



Blogging

SVEA TRAINING MODULES

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Author:

Kate Pearce, Gower College Swansea

Project Coordinator:

MFG Baden-Württemberg mbH
Public Innovation Agency for ICT and Media
Petra Newrly
Breitscheidstr. 4
70174 Stuttgart
Germany
Phone: +49 711 90715-357
Fax: +49 711 90715-350
E-Mail: newrly@mfg.de

SVEA Consortium:



Innovation Agency
for ICT and Media



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Introduction

This Module is designed to introduce and develop teachers' competencies in using blogs and micro blog services on the web. This is aimed at teachers with little or no knowledge or experience in using blogs and will demonstrate the key features of each and how they can benefit both teaching and learning. For this module we will be looking at two of the biggest providers of blogs: Blogger and Wordpress; and for micro-blogging, the world's biggest: Twitter.

This module is split into four sessions, as outlined below.

Session 1 - Blogs and Blogging

This session introduces blogs and blogging and provides an overview about how they are being used to communicate, collaborate and share resources over the Internet. It will show how blogs are being used by individuals to communicate socially and how companies and organisations use blogs to inform customers and the workforce. The session will also show how to set up a blog account and will provide practical advice on the effective use of blogs

Session 2 - Micro-Blogging

This session will introduce you to micro-blogs and micro-blogging. It will explain the differences between this method of communicating online and the uses of blogs that were covered in session 1. The session will concentrate on the micro-blogging application *Twitter* which is currently the most popular, and will explain how it is being used socially and also in a work context.

Session 3 - Educational Uses of Blogging and Micro-Blogging

This session is a practical exercise investigating the educational use of blogs and micro-blogs. It involves two 30 minute desk research exercises designed to explore the work that a range of experienced practitioners have undertaken in using these resources in teaching. The aim is for you to reflect on the evidence of effectiveness demonstrated and for you to draw conclusions about the applicability in your work.

Session 4 - Outcomes and Discussion

This session concludes the module and invites reflection and discussion about the applicability and value of blogs and micro-blogs in education generally and VET in particular. You will have the opportunity to share your views with others in the discussion forum and consider how blogs and micro-blogs might integrate with the other web 2.0 tools available for use in delivering VET.

Session 1 - Blogs and Blogging

Introduction

This session introduces blogs and blogging and provides an overview about how they are being used to communicate, collaborate and share resources over the Internet. It will show how blogs are being used by individuals to communicate socially and how companies and organisations use blogs to inform customers and the workforce. It will also indicate how education can benefit from the use of blogs - a subject that will be explored in more detail in Session 4.

This session will also show how to set up a blog account and will provide practical advice on the effective use of blogs.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, you will:

- know what a blog is;
- understand how blogs are being used in social and work contexts;
- have set up your own blog and posted information.

By the end of the session you will have a good working knowledge of blogging and you will have practical experience of two different types of blogs and how they are being used socially, in business and in education.

What you have to do

In this session you will be provided with information resources that will introduce you to blogging and its general use socially and in a work context. Even if you are an experienced blogger it is recommended that you skim through the materials. You will set up your own blogs and will be asked to reflect on your initial thoughts about use in education.

1.1 Blogs Explained

This first session provides an introduction to blogs and blogging. The term 'blog' is a combination of two words: web and log. In simple terms a blog is an online diary or log that is usually published on the Internet and is viewable by the worldwide community. Blogs allow anyone to self-publish and tell the world what they are doing, the content of the blog is usually the owner's commentary on a particular area of interest such as a personal diary, sport, art or the news. Typically, a blog will contain text, images and links to other blogs. Blogs also allow the audience to make comments and give feedback to the blog's author or 'blogger'. Blogging really is about online communications on subjects of mutual interest, allowing people to both express what their views and comment on others' experience and opinions.



The resources that have been assembled here are intended to further your understanding of blogging and the impact blogs have had on the world wide e-community. We begin with an example of a Blog to demonstrate how it differs from other websites.

1.2 The Basics of Blogging

This section shows an example of a blog and describes how you recognise a blog when you are looking at web content. The example is a blog for the Regional Support Centre (RSC) for Technology Enhanced Learning in Wales. On the surface it looks like any other website. However, there are a few things that tell us immediately that it is in fact a blog.

The first thing to notice is that it displays a historical sequence of messages or blog 'posts'. These show that it is in the form of a reflective diary relating to a particular subject or area of interest. Postings can be made to the blog that include photos, videos and other materials that make it an excellent online environment to share information.

With a blog you can submit comments on any of the blog posts. Everyone can also look at posts and the comments other people have made. This makes it ideal for online information sharing, communication and collaboration.

In other words, using a blog means that the web presence is much more two way than a standard, static webpage. While blogs are 'owned' by an individual or institution, whose ideas and opinions will be posted, the audience has the opportunity to comment it and share their ideas. This makes blogging much more organic and engaging than static websites. Also, Blogs enable you to take feeds from other Web 2.0 services such as YouTube, Delicious, and Flickr. These services will be covered in other sessions in this course.

