



Designing your module website using blogs

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About the Workshop

Blogs, the most common type of web service, are online personal journals with reflections, comments, and hyperlinks selected by the creator. Blogs encourage reflective writing, strengthen class community breaking down barriers among faculty and students, and enhance online discussions.

This hands-on workshop will explain in detail the how-to of designing a module website using a blog and will also showcase some successful blogs that are currently in use.

Workshop Objectives

By the end of this workshop, participants should be able to:

1. Understand the structure of a blog
2. Design a module website
3. Use blogs to collaborate with students
4. Reflect on the good practices of blogs for teaching and learning

Session Prerequisites

Participants are expected to create a Blog account prior to attending the workshop: <http://blog.nus.edu.sg>. It would also be good for participants to have basic formatting and internet surfing skills.

Course Outline

Overview

Structure, Comparisons, and Examples

Credible Blogging for Beginners, a Concise Guide

Summary

Q&A

What is Blog.NUS?

Blog.NUS is a blog platform for academic, educational, research and administrative use in the National University of Singapore. This is a useful tool when you want to write your personal learning or reflection, and can be an alternative venue to conduct module or tutorials, developing a department news blog, or posting an event.

Setting Up a Blog Account

1. In your browser, type <http://blog.nus.edu.sg>, and click **Create a Blog or user account**.



2. Enter a **username**. A username is a name to be used as your NUS blog address. For example if you enter your name, your blog address will be set to <http://blog.nus.edu.sg/username>. It is suggested that you put in a unique name such as your NUSNET user ID.
3. Enter your **NUS email address**. Once your blog account is generated, username and password will be sent to this email address. It is suggested that you use your NUS email address.
4. Read the terms and conditions and click on the box below **I agree**.
5. If you intend to create a blog space, choose **Gimme a Site**. If you only want to participate in a blog, choose **Just a username, please**.
6. Click **Next**.

7. Check your email account. You will receive an email with an activation link.

Activating your Blog Account

Once you have received an email notification, you can start writing your blog. However, please note that if you do not activate your account within two days, it will become invalid. This means that you will have to make another request from CIT.

1. Check the email confirmation to activate your blog account.



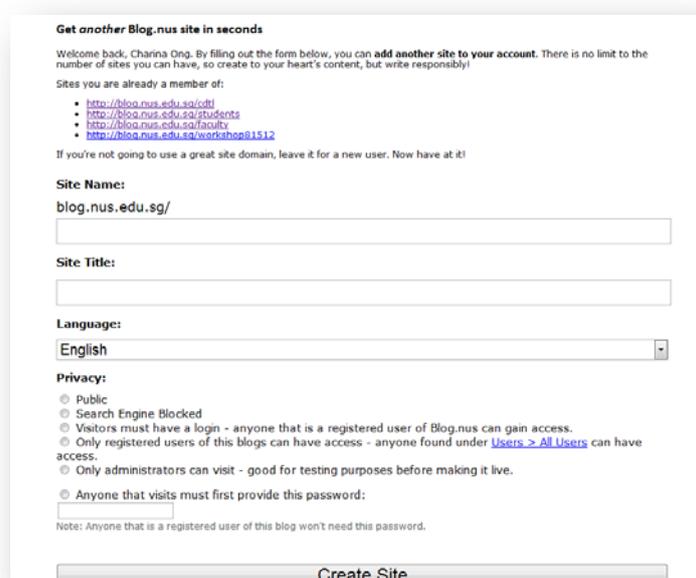
2. In case you did not receive any email notification, double check the Spam folder of your Outlook account.

Adding a Blog to your Existing Account

Blog.NUS allows you to add and maintain as many blogs as you want. You can create one for your class and add another one for personal use with your existing account. When you enter the system, a list of all blogs under your account is displayed.

To add a new blog to your existing account:

1. Login to your own blog.
2. Open a new tab and type <http://blog.nus.edu.sg/wp-signup.php> in the address bar.
3. Click **Create a blog**.
4. Type a **Blog name** and **title** of your new blog.
5. Choose your preferred language from the list.
6. Specify if you want your blog to appear in search engines.
7. Click **Create Blog**. A message will display on screen that you have successfully created your blog. Click the link to access your new blog.



Get another Blog.nus site in seconds

Welcome back, Charina Ong. By filling out the form below, you can **add another site to your account**. There is no limit to the number of sites you can have, so create to your heart's content, but write responsibly!

Sites you are already a member of:

- <http://blog.nus.edu.sg/cdt/>
- <http://blog.nus.edu.sg/students>
- <http://blog.nus.edu.sg/faculty>
- <http://blog.nus.edu.sg/workshop@1512>

If you're not going to use a great site domain, leave it for a new user. Now have at it!

Site Name:
blog.nus.edu.sg/

Site Title:

Language:
English

Privacy:

- Public
- Search Engine Blocked
- Visitors must have a login - anyone that is a registered user of Blog.nus can gain access.
- Only registered users of this blogs can have access - anyone found under [Users > All Users](#) can have access.
- Only administrators can visit - good for testing purposes before making it live.
- Anyone that visits must first provide this password:

Note: Anyone that is a registered user of this blog won't need this password.

