- Taught a freshman seminar on blogging, Fall 05 (to be repeated Fall 06)
- 5/7 freshmen already had blogs (MySpace, Xanga, etc.)
- Also set up private, class-only blogs via IS&T Blog Service

Seminar topics: Personal Reflection

- MIT Admissions blogs - What MIT is really like for students
- Dooce.com - irreverent diary of a woman coping with unemployment, post-partum depression, parenting, and religion
- Drivetime - video blog of commute from JP - Allston

Seminar topics: Citizen Journalism

- London bombing survivors
- Katrina/Rita witnesses and journalists
- Gush Katif and Gaza settlers

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Seminar topics: Cool stuff

- One person's amalgamation of interesting things
- Notmartha.org
- Kottke.org
- Boingboing.net
- DailyCandy

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Seminar topics: project blogs

- Numb3rs blog from Northeastern
- The Blue Blog for knitting (Alison Hansel guest lectured too)
- The Julie/Julia Project

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Seminar topics: productivity and tech blogs

- [Lifehacker.com](#)
- [43folders.com](#)
- [Frappr](#)
- [Del.icio.us](#)

- [Technorati.com](#)
- [Digg.com](#)
- [Bloglines](#)



Blogging and risk avoidance

- Services are advertising to high school and younger audiences who are not savvy about personal security: MySpace, AOL, Xanga, Facebook
- Blogs give an appearance of anonymity while allowing for human connection via commenting
- Blogs (and web pages, and Usenet postings) are a permanent record

Personal security

- Posting personal info: names, birthdays, towns, team names, phone numbers, dorms, etc.
- Harassment and bullying via blog postings; libel suits stemming from blogs
- Others can reuse your info: eg. Flickr photos

Blogging and anonymity

- They only seem anonymous
- Identities of bloggers can be traced
- Police departments now look for blogs, Yahoo group postings, etc. when investigating crimes (recent cases in high schools north of Boston)
- High schools beginning to have blogging policies for students

Your permanent record

- Even if you delete your blog, a part or entire copy is probably archived somewhere (eg. your 1992 Usenet postings)
- Companies now routinely do online searches on prospective employees and may bar (and fire over) work-related blogging (NYT 7/17/05, Dooce)
- Reporters will search online backgrounds of future political candidates

Blogging seminar: student work

- After formal part of class, students reflected on previous week and created blog entries
- Required some guidance on how to do this
- Structured end-of-term blog assignments

Using blogs in classes or teams

- For “assigned” blogging, people need guidelines
- Comment often, but judiciously
- People reveal things in blogs that they may not in person
- Blogging can help you know team members better than face to face interactions
- Students will be familiar with blogging when they get to MIT; faculty and staff must use that to their advantage

To blog, or not to blog?

- Can you live with the lack of anonymity? If not, run a private blog server or use a paper journal, MacJournal or Word.
- Be aware that your work may spread far wider than its intended audience
- Use caution when giving identifiable details of your daily life