Blogs are now more and more commonly used instead of 'static' websites for personal online networking, because they are easily updateable and can be used easily by someone with little or no technical knowledge. Also, as well as the audience being able to contribute and comment on any of the postings, blogs are able to make use of other Web 2.0 services such as YouTube to enhance the blog. So, for example, you could upload videos you have made into YouTube and feed them directly in your blog. This will update every time you add something new into YouTube.

The next section provides some case studies that will introduce you to some general uses of blogging. These case studies will help you start to think about practical uses and implementations and uses within the classroom.

1.3 Blogs in Practice

In this section can be found two videos that give a good overview of blogs and how they are used.

The [first short video](#) reinforces the messages already provided about blogs and gives a good overview of the capabilities of blogging and how people are using blogs in their everyday lives.

A short summary of the first video:

- Blogs are a way for anyone in the world to self-publish on the Internet.
- Blogs are websites that are organised by blog posts, these are individual stories like articles in a paper.

Over time the blog becomes a collection of these posts; all archived for easy reference.

- Each blog post can become a discussion through comments left by readers, thus making blogs a two-way communications medium.
- The content of a blog reflects the bloggers' unique perspective on that subject.
- Blogger often create communities between them by commenting on each other's posts and link to each other's blogs.

The [second video](#) gives ten top tips on how to be a good blogger. It is a helpful introduction to the effective use of blogs for communications, collaboration and information sharing. The tips will be useful when you are considering how blogging could be a resource for educational delivery.

A short summary of the second video:

As it can be seen from the video, there are many blogging services available to use. Blogger and WordPress are two of the most popular and they offer a range of options and a large choice of designs at no cost. Thus, creating and customising your blog in the way you want is really easy to achieve and can be set up very quickly.

You are now going to set up your own blog and gain experience in its use. You will firstly be invited to set up a 'Blogger' blog and will then be shown how to set up a WordPress blog. If you already have a blog, then you can skip this activity.

1.4 Setting up a Blog with Blogger

Having been introduced to blogging, it is now time to set up your own blog and gain experience in its use. In the following exercises you will set up blogs using two of the most popular blog tools: Blogger and WordPress.

We will begin with Blogger. The [tutorial video](#) shows you in simple steps how to set up your blog using Blogger.

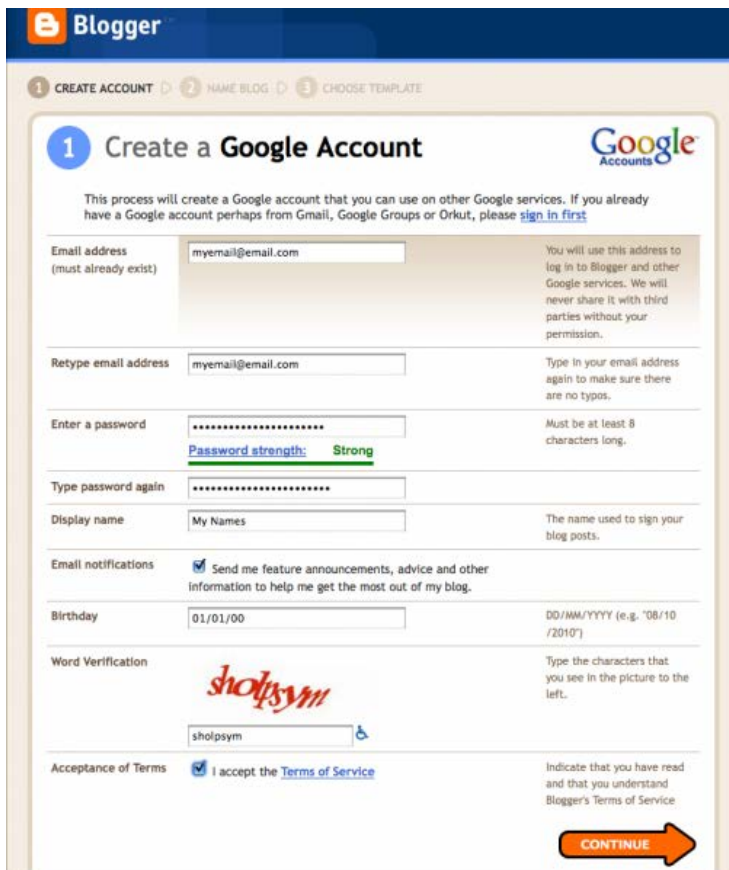
The step-by-step process of setting up your blog using Blogger is as follows:

1. First of all you need to go to [Blogger.com](https://www.blogger.com)

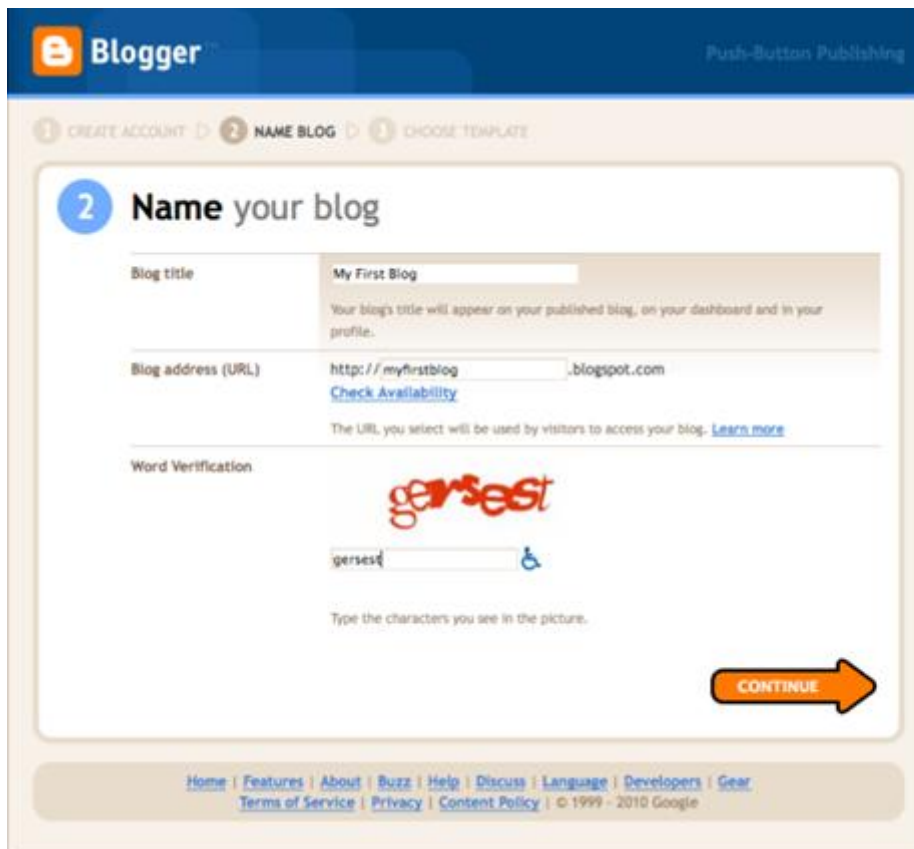
Click on *Create a Blog*



2. Input your details and click *Continue*

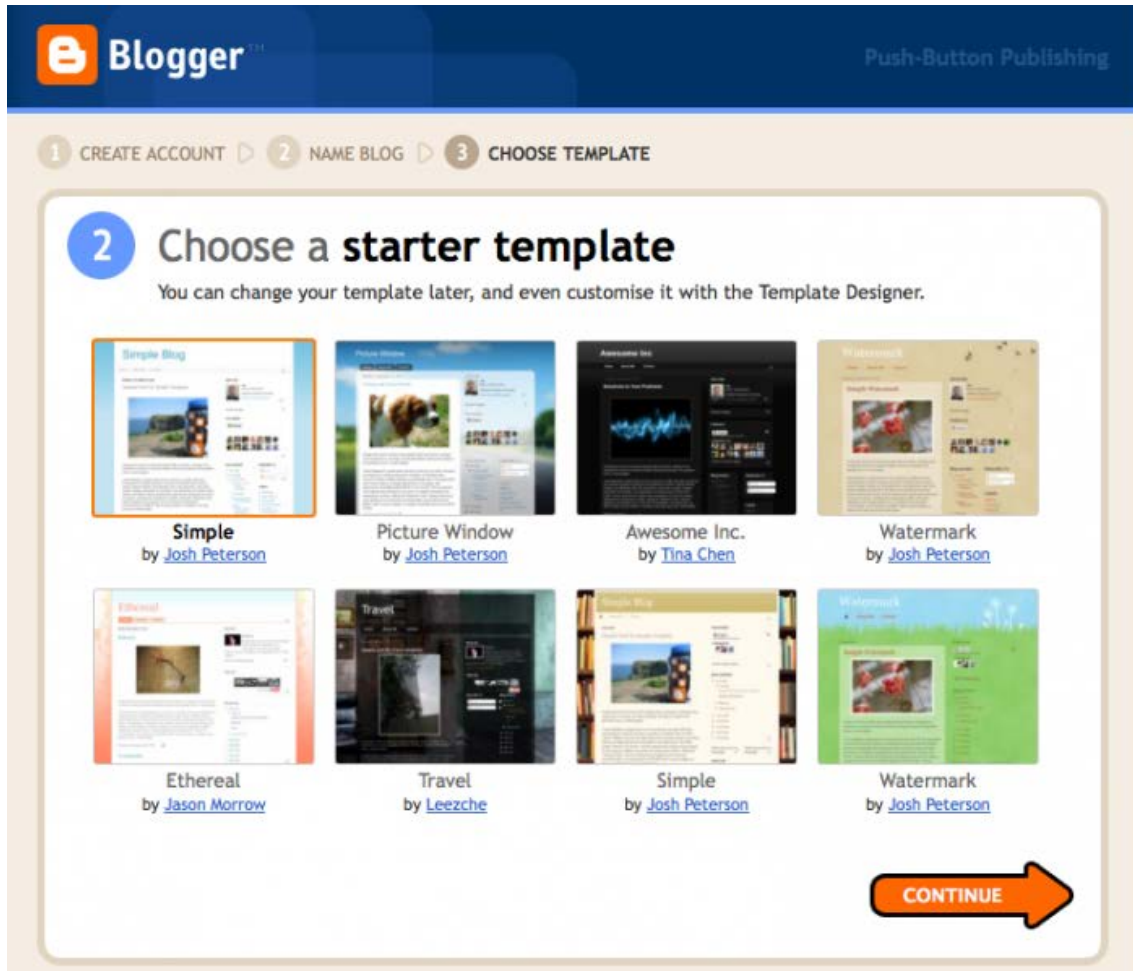


3. Add the title of your blog. Give your blog a name (this will become the web address of your blog, often called a URL). I have chosen the name 'myfirstblog'. You will need to check the availability of the URL with this name in by click the 'Check Availability' link. If that address is already taken, you will need to change the name to something else. Remember, the URL of your blog has nothing to do with your user name or your account. You can have numerous Blogs under one account/user name. Your blog name should reflect the subject of your blog. For example a Blog about a holiday could be **<http://myholidayinfrance.blogspot.com>** or blog about Italian cooking could be **<http://Italiancooking.blogspot.com>**.

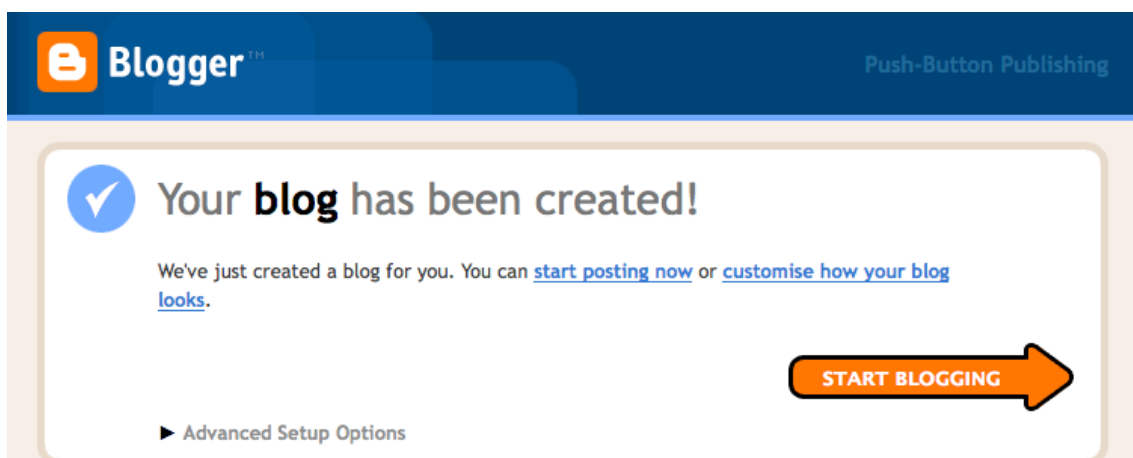


The screenshot shows the Blogger 'Name your blog' setup page. At the top, the Blogger logo and 'Push-Button Publishing' are visible. Below the logo, a progress bar indicates three steps: 1. CREATE ACCOUNT, 2. NAME BLOG (current step), and 3. CHOOSE TEMPLATE. The main heading is '2 Name your blog'. The form contains three sections: 'Blog title' with a text box containing 'My First Blog' and a note that the title will appear on the published blog, dashboard, and profile; 'Blog address (URL)' with a text box containing 'http://myfirstblog.blogspot.com', a 'Check Availability' link, and a note that the URL will be used by visitors to access the blog; and 'Word Verification' featuring a distorted image of the word 'gersesd' and a text box for typing it. A large orange 'CONTINUE' button is at the bottom right. The footer includes links for Home, Features, About, Buzz, Help, Discuss, Language, Developers, Gear, Terms of Service, Privacy, and Content Policy, along with the copyright notice '© 1999 - 2010 Google'.

4. There are a number of templates available that set the layout and colour scheme of your blog. Decide which template you would like to use by clicking on it and then click on continue.



5. Your blog has now been created and you can start blogging!



6. You now need to create your first post. You can edit the text as you would in a Word document, you can also add web links, pictures and videos to your post. Once you are happy with your first post you can save it and then publish the post to your blog!

