Build a Blog Portal

By Lorrie Jackson

WHY A TECHTORIAL?

What will I learn today?
You will learn how to create your own teacher or student blog.

What hardware and/or software does the techtorial apply to?
The techtorial applies to anyone with Internet access.

Which National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers does the techtorial address?
The techtorial will help teachers accomplish standard I.b. in particular.

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) has developed a set of National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers. Standards or Performance Indicators are included for each techtorial to help teachers and administrators improve technology proficiency. For a complete description of the standards indicated, go to NETS for Teachers.

WHAT'S A BLOG?

"Blog!" It sounds like the subject of a horror movie, doesn't it? "Attack of the Blog!" But blogs -- short for Web blogs -- are neither scary nor trivial. They simply are dated entries -- much like a journal or diary entry -- that are posted online.

Want an example? Take a look at the Ms. Frizzle's blog, written by a middle-school science teacher from New York City. Scroll down the page and you'll see dated entries, the most recent entry first. These entries are meant to be read by fellow educators and other interested adults. On the right side of the page, you'll see a place to e-mail the teacher, and lists of links and archives of past postings. Note that "Ms. Frizzle" takes great care to protect the privacy of her school and students, something all educators must address as they start blogging.

The Write Weblog is an example of a blog in which the students are the writers. On the left side of the page, you'll see a list of the students' first names. Click any name to see that student's blog. Go back to the home page and click the Counselor's Corner or Principal's Quest page to learn about the support this blog had across the school's campus.

Intrigued? Then let's get started building your very own blog.

STEP ONE: PICK A HOST

Many free blogging services are available online. Some -- [Blogger](#) and [LiveJournal](#), for example -- are very simple to use. Keep in mind, however, that services that are open to anyone might include blogs that are not school appropriate.

Blogs specifically designed for K-12 classrooms include

- [ePals SchoolBlog](#) (fee-based).
- [BlogMeister](#) (free -- must e-mail for a pass code)
- [Gaggle.Net's Blog](#) (free; includes a filter; will call to confirm you're an educator).

For the purposes of this techtorial, we'll use [21Publish](#), because it's free, faster than some education-specific blog sites, and protects student privacy by only allowing users you specify to see your blog. This service provides not just a free blog site, but an actual blog portal, in which the teacher has a blog page and students have separate pages for their own blogs!

Regardless of which blog site you plan to use later, follow the steps in this techtorial to create a blog at 21Publish, and try out the site for a while. If you later decide to use another blog service, you'll already have basic experience with a blog and know what will work best for your classroom.

STEP TWO: SIGN UP

- Go to [21Publish's registration site](#).
- Fill in your information to complete the registration process. For the portal name, you might want to use the name of your class -- "MrsJacksonsBiologyClass" - particularly if that is the name of your class Web site.
- Click Proceed twice. (Note: If you have more than 100 students, the maximum number of users for a free account, you might need to choose another blog site.)
- Click Let's Go and Start the Assistant.
- Pick one of the two layout designs. (Note: Other services give more design choices).
- Choose the design you want students to have on their pages. (They can have the same or different designs.) Because this is your first foray into blogs, you might want to pick a different design for students than for yourself, to help them better

navigate the blog portal.

- At step three (registration of users), check only the boxes for first and last name. Because you're allowing students to use your blog, you don't need to provide their addresses. Also click "Registrations need to be confirmed by portal administrator," so you can make sure that only your own students sign up. If your students have e-mail, you also can click the "confirm through e-mail" option, but it's not necessary! Click Save and Continue then Begin.

Congratulations! You've now set the foundation for your class's blog portal.

PORTAL PAGE

Your screen should look like this:

At top left, you should see "Home of____" with the name of your portal (MrsJackson's Biology Class).

STEP THREE: ADD CONTENT TO THE PORTAL PAGE

- Click the Portal Content button, and then click More Options on the far right.
- Click Description and you'll the screen below.

TITLE AND NAMES

Title
(to be displayed on the homepage)

Mrs. Jackson's Technology Page

Brand name
(to appear on your admin screens)

LorrieJackson

Name of your organisation

Louis Martin Middle School

Save settings   Cancel

- Change the title to anything you want, and type the name of your school under Organization. Leave the Brand Name blank alone.

WELCOME VISITORS

- Click Edit Entries (just below the Portal Content button). You'll see a default posting that says "Welcome to your blog…." This is great information for you, but your students don't need to see it. So...
- Click the pencil on the right side of the screen and change the title and text of this post. This is visitors' first exposure to your blog, so use the opportunity to welcome students, colleagues, and parents. Explain what your goals are. See below for an example:

Entry title

Mrs. Jackson's Classroom Blog Portal?

Entry text

[Format]   [Font]   [Size]

Add link | Add image | Add document | remove HTML | Show source code

Welcome students, parents, and fellow educators!

This year in our technology courses, we will start using blogs for the first time. Blogs are simply diaries o post our thoughts in chronological order. This main page will contain my musings and links for further in technology this year will also have his or her own blog.