Create Site

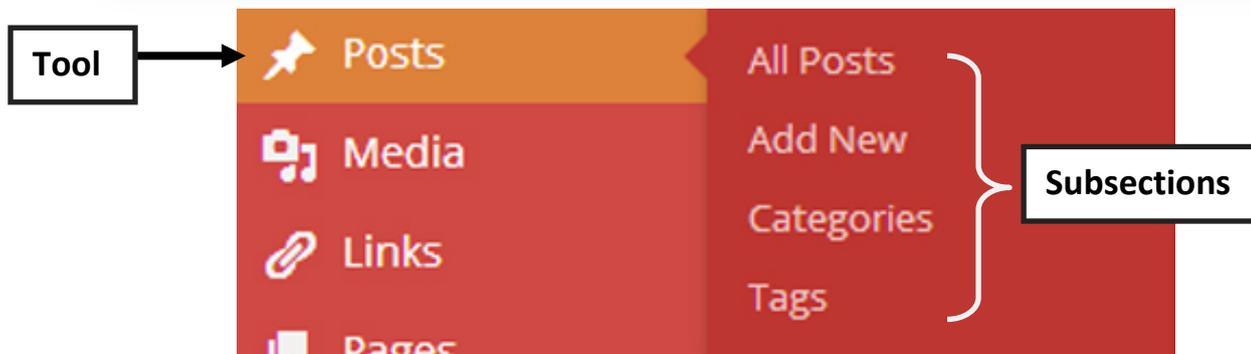
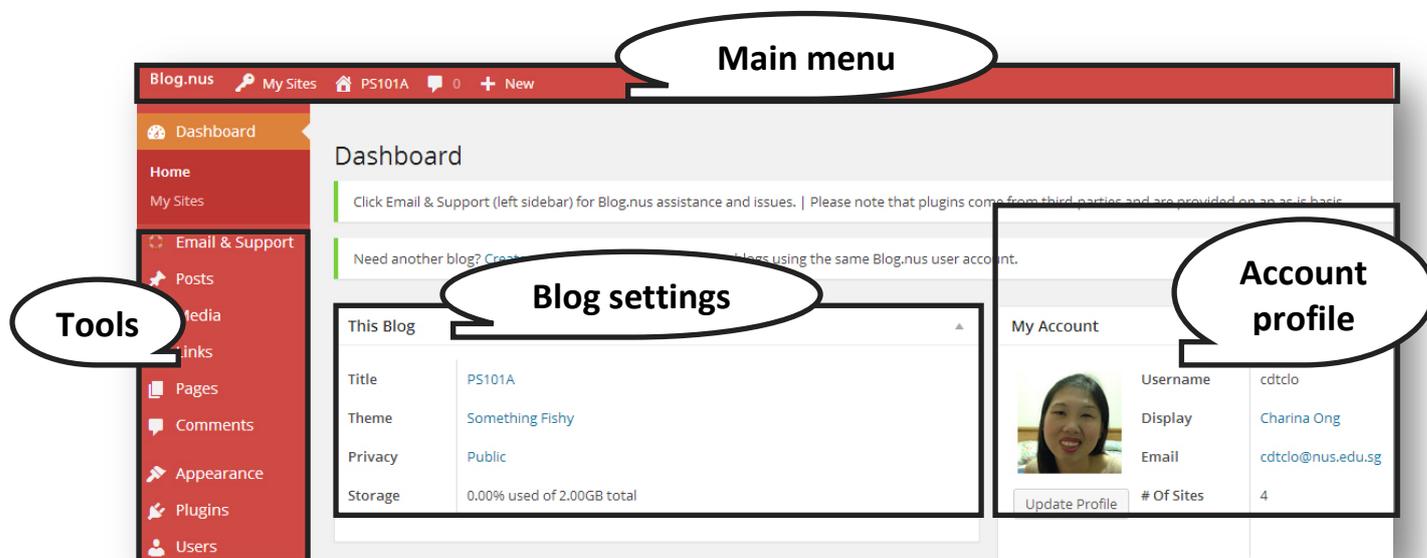
Admin Panel vs. User Interface

A blog has two types of interface. As a blog owner, you want to manipulate what you can do with your blog such as writing the content users will see, approve comments to be posted in your blog, etc. All these things can be done using the **Dashboard**. On the other hand, when a user enters your blog address in the browser, elements that will display on screen refers to the **user interface**.

Dashboard/Administration Panel

The Dashboard or the administration panel is the brain behind your website. It provides access to the control features of your blog. It has four parts:

- The top navigation shows the main menu which displays the blog sites that belongs to you, the link to your blog, shortcut to create post or page.
- The left navigation shows the tools to create the content of your blog and its settings. Each tool contains a pull down menu that expands to see the subsections.
- The middle section shows a summary of your blog settings such as the title, privacy, theme, etc.
- The right section shows your account profile such as the information about the lecturer. This is also the section where you can change the default password.