The screenshot shows the Blogger 'I Love Blogging' post editor. At the top, there's a navigation bar with tabs for Posting, Comments, Settings, Design, Monetise, Stats, and View Blog. Below this is a sub-bar with 'New Post', 'Edit Posts', and 'Edit Pages'. The 'Title' field contains 'My First Blog'. To the right of the title are 'Edit HTML' and 'Compose' buttons. The main editing area has a rich text toolbar with options for font, text color, background color, bold, italic, text color, background color, bulleted list, numbered list, decrease indent, increase indent, link, unlink, text color, background color, insert image, insert video, and insert code. The text area contains the following content: 'This is the first entry to my blog.', 'This text will be **bold**', 'This text will be in *italics*', a bulleted list with three items 'This is a list', and a link 'This is a link to the BBC'. Below the text area is a 'Post Options' section with a 'Labels for this post' field containing 'e.g. scooters, holidays, autumn'. At the bottom, there are 'PUBLISH POST' and 'SAVE NOW' buttons, and a status message 'Draft autosaved at 10:17'. A link 'Return to list of posts' is also present.

7. Once you decide to make your post live it will look something like this. Take note of the URL, as you can see this is the URL that was decided upon when you set-up your blog. You can now edit your blog post and add new entries.



The next section shows you how to set up a similar blog using Wordpress. Looking at these two main blogging services will help you decide which one to choose.

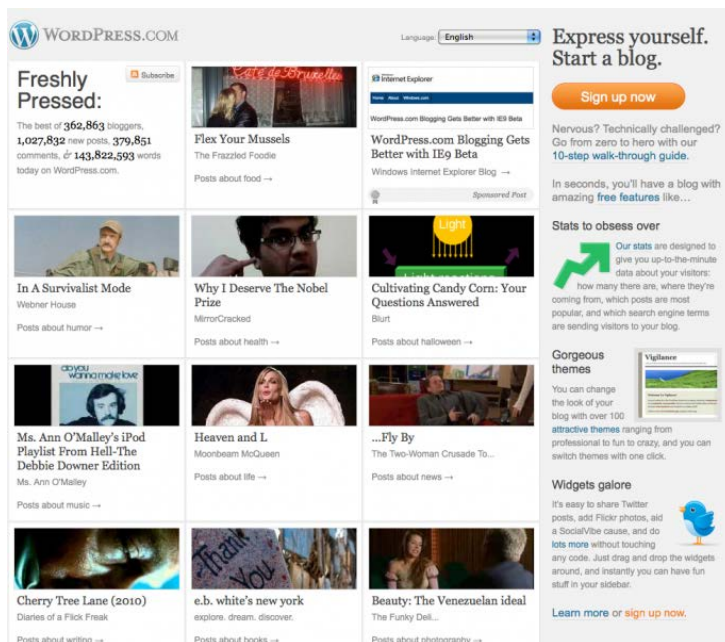
1.5 Setting up a Blog with WordPress

The second blog application to be introduced here is WordPress. As with the section on Blogger, you can first have a look at a [short explanatory video](#) and then read the following guidance on setting up an account.

Guide to setting up a blog with WordPress:

WordPress is a more extensive and powerful application than Blogger and is therefore slightly more complex in its view.

1. First of all you need to go to wordpress.com and click on the *signup now* button.



2. Enter in your details and click *Next*

Get your own WordPress.com account in seconds

Fill out this one-step form and you'll be blogging seconds later!

Username myfirstname
(Must be at least 4 characters, lowercase letters and numbers only.)

Password
Use upper and lower case characters, numbers and symbols like !@#\$%^&* in your password.
Password Strength: **Strong**

E-mail Address myemail@email.com
(We send important administration notices to this address so triple-check it.)

Legal flotsam ☒ I have read and agree to the fascinating terms of service.

☒ Gimme a blog! (Like myfirstname.wordpress.com)
☐ Just a username, please.

Next →



When you enter your details make sure that your email is correct, as WordPress will send through an activation email. You will need that email to activate your account.

Once you have activated your account you will be able to access WordPress and start blogging. Remember, that this information pertains only to this particular blog.

The first view you will see is the Dashboard. You can look at this [video](#) that shows how to change the Dashboard to your display preferences. The video shows you how the change to look and feel of your blog.

Once your WordPress blog is set up you can post messages in the same way that you did with Blogger.

You have now been introduced to two of the most popular blogging applications and it is hoped that the comparison will help you decide which offers you the options that best meet your needs. These are not the only blogging services available, there are many more for you to investigate.

It is suggested that you decide which application you will choose for the completion of this session and spend some time now exploring the functionality and information that the application provides.

To complete this session, you are invited to reflect on your experience of setting up and using blogs.

1.6 Session Outcomes & Discussion

This session has introduced you to blogs and blogging and explained the uses and general capabilities. The session has also given you the opportunity to set up your own blogs using two popular applications and to experiment with their use.

What are your initial thoughts about the nature of blogging and how it has opened up the world of online authoring to everyone? What do you think the benefits of this might be in education, both for you and for your learners? We will be looking at educational applications in a later session, but you will probably already have some ideas about how you might use blogs.

To conclude this session, go to the [discussion forum](#) and post your reflections on the questions above.

The next session looks at micro-blogging and the popular application *Twitter*.