- Just below the welcome, you can choose to make your blog entry public to the world or just to your students. You also can let anyone or just your students post comments about your blog. Start by choosing options for both that make your blog accessible only to members; you can choose to make it public as you get more

experience with a blog.

- Click Publish.

Now, each day or week you want to add a new entry, just go to your Blog and click New Entry. (You might want to bookmark your blog's URL -- http://_____.21publish.com.) Note that you also can upload files (such as a PowerPoint lecture) and add links to other sites here. Take a few minutes to click around and discover how you can alter your main blog.

ADD STUDENTS

- Click Community and Members, and then click Manage.
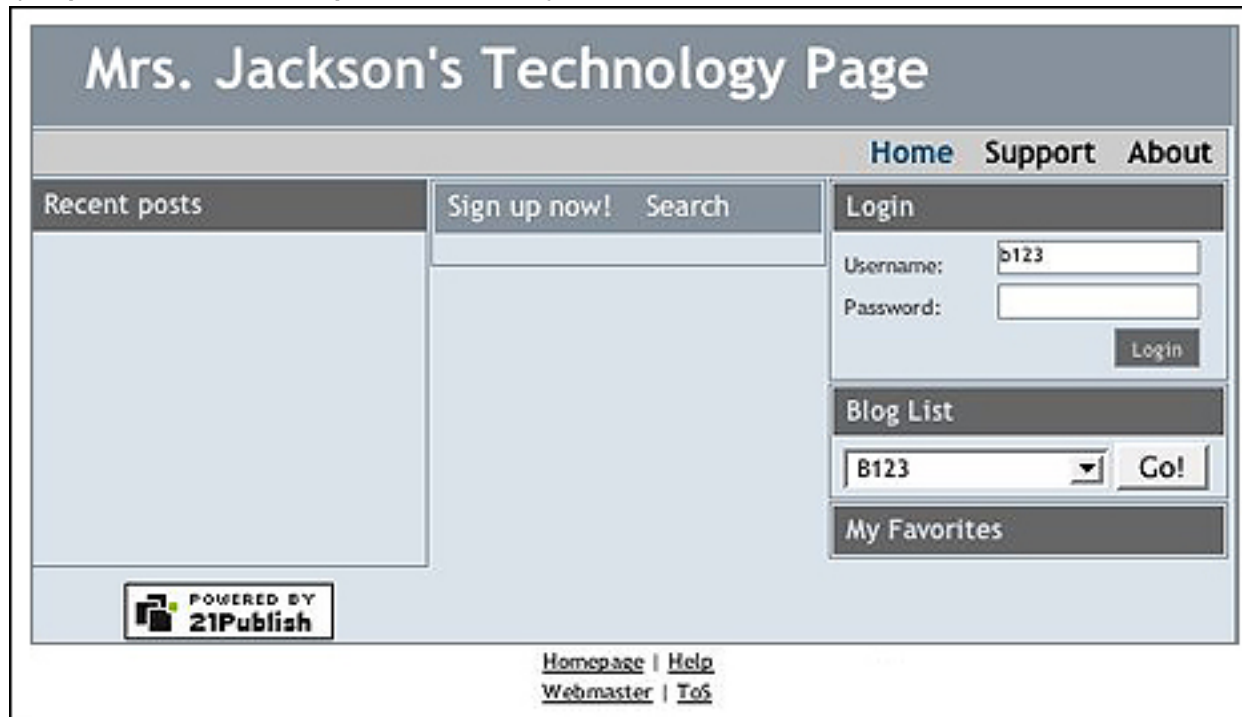- Type a username, password, and the first and last name for each student in your class.

MEMBER DATA

E-Mail	
Username	B123
Password	******
First name	Bryan
Last name	Anders

Create account   Cancel

The username and password should be unique for each student. Depending on the age and maturity of your students, you can choose them or allow students to choose their own. (Because the site is private, you can use their first names for their user names.) Keep in mind that when students choose their own passwords, they tend to use something they like such as "SkiAspen" or "Soccer." Those are, not surprisingly, easy passwords for friends -- and enemies -- to hack, so assigning random passwords is a good idea. They'll, of course, need to write down their usernames and passwords.

STUDENTS' BLOGS

When students are ready to create their own blog pages, they go to the blog's URL

(http://_____.21publish.com),

type their individual username and password in the top right box and click Login. (Notice that just beneath the login, a blog list (drop down menu) includes a link to each student's blog, as well as the home page blog.)

Students then can click New Entry and type an entry. Give them half an hour, and most students will have plenty written -- *and* added links, files, and more. The challenge won't be getting them to write, but getting them to *think* and then write what they're thinking about!

That's it. You can add content and "pretty" up your blog portal as you wish, but we've now covered the basics.

TELL ME MORE!

Where can I find more information?
Now that you know how to create a classroom blog, what should you blog about? See these excellent Education World articles for ideas:

- Blogging? It's Elementary My Dear Watson!
- Blogging Basics: Creating Student Journals on the Web
- Log Onto a Blog
- Writing With Weblogs
- This Bird Can Blog!