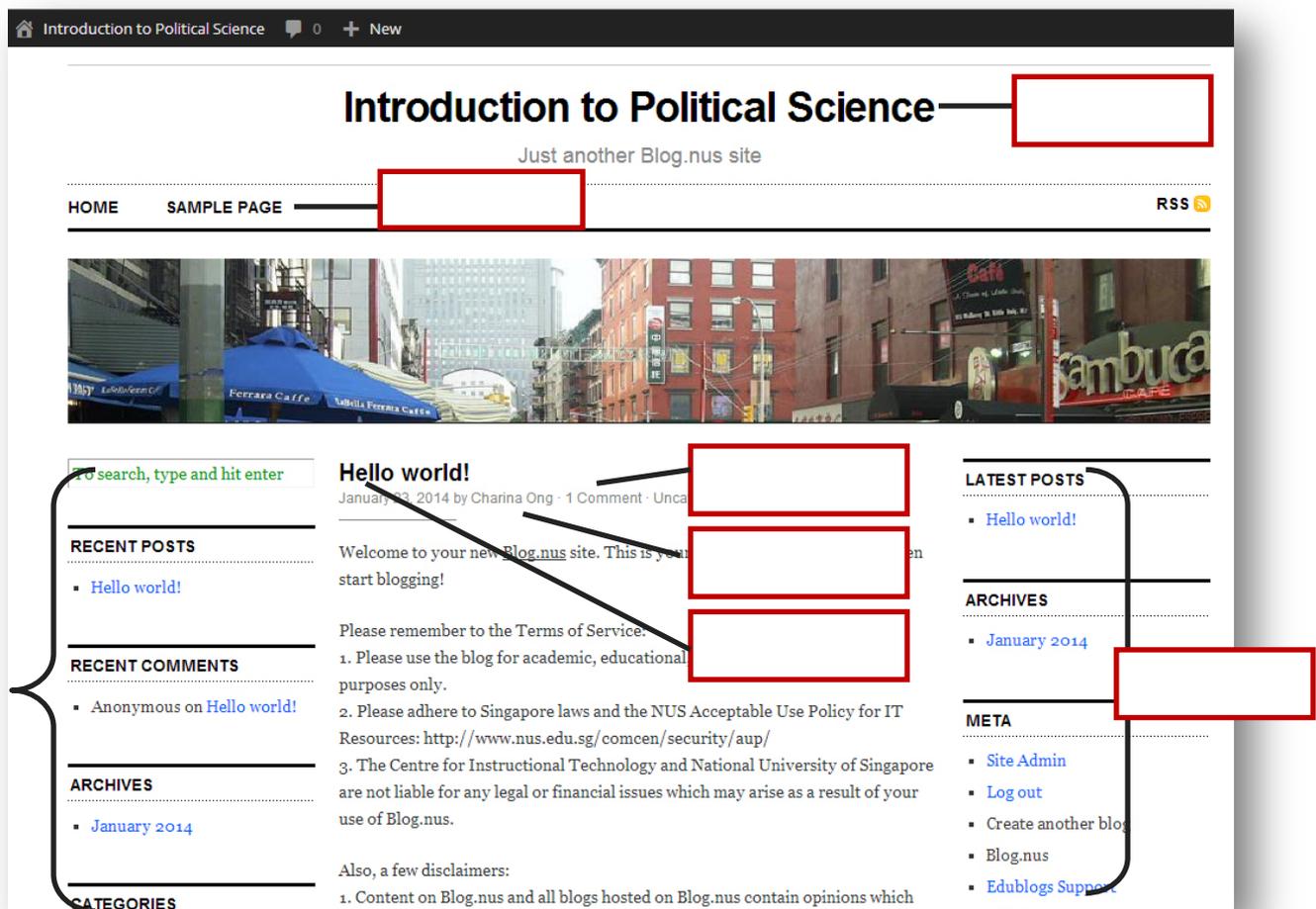


User Interface (Students' view)

To check how your blog looks like, click the **Visit Site** button. Use this button every time you want to see changes that have been made to your blog.



Parts of a Blog



A blog is composed of major parts like the **header** which contains the title of your blog; the middle part where **posts and comments** are displayed; the left and right **sidebars** which contain important links; and the **footer**.

A post can display text, links, images and videos. Information below each post is called the **post meta data**. It contains the date and time the post was made, the author, and the categories that the post belongs to.

The sidebar contains different sections with information. Among these you may find a list of Pages, Links/Blogroll, Categories, Archives, Calendar, Tags, etc. This is part of the navigation panel that people will use to move around your site, visiting posts from different categories or time periods.

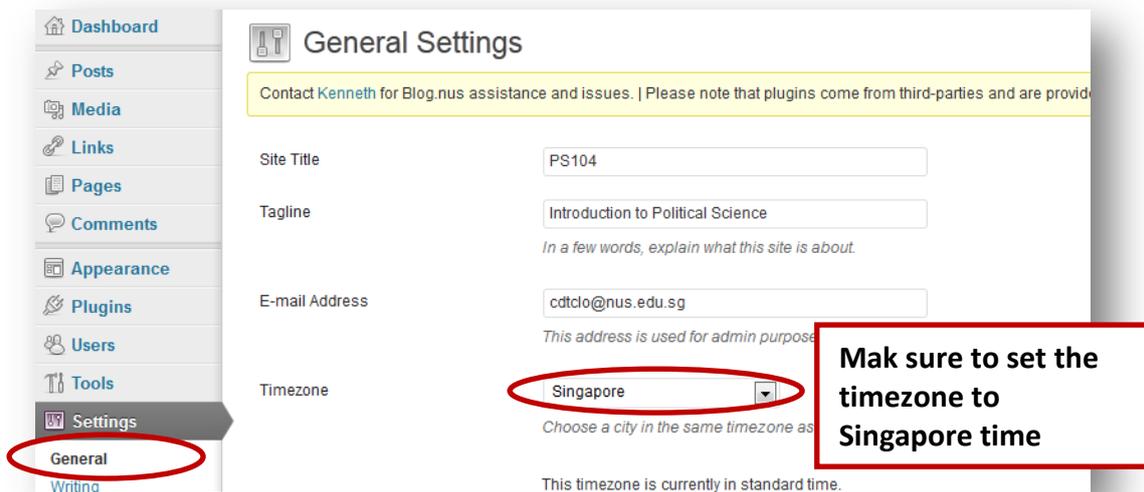
Configuring Blog Settings

The entire configuration of your blog is handled through the **Settings** menu. This can be accessed using the **Settings** tab in the left navigation.