Session 2 – Micro-Blogging

Introduction

This session will introduce you to micro-blogs and micro-blogging. It will explain the differences between this method of communicating online and the uses of blogs that were covered in session 1. The session will concentrate on the micro-blogging application *Twitter* which is currently the most popular, and will explain how it is being used socially and also in a work context. The use of micro-blogging in education will be covered in session 3.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session you will:

- know what a micro-blog is
- understand how micro-blogs are being used both socially and in a work context
- have set up your own micro-blog account and posted messages

What you have to do

The task is to read through the explanatory information and view the video resources that will introduce you to micro-blogging. You will then go through the process of setting up your own Twitter account and will gain experience in its use (if you already have a Twitter account, you can skip this section of course). At the end of the session you will be invited to contribute to the session discussion forum.

2.1 Micro-Blogs Explained

A micro-blog is similar to a blog in that it allows users to post messages and information in an online space, and to comment on the postings of others. It differs, however, in that micro-blog entries are much smaller. Micro-blogging entries are a bit like instant messages, but broadcast generally, rather than sent to a specific person. When used socially they typically talk about what that person is doing at that time, what is going on in their lives, or what their opinions are on current topics. In a work context, micro-blogging is used for the ongoing sharing of information between colleagues about tasks they are collaborating on whilst they are at different locations. These micro-blog exchanges are similar to the use of an online chat tool, but, again, broadcast to a broader audience and in a more spontaneous way.

Micro-blog entries are always relatively small, short sentences that relate to a specific current topic that is relevant to the user and the intended readers. Normally a limited number of characters are allowed for each posting.

Currently, the most popular micro-blog is *Twitter*. For the purposes of this session, when discussing micro-blogs we will be referring to Twitter, although the principles would apply to



all similar applications. In the case of Twitter, blog posts are text-based entries of up to 140 characters long. These entries are called 'tweets'.

The next section provides an introduction to Twitter and gives some examples of its use in a social and a work context.

2.2 Introduction to Twitter

[Here](#) you can find a video gives a good explanation of the most widely used micro blog, *Twitter*. It also explains the difference between blogging and micro-blogging and why you would want to micro-blog.

In Summary

- Twitter is free
- Twitter allows people to post short bite-sized updates
- A Twitter page looks a bit like a blogs with lots of short posts
- Each page is personal has contains all the updates from and for people you follow
- Update are a maximum of 140 character long
- Updates can be sent via the Twitter website, software on your browser, on your mobile phone

Twitter Examples

The following examples of Twitter sites show how it is being used both individually and in business. They show the general layout of the Twitter page and indicate how the limited length of the postings is being used effectively.

The first example is the Twitter page of Barack Obama. It shows a series of postings about to his activities and related political events. The thing to note is that each post contains a link for further information, which makes each short sentence a gateway to further information on the subject.



The second example is the Twitter page for a Small Business promoting its food products. Again, each posting contains a link to a website for additional information about the subject covered.



There are many other examples available on the web and also a lot more information about how to use Twitter. The following website provides an online guide book that will allow you to explore the application and its use in much more detail.

Having introduced Twitter, the module will now move on to setting up a twitter account and using it.

2.3 Setting up a Twitter Account

As noted in the previous section, Twitter is a micro-blogging service and, as the name suggests, it is intended for you to post small update about what you're doing and what's going on. Also, Twitter has a social element to its functionality and allows you to follow

other people's postings and be followed by them. The really good thing about Twitter is that you can follow anyone who has a Twitter account and read their updates. These persons could be politicians, celebrities or friends. Unlike the social networking site, Facebook, Twitter allows you to read the updates, or Tweets of anyone you choose to follow rather than people who allow you to be their friend.

The following video gives simple introduction to setting up a Twitter account

Having seen the overview, now is the time to set up your Twitter account if you haven't already got one.

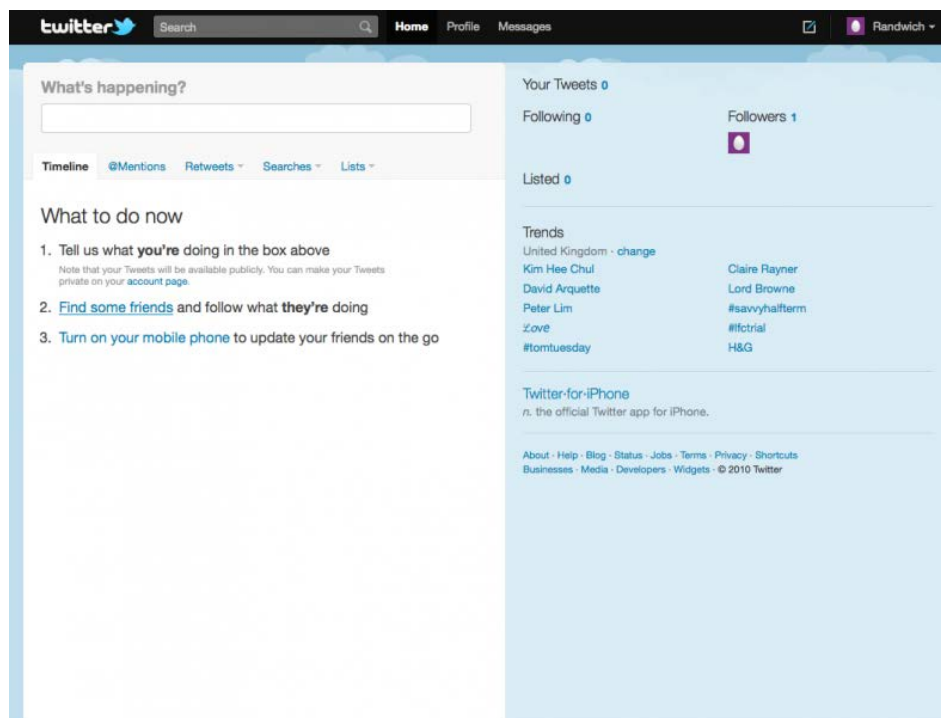
1. Go to the Twitter website: <http://twitter.com/>



