Albrecht Sonntag
UACES Doctoral Training Academy

Blogging.
Why? And how?
Why blogging?
- What are the advantages of blogging?
- What form may a blogpost take?

How to go about it?
- What topics are suitable?
- In what style and tone?
- In how many words?
- How long does it take?
- How do I finalise my post?
- Where can it be published?
- How can I promote my post?
On the author of the document

**Albrecht Sonntag**

* professor of European Studies
* ESSCA School of Management
* based in Angers, France
* regular contributor to regional and national (French) media
* serial blogger on several platforms in English and French since 2014
* weekly column on [www.euradio.fr](http://www.euradio.fr)
* Twitter: [@albrechtsonntag](https://twitter.com/albrechtsonntag)
Why blogging?

Writing about a complex topic in limited space:

- a stimulating exercise and an essential skill:
  - focusing on an idea and structuring one’s thoughts,
  - being clear, down to the point and precise,
- which is open to everybody

All it takes is

- serious research on the topic fed by a variety of good sources
- which leads to a well-argued personal reflection

The ideal blogpost provides “informed analysis”:

- not just an opinion, but an argument based on knowledge acquired through previous interest and research
What does an expert blogger say?

Simon Usherwood

- University of Surrey
- long-standing UACES member
- regular contributor to the ideasoneurope multiblog

Some recent posts:

- Three messages from the withdrawal agreement
- The pros and cons of a longer transition
- Cui malum?

https://youtu.be/yoT1uNCI-TQ

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What are the advantages of blogging?

Freedom of expression:

- it’s not an academic piece of writing!
- there is place for stylistic freedom, and even some humour!

The digital nature of a blog:

- allows for reactivity in engaging with current news and facts
- enables combining different media (→ hyperlinks)
- leaves an archived trace (“URL”)
- enhances an online profile
What forms can a post take?

So little constraints, so many options!

- an **analysis of a problem** that requires a minimum of expertise
- a **personal position** on a current issue
- an **interview with an individual actor or expert**
- a **comment or argued response** to other media articles
- a **polemical (yet controlled) “WTF” outburst**
- a **provocative satire** on a **regrettable state of affairs**
- a **critical review of recently read book** (or a TV series, or a film etc.)
- a new interpretation of a **historical date**, event, anniversary
- an **obituary** or **tribute** to a personality
- a **critical summary of a recently attended event**
- and more!

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What is a good blogpost?

A really good post is a post that...

* brings an added value to what you can find in mainstream media » (→ originality)
* knows what it’s talking about: it is fed and underpinned by research on the topic addressed (→ expertise)
* provides a piece of new knowledge to the reader, in an entertaining, not lecturing manner (→ tone and style)
* makes good use, beyond its message, of the possibilities offered by the online support (→ illustrations, hyperlinks, dissemination)
* focuses on one issue at a time and does not stray in many different directions (→ readability, reader’s attention)
* may be part of a series, with a follow-up (→ serialisation)
* makes the reader want to react (→ debate, reactivity)
What topics are suitable?

Rule No. 1: never write a post without personal interest for the topic!
- what am I passionate about? (→ sharing)
- what puzzles me? (→ questioning)
- what makes my voice different? (→ added value)

Rule No. 2: be patient – blogging is “learning by doing”!
- no one is a super-blogger at their first attempt

Rule No. 3: « If it’s not fun, don’t do it! »
- if the author of a post has no pleasure in writing it, why would a reader like to read it?
What style is appropriate?

Three major questions to ask yourself:

- how do I want to express myself?
- what is the context in which I publish my post?
- what is my target audience?

Style is a very personal component of a post

- be honest, be yourself, be spontaneous
- get inspired by your research on the topic
- be patient: a real, personal style emerges in the long run

For our blog like https://ideasoneurope.eu/:

- target an audience of interested citizens (→ civil society, media)
- but respect the context of publication (→ academic)
How many words?

It’s important to adapt the text to the medium

* take into consideration the expectations linked to reading on screens (laptop, mobile):
  → the ideal volume of a post is between 600 and 1,000 words
* stick to one central idea you want to bring across
* condense your text to the essential:
  → even your final text can be shortened
  → go over it several times
  → cut out the superfluous, the repetitive, the redundant

For our post to be published on https://ideasoneurope.eu/:

* constrain yourself to remain within the 600-1,000 words bracket
* force yourself to go over your final text two or three times

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How much time does it take?

Blogs are easy reading, but a demanding writing exercise

* **Research and reflection:** investment in research prior to writing depends on previously existing expertise, but should by no means underestimated.

* **Drafting:** it is impossible to rush the writing process. You will need to count three hours for 1,000 words, maybe a bit less once you have the habit.

* **Proofreading:** once finalised, leave it alone, go over it again later

* **Form:** it’s not because it’s just a blogpost that spelling and grammar may be neglected!

**Recommendations in case you have a deadline:**

* schedule your work, let your ideas and your formulations mature

* avoid at all costs to rush the drafting in the last-minute – it shows!

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How do I finalise my post?

A blogpost is a multi-media document

* first of all a well-carved text, with a title that provides incentive to click on it
* secondly, it is enriched by **images** or **graphs**, which may provide visual stimulation or a touch of humour
* finally, it is completed and enhanced by **hyperlinks** in order to refer to sources or recommend further reading

Expectation for any post on any blog:

* exploit the possibilities of the medium
* enhance your post intelligently (→ added value)
* give evidence of your research and knowledge through links
General recommendations

For the text:
- read it out loud – it will improve your final editing
- avoid long sentences and endless paragraphs
- make sure the author (you!) is well identified

For the illustrations:
- careful with copyrights!
- use free pictures like you can find on [wikimedia](https://commons.wikimedia.org), [unsplash](https://unsplash.com), [pexels](https://www.pexels.com), [pixabay](https://pixabay.com), [gettyimages](https://www.gettyimages.com) or other image banks (this PPT thanks [flaticon](https://www.flaticon.com) for its icons!)

For the hyperlinks:
- make sure they open in another window
Where to publish?

Option 1:
* create your own blog
  → not very complicated (esp. with templates like *WordPress*)
  → useful if you want to cover your own little niche
  → but only worth while if you blog regularly

Option 2:
* contribute to an existing collective blog like [https://ideasoneurope.eu/](https://ideasoneurope.eu/)
  → recommended to beginners
  → ideal for positioning oneself in a given field and audience
  → makes life easy in technical terms
A blog is a “social media”

- it has a URL that is easy to disseminate and communicate
- it is archived online
- it can easily be promoted through other social media channels

Obvious suggestion for your own posts:
- send them round in your own networks!
For all further questions

✿ Use and follow our hashtags
  #UACESdta and #AcademicBlogging

Follow-up of the workshop:

✿ inspired and decided to go for it? → Great!
✿ unsure how to go about it? → Normal.
✿ wrote a first draft but have doubts about quality? → Send it!
✿ To: albrecht.sonntag@essca.fr
✿ Members of the UACES Doctoral Training Academy benefit from a 100% discount on some editing suggestions for their first post!
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