General

The General Settings allow you to edit the title, contact email, time zone, date and time format, language preferences, etc.

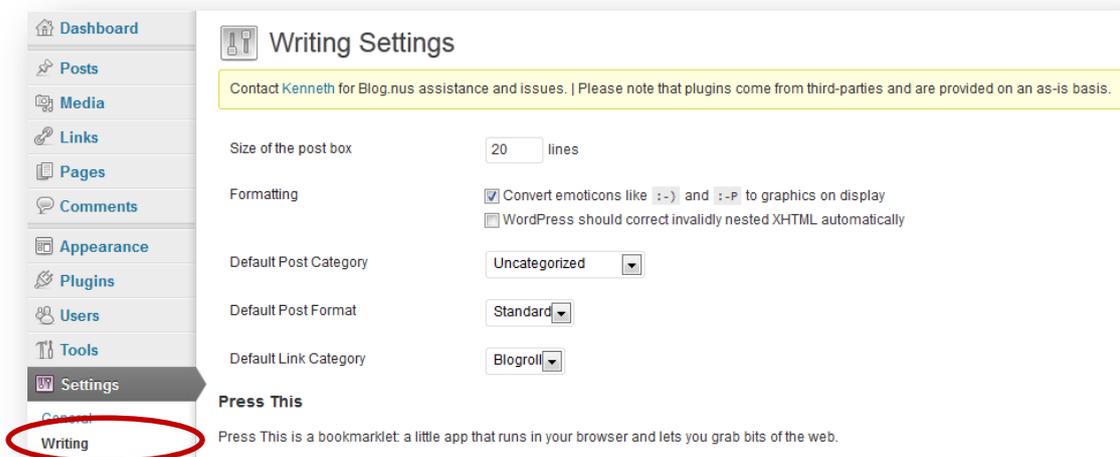
1. From the **Dashboard**, click **Settings**> **General**.
2. Make necessary changes and click **Save Changes**.



Writing

The Writing settings allow you to specify the size of your post box, formatting, the default link category, etc.

1. From the **Dashboard**, click **Settings**> **Writing**.
2. Make necessary changes and click **Save Changes**.



Reading

The Reading settings allow you to specify the number of posts to display, whether the post will display in full text or just a summary, etc.

1. From the **Dashboard**, click **Settings> Reading**.
2. Make necessary changes and click **Save Changes**.

Front page displays

Your latest posts

A [static page](#) (select below)

Front page:

Posts page:

Blog pages show at most: posts

Syndication feeds show the most recent: items

For each article in a feed, show

Full text

Summary

Site Visibility

Allow search engines to index this site

Discourage search engines from indexing this site

Note: Neither of these options blocks access to your site — it is up to search engines to honor the robots.txt file.

Visitors must have a login - anyone that is a registered user of Blog.nus can gain access

Only registered users of this blogs can have access - anyone found under [Users >](#)

Only administrators can visit - good for testing purposes before making it live.

Anyone that visits must first provide this password:

Note: Anyone that is a registered user of this blog won't need this password.

Default page to display: Post or page?

Site visibility settings: Open to all or just your students?

Full text

Discussion

The Discussion settings allow you to specify whether the discussion can be available to the public; if you want to be notified there is a new post; if you want comments to be automatically displayed, etc.

1. From the **Dashboard**, click **Settings> Discussion**.
2. Make necessary changes and click **Save Changes**.

Kenneth.' Below the banner are two sections: 'Default article settings' and 'Other comment settings'. A red box highlights the 'Other comment settings' section, specifically the 'Break comments into pages with 50 comments per page and older comments at the top' checkbox."/>

Discussion Settings

Questions about Blog.nus? Please contact [Kenneth](#).

Default article settings

Attempt to notify any blogs linked to from the article (slows down posting.)

Allow link notifications from other blogs (pingbacks and trackbacks.)

Allow people to post comments on the article

(These settings may be overridden for individual articles.)

Other comment settings

Comment author must fill out name and e-mail

Users must be registered and logged in to comment

Automatically close comments on articles older than days

Enable threaded (nested) comments levels deep

Break comments into pages with comments per page and comments at the top

Good to have if you want students to do peer review

Editing your Profile

This allows you to set the dashboard's color scheme, name and contact information to display, as well as telling the system how to display your name next to your posts.

To edit your profile:

1. From the **Dashboard**, click **Users>Your Profile**.
2. Under **Personal Options**, choose a color scheme to be used.
3. Enter details such as your **name, contact information, and biographical information**.
4. Enter a new password if you intend to change the default password provided during the initial setup.
5. Click **Update Profile**.