2. To set up your account add your details to the first signup page
3. Select an appropriate username on the second signup page and click 'Create my account'

A screenshot of the Twitter 'Join the Conversation' signup page. At the top left is the Twitter logo. The heading is 'Join the Conversation'. Below it is a link: 'Already on Twitter? Sign in.' and a checkbox: 'Already use Twitter on your phone? Finish signup now.' The form contains several fields: 'Full name' with the value 'myname' and a green 'ok' status; 'Username' with the value 'my_name1' and a green 'ok' status, with a note 'Your public profile: http://twitter.com/my_name1'; 'Password' with masked characters and a yellow 'Strong' status; 'Email' with the value 'myname@google.com' and a note 'we'll send you a confirmation'. There is a checkbox 'Let others find me by my email address' which is checked, with a note 'Note: Email will not be publicly displayed'. Below the email field is a 'Terms of Service' section with a 'Printable version' link and a scrollable text area containing the terms. At the bottom is a 'Create my account' button and a checkbox 'I want the inside scoop—please send me email updates!' which is checked.

Once you have set up your account you will see the Twitter start page.



You can change to way your Twitter page looks and feels. The following video will explain how to do this.

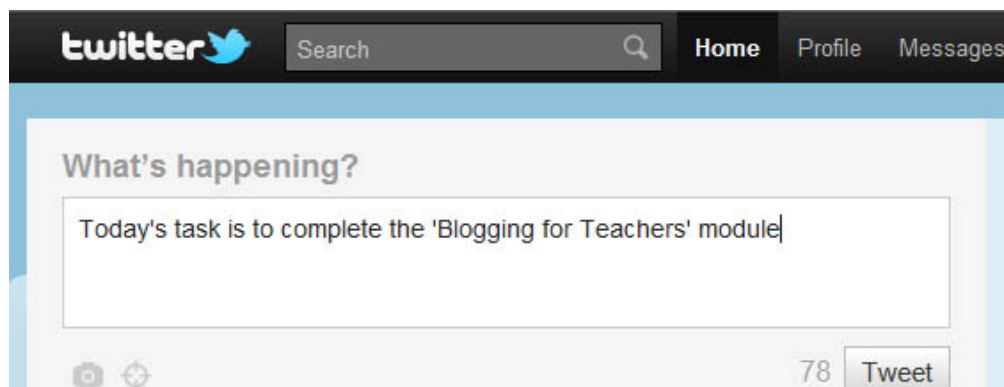
Now you have set up your Twitter page you can now begin posting messages, or 'tweeting'.

2.4 Tweeting and Following Others in Twitter

Now that you have an account you can start adding messages, or tweets, and also setting your account up to follow the postings of other Twitter users.

Tweeting in Twitter

Adding a tweet in Twitter is really easy. All you need to do is to type whatever you want to say in 140 characters and then click on tweet. This message will then appear in your timeline and in the timeline of anyone who is following you.



Your message or 'tweet' appears immediately in the timeline of your Twitter page. It's important to remember that once you've tweeted something, anyone following your Twitter account will be able to read it (although you can delete tweets if you want to).

Following other people's tweets

One of the really useful features of Twitter is the ability to follow other peoples' postings automatically. By adding people to your 'Following' list you automatically get an update on their latest postings when you log on to your account.

You can have a look at [this video](#) that explains the process:

This can be very useful both socially and at work. You can keep track of people's social activities (as they can of yours if they follow you) and use the facility for instantly sharing the outcomes of work activity.

Using the 'Hash Tag'

There is another very useful feature of Twitter that allows not just people, but events and activities to be followed by tagging any tweet with the 'hash' symbol #. When you and a group of colleagues or friends want to share just the postings about a particular subject or event, then all that has to be done is to agree a keyword that characterises the subject and to prefix it with a #. When this is then used as a search name in Twitter, all messages with that 'hash tag' will appear in chronological order, the latest posting first.

This is commonly used at educational conferences, for example, where typically the hash tag will be '#<the conference name>'. When delegates search for this in their Twitter account, all the comments from other delegates that include this hash tag will be displayed as they are posted.

2.5 Security Settings in Twitter

Like other social networking site you can choose to secure your account / profile to people vetted by you. This means that your tweets will not be available publicly and only be seen people who you have approved to follow your tweets.

To change your security setting is easy, all you have to do is go to your profile page and click on Edit Profile. This will then display various options, such as:

- Add a location to your tweets
- Show photos and videos from everyone
- Protect my tweets

Tweet Privacy

☐ Protect my tweets

Only let people whom I approve follow my tweets.
If this is checked, your future tweets will not be available publicly.
Tweets posted previously may still be publicly visible in some places.

[Save](#)

To protect your tweets just click on the tick box next to the 'Protect my Tweets' option and then save your changes.

Your follow request has been sent · [Cancel request](#)



Once you have done this, anyone who wants to follow you automatically will send a request permission. You can either accept or decline this request. This setting is really handy when using Twitter with students. It allows you to keep your followers to a community of people you choose.

This concludes the Micro-Blogging session. You will now move on to explore how Blogs and Micro-Blogs are being used in education.

Session 3 – Educational Uses of Blogging and Micro-Blogging

Introduction

This session will involve you in two practical exercises designed to provide understanding and experience of the use of blogging and micro-blogging in education. You will be introduced to a range of educational practitioner websites and will be invited to complete desk research exercises that gather information about current use of blogs in education.

You will record the outcomes of your work and will reflect on the relevance and value in your area of responsibility. You will share your experience and views in the discussion forum.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session you will:

- have an understanding of how blogs are currently being used in education
- have an understanding of how micro-blogs are currently being used in education
- have reflected on the relevance and value of both forms of sharing information online in your area of responsibility

What you have to do

You will complete two 30 minute desk research exercises, using the web based resources provided, into the use in education of each of the two types of online blogging discussed in this module. You will complete a reflective log of your findings and of your opinions about their relevance and value in your area of teaching/responsibility.

3.1 Educational Uses of Blogging

By now you will be aware that blogging is a popular way for people to communicate, share resources and collaborate online. Blogs are used by individuals as reflective diaries; by societies, clubs and special interest groups to share their interests online; and by companies and government agencies to communicate with their customers and workforce.

You will have seen that the key feature of a blog is that it is a live networking tool that can enable groups to communicate and collaborate from wherever they have internet access. It is not surprising, therefore, that educators have seen the potential in supporting learners in more flexible ways and that there are many educational blogs set up for that purpose.

To conclude this introduction to blogs you are invited to undertake a personal research exercise into the current use of blogs in education. Using [this website](#) as a gateway to information, spend some time exploring other people's educational blogs. Consider the messages about use and usefulness and reflect on how this might be applicable in your area of responsibility.

Exercise: to reflect on the potential uses of blogs in your teaching by examining the experiences of other teachers. Although the examples are from across the educational spectrum, from schools to universities, the messages they offer are equally applicable to vocational education and training.

Time: 30 min (Try to be agile. Spend no more than 5 min on any one blog. Make notes of your thoughts).

To conclude the exercise, summarise your thoughts, both on the perceived value of blogs in teaching and also any thoughts you have about your need for further information. Share your thoughts and views with others on the [discussion forum](#).

The next section introduces micro-blogging and its educational uses.

3.2 Educational Uses of Twitter

It has been shown in this module how micro-blogging with Twitter has grown in popularity as a social networking communications medium and grown in use as tool for management communications and company promotion. You have been encouraged to consider its potential for teaching and use in your area of responsibility.

In this section you are invited to undertake a practical exercise, similar to that in the previous section on the use of blogs that involves you exploring how others have used micro-blogging in education and reflecting on how you might use it in the future.

Exercise: Explore some of the resources accessed through the links in [this website](#). Each of them relate to the use of Twitter in education and provide information on the experience of other practitioners.

Time: 30 min (Try to be agile. Spend no more than 5 min on any one blog. Make notes of your thoughts).

In the final session of this module you will be invited to summarise your thoughts, both on the perceived value of micro-blogs in teaching and also any thoughts you have about your need for further information.



Session 4 – Outcomes and Discussion

This module has introduced you to the basic practical skills you need to engage with blogs and micro-blogs and has explained the application of these skills in a social and work context. The session has also covered the benefits of blogs and micro-blogs in education.

The overall message is that blogging and micro-blogging are emerging as popular and effective ways of collaboratively communicating online. They are part of the development of online social networking, but are being recognised as valid and effective ways of communicating and collaborating in a business context.

Communications and collaboration are at the heart of the educational support of learners. Any additional strengthening of that support is, of course, beneficial. This is why many individuals and institutions are exploring how those benefits may be exploited in their teaching.

You have been invited to explore how others have been working towards this objective and to learn of the outcomes of their work. At the same time you have been reflecting on the relevance to your own work. This is likely to have been with specific reference to VET and you will have drawn conclusions about how the support of such learners might benefit.

You are now invited to share the outcomes of that reflection with others in the [discussion forum](#).