Personal Options

Visual Editor Disable the visual editor when writing

Admin Color Scheme

Default Light Blue

Ectoplasm Midnight Ocean

Keyboard Shortcuts Enable keyboard shortcuts for comment moderation. [More information](#)

Tips

Show Tips

Name

Username

First Name

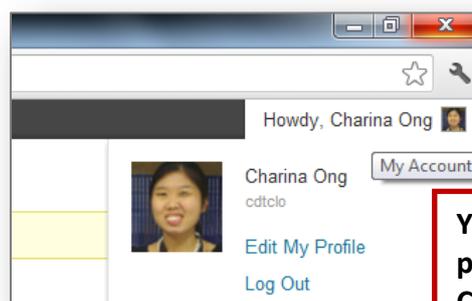
Last Name

Nickname (required)

The display name option depends on the first and last name you entered

To upload or change your picture/ display avatar:

1. From the **Dashboard**, click **Users> Your Avatar**.
2. Click the **Choose file** button.
3. Select the image to display and click **Open**.
4. Click **Upload**.
5. Make a selection to the image and then click **Crop image**.
6. Place your mouse over the top right portion of the screen to see your new avatar.



Publishing Content

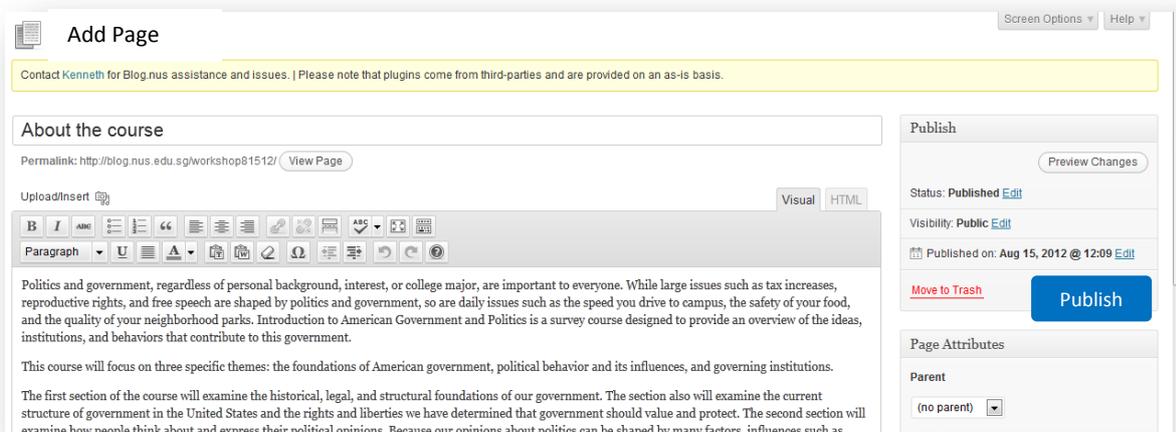
A blog refers to an entry that one posts. Usually the blogger is in control of the discussion, but allows questions and comments from the audience. Content can be constantly updated and can be assigned as categories and tags. It is displayed in reverse chronological order. This means the recent post is always displayed on top.

Creating a Page

Pages contain information that never change and are not dated or have time stamps like your blog posts. Pages are great for providing information that will not require users to comment.

To create a page:

1. From the **Dashboard**, click **Pages> Add New**.
2. Add a page title.
3. Type the content of the page in the box provided.
4. Modify the font properties using the **Formatting toolbar**.
5. Specify if you allow users to comment on the page.
6. Set the status of the page either as a draft or a public document and click **Publish**.



Managing Pages

To edit an existing page:

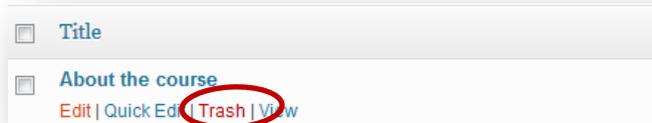
1. From the **Dashboard**, click **Post> All Pages**.
2. Hover to the title of the page, and click **Edit**.



3. Make necessary changes and click **Update**.
4. Refresh your browser to see the changes by pressing **F5** key.

To delete a page:

1. Hover to the title of the page, and click **Trash**.



Tip: To delete multiple pages, select the page titles. From the **Bulk actions** menu, choose **Move to trash** and click **Apply**.

Creating Reference Links

Lecturers can include resources that students may find useful in understanding the lesson. When you add links in your blog, it automatically creates a list of links under the Blogroll (blog's sidebar).

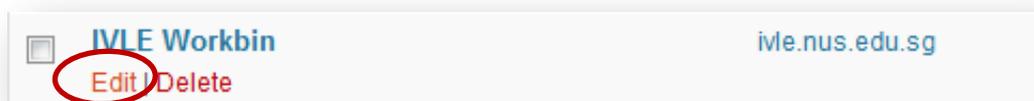
To add a reference link:

1. From the **Dashboard**, click **Links > Add New**. The links page options displays on screen.
2. Type a title in the **Name** box.
3. Type the complete address in the **Web Address** box. Be sure to include **http://**.
4. Enter a short description about the reference link in the **Description** box.
5. Specify a category the reference in which links should display. The default category is set to Blogroll. You may add your own category.
6. In the **Target** section, specify whether the link will be opened in the same page or a new window.
7. Click **Add Link**.

Managing Reference Links

To edit an existing link:

1. From the **Dashboard**, click **Links > All Links**.
2. Select the title of the link, and click **Edit**.



3. Make necessary changes and click **Update Link**.
4. Refresh your browser to see the changes by pressing **F5** key.

To delete a link:

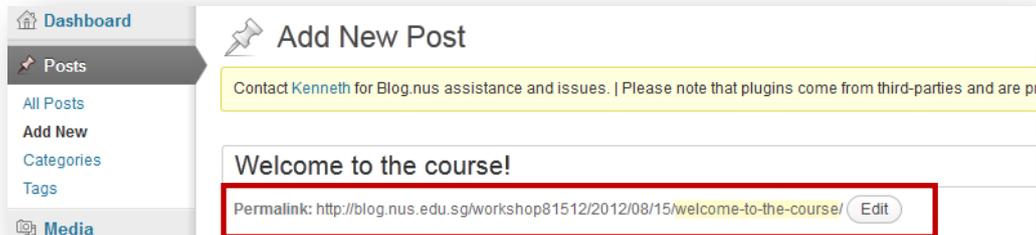
1. Hover to the title of the link, and click **Delete**.



Tip: To delete multiple links, select the link title. From the **Bulk actions** menu, choose **Delete** and click **Apply**.

Writing a Post

1. From the **Dashboard**, click **Post > Add New**.
2. Type in a good descriptive heading in the **Title** box. The title of your post can be part of the permanent link.



Tip: The permanent link allows you to access specific blog post.

3. Write the main content in the space provided. Use the formatting toolbar to change the text style or font properties.



4. In the **Discussion** section, specify if you allow users to comment.
5. Enter keywords in the **Tags** and click **Add**. These keywords can be useful when the users are searching for specific topics in your blog.
6. Choose a category for this post. The default category is set to Uncategorized. You can also add a new category name to organize your posts by topic or month. (Announcements, Assignments, Projects, Additional Resources, etc.)
7. Set the **Publish** status either as a **Draft** or **Public Document**. You can also set the date and time when you want the post to be published.
8. When you are ready to share your post, click **Publish**.



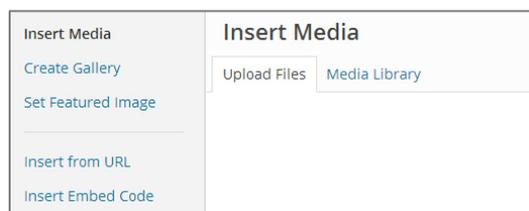
Tip: You can quickly add a new post/page, write a draft or upload media using the quick link located at the top bar, beside the title of your blog.

Insert Media

You can add media to your post such as image, video, audio, or flash animation. Files can be taken from your computer, an external source, or the system's media library.

Inserting Image/Audio/Flash Animation/Other documents:

1. Click **Add media**.
2. Specify the media source. The file can be uploaded from your **local computer**, **URL**, **Gallery**, or **media library**. Assuming that the file will be taken your local computer, click **Select Files** to locate the file.



3. Enter details such as **Image Title**, **Caption**, and **Description**. The caption will be used as an alternative text in case the image doesn't load properly.
4. Set the alignment of the image. Choose either **none**, **left**, **center** or **right**.
5. Specify the display **size** of the image to either **thumbnail**, **medium**, or **full size**.
6. Click **Insert into Post**.
7. When you are back to the post page, click **Update Post**.

Embedding Video

Videos can be large in size depending on the duration. One of our concerns as educators is how to make these videos accessible to our students. Having your own web hosting to store videos can be a solution, but if the file is already available online, such as in Youtube, it might be easier to embed this video to your blog. This way, you do not need to duplicate the available resources. It is also a good practice to cite the online videos you use for your class to avoid copyright issues.

To embed a video to your blog:

1. Search for a video in Youtube that you want to your students.
2. Click the **Share** button.
3. Copy the URL of the video by pressing **CTRL + C**.



4. Add a new post or edit an existing post.
5. Type a title and some instructions on what you want the students to do after watching the video.
6. Paste the URL in the space provided by pressing **CTRL + V**.
7. Enter keywords in the **Tags** and click **Add**. This feature is helpful when a user is searching for keywords within your blog.
8. Click **Publish**.
9. Preview the video by clicking **Visit Page** button.

Managing your Posts

To edit an existing post:

1. From the **Dashboard**, click **Post > All Posts**.
2. Hover to the title of the post, and click **Edit**.



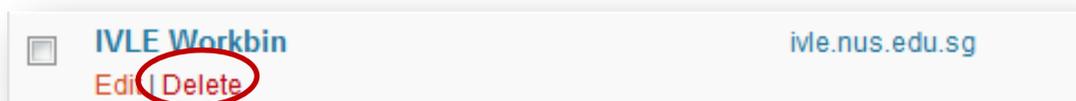
3. Make necessary changes and click **Update**.
4. Refresh your browser to see the changes by pressing **F5** key.

To delete a post:

1. Hover to the title of the post, and click **Trash**.



Tip: To delete multiple posts, select the post titles. From the **Bulk actions** menu, choose **Move to trash** and click **Apply**.

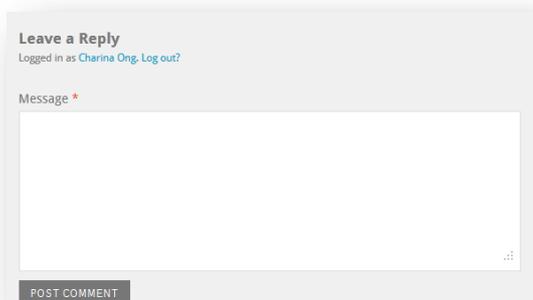


Posting Comments

What would a blog be without a place for your readers to give their two cents on your posts? Comments allow your users to share their personal opinion on individual posts and users can see and comment on their comments. It's almost like every post is its own little forum.

To post a comment:

1. Choose a post that you would to comment.
2. Type your comment and click **Post Comment**.



Managing Comments

The Comments pane opens with a list of all of the comments made to your blog. You can see the author info, including the date and time of their comment, as well as the comment itself and what post it was made from.

To approve a comment:

1. From the **Dashboard**, click **Comments > All Comments**.
2. Hover to the name of the student and click **Approve**.

| Author | Comment |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mary cnmleem@nus.edu.sg 137.132.3.6 | Submitted on 2009/07/23 at 11:37p That's a question I am grappling with passion, dedication and clear (read... |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Judy ephjsgk@nus.edu.sg 137.132.3.6 | Submitted on 2009/07/23 at 11:33p A good teacher is someone who asks rather than using "teacher-talk" all... |

To delete a comment:

1. Hover to the name of the student and click **Delete**.

| Author | Comment |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mary cnmleem@nus.edu.sg 137.132.3.6 | Submitted on 2009/07/23 at 11:37p That's a question I am grappling with passion, dedication and clear (read... Unapprove Spam Delete Edit |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Judy ephjsgk@nus.edu.sg | Submitted on 2009/07/23 at 11:33p A good teacher is someone who asks... |

Customizing your Blog

Applying and Customizing a Theme

A theme refers to the overall design of your blog. Be careful while choosing a theme. You have to take note that each theme behaves in certain way. One feature from a design may not necessarily be available in other designs. It is suggested that you focus on the content and other relevant elements rather than the visual.

To change the theme of your blog:

1. From the **Dashboard**, click **Appearance**> **Themes**.
2. Browse through the different design templates and choose a theme that is suitable to your subject.



3. When you select a design, a preview of the actual blog is displayed. Click **Save and Activate** to immediately apply this design to the blog or click **Cancel** to go back to the original design.



4. Some designs allow you to customize the layout such as changing the layout style, color scheme, page width, background, fonts, etc. All these can be modified in the **theme settings**.



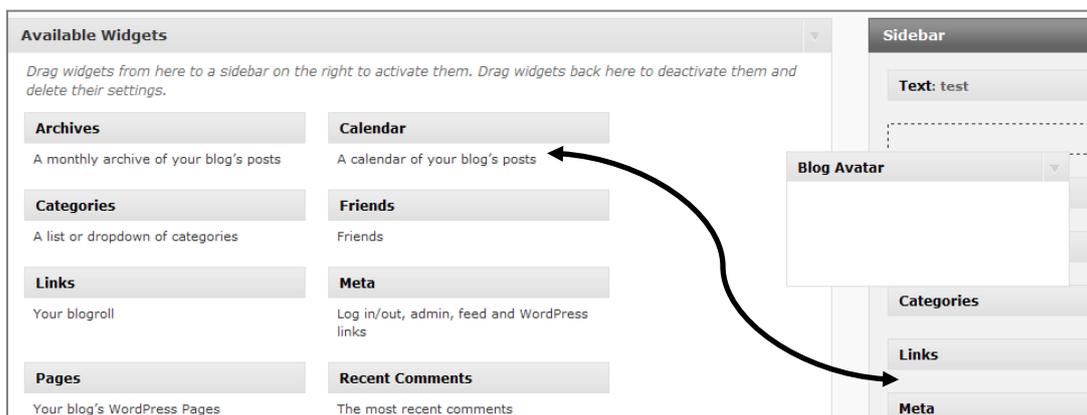
5. Click **Visit Site** to check the newly selected theme or press **F5** key to refresh your browser.

Working with Widgets

Widgets are also known as sidebar accessories which are plug-ins or add-ons to your WordPress blog sidebar. It allows the easy addition of design elements, gadgets, content, images, and more to your WordPress sidebar to personalize your blog without having to know any coding.

To add a widget to your blog:

1. From the **Dashboard**, click **Appearance > Widgets**. The system will display a list of available Widgets you can add to your blog. Please note that when you add a widget, this will clear the default widgets displayed on your blog. Below are some of the useful widgets:
 - a. **Delicious**- allows you to import the bookmarks from your existing Delicious account
 - b. **Videos**- allows you to import the videos from VodPod account
 - c. **Meta**-allows you to include user log-in, entries RSS, comments RSS, etc.
 - d. **RSS**- can be used to add feeds to your sidebar. As with the text widget, you can have as many RSS widgets as you need
2. Drag your preferred widget to the sidebar.



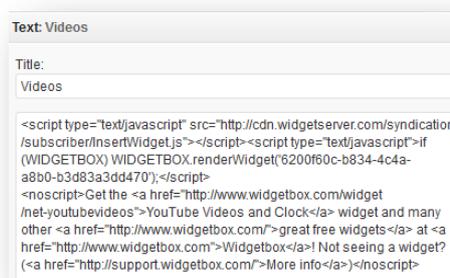
3. Click **Visit Site** to check the newly selected theme or press **F5** key to refresh your browser.

To edit a widget:

1. Click on the drop down list of the widget and apply the necessary changes.
2. Click **Save**.
3. Click **Visit Site** to check the newly selected theme or press **F5** key to refresh your browser.

To add a widget not from the list:

1. Drag the **Text widget** into the sidebar.
2. Add a title.
3. Enter the HTML code into the second box and click **Save**.



Attachments

Blog Guidelines by N.Sivasothi (Department of Biological Sciences)

Structure of a Blog entry:

- **Title** - an interesting title will excite the interest of the reader. But do not exaggerate or misrepresent facts.
- **Content** - a blog post has to be short, around 3-5 concise paragraphs for the 250-300 word limit is probably suitable. It helps to prepare a longer draft which you shorten before submission. Get to the point quickly and do not lapse into an essay. The attention span of blog readers will be quite short!
- **Citations/References**- When you point to the site/article/post you are highlighting, cite references appropriately and link to it to the source.
- **Quote text** only where suitable and *not excessively*. Quotes are used when citing text exactly as they appear in their original publication. Be sure to “enclose the relevant text in quotation marks.”

Citation and Copyright/Permissions:

Whenever you present information, it is assumed it is original, unless you cite it.
In credible science blogging, we adopt precise citation methods:

1. Citation method for journal article

First author's surname, initials, Year. Article name. Journal name, volume number (issue number): beginning page number-ending page number.

[E.g. Loveridge, A. J., J. E. Hunt, F. Murindagomo & D. W. Macdonald, 2006. Influence of drought on predation of elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) calves by lions (*Panthera leo*) in an African wooded savannah. *Journal of Zoology*, 270(3): 523-530.]

2. Citation method for non-journal sources

Cite all blog sources with proper attribution, including articles, blog posts, videos or images. You may use any citation format as long as it provides adequate information about the source and is consistent. Examples of formats follow:

- **Article or blog post:** “Title,” by Author. Publication, date (DD Mmm YYYY). URL: xxx (accessed on DD Mmm YYYY).
 - “Monkey mayhem in Bukit Timah,” by Arul John. The New Paper, 12 Mar 2008. Hosted on WildSingapore: <http://wildsingaporenews.blogspot.com/2008/03/monkey-mayhem-in-bukit-timah.html> (accessed on 19 Mar 2010).
- **Video or image:** “Title,” by Author or production source. Host site, date (DD Mmm YYYY). URL: xxx (accessed on DD Mmm YYYY).
 - “Mapogo,” by Greg Du Toit. Greg Du Toit Galleries: African Anomalies. URL: http://www.gregdutoit.com/index.php?page=photo_anomaly (accessed on 16 Mar 2010)

The street finds its own use for things

Farrell, H. (2003). "The street finds its own use for things". In *Crooked Timber, September 15, 2003*. Retrieved September 12, 2006 from <http://crookedtimber.org/2003/09/15/the-street-finds-its-own-use-for-things>

Today I came across John Palfrey's blog for a class that he's teaching in Harvard Law School on the Internet and the global economy. Interesting stuff; all the more so for those of us who are beginning to take the first, wobbly steps towards using blogs in the classroom. Dan Drezner used Blogger to put together his syllabus last semester; John Holbo runs a couple of class blogs, and I've recently installed Movable Type on the university server so that I can do so myself. Palfrey is pushing his students to start their own blogs as part of the classroom experience – I haven't had the courage to do this myself. But it seems to me that there are a variety of different ways that you can use blogs in the classroom, each with their own pros and cons, discussing them in order of increasing ambition.

1. **Standard class web pages.** This is the least exciting way of using blogging software, but also, for many purposes, the most practical. Most class web pages consist of a few static pieces of information – class times and rules, links to the syllabus etc – and a few dynamic – cancellation of office hours, announcements of essay topics and the like. It's remarkably easy to put together a quick and dirty page using MT that fulfils these requirements (see [here](#)), and that can be updated easily, from anywhere without having to fooster around with FTP, web authoring software etc, let alone dumbed down programs like Web-CT. And if you use MT or an equivalent, you can also try to make your students use the comments feature to ask everyday questions about tutorials, bibliographic styles and so on, rather than having to deal with the same issue over and over by email. It doesn't only save you time, it saves the students time too – they can look up your previous answers in comments rather than having to email you and wait on a response.
2. **Professor-written blogs** which cover interesting developments that relate to the theme of the course. A nice and easy way to make the issues that you cover in a course more topical, linking to stories that will show the real world implications, say, of file-sharing on the Internet, or the breakdown of talks at the WTO. Can easily be combined either with (1) or (3).
3. **Organization of in-class discussion.** Another thing that I'll be trying this year for a senior level undergraduate class that used to be a seminar, but now has 60 odd students. Set a discussion question every week, and have people debate it in comments. The conversation will probably be a little more stilted than in-class discussion, but likely to be on a slightly higher level – people can think before putting in their responses. This is also much easier to grade fairly than an in-class participation mark – you can go back and look at how students have participated and developed over the semester. I will see how it works over the semester, but I'm hopeful.
4. **Organization of intensive seminars** where students have to provide weekly summaries of the readings. This is something that I'm thinking about for future graduate classes, where each student has to do – and circulate – a weekly discussion of a particular assigned reading. By making them authors of a group blog – and posting their summaries on the blog – it becomes much easier for the professor and students to access the readings for a particular week – and if you make sure that people are organized about how they do it, the summaries will effectively file themselves. Obviously, you have to give the students some training in using MT at the beginning, but it's fairly self-explanatory, even to the technophobic.
5. **Requiring students to write their own blogs** as part of their grade. I used to teach a class where I made students learn HTML, and then prepare their own web pages dealing with international relations topics that interested them. In future, I suspect that it would be a lot easier to point them towards Blogger Pro, and let them go at it, writing blogs that covered developments in a particular issue area over time. This would obviously involve a moderate chunk of technical assistance at the beginning – but would have a relatively quick and easy payoff for the students. And if undergrads can learn how to use frames, formatting tables and tags (and they can) blogging should be a cinch.