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To Blog or Not To Blog — Academic Blogging

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A cademics blog. They are fond of writing about their work and about developments in their field. How does their academic blogging mesh with their more formal research and publication? Let’s look at some active scholarly bloggers and discover why they blog and about what.

Scholarly blogging is becoming important in its own right as a continuation of published research, updated with new information, developments, or commentary as a new paper or presentation is in the works. According to Sarah Bond, Assistant Professor of Classics at the University of Iowa, and author of the blog Sarah E. Bond: History from Below, not enough quality scholarly blogs are cited nor archived. This is a similar theme that was discussed in a panel I moderated at the Charleston Conference last November and recapped in a blog post I wrote about the panel: “Why We Blog.” The three issues scholarly bloggers identified as important to their blogging efforts are having their blogs discovered, cited, and archived for future research.

Bond raises a recent blog post, “Legitimizing the Blog: On Reading, Citing & Archiving Blogposts” why more academic blogs are not cited in the footnotes of journal articles or within academic books. She states: “While there are certainly still spurious blogs that abound on the web, the number of trusted, well-sourced, and highly researched academic blogs is on the increase.”

She gives a few examples of well-researched blogs in the classics and then describes how to quote blogs, cite them, use citation tools like Zotero, and how to archive blogs. It is a worthwhile and practical guide for scholarly bloggers. Bond’s blog post was also published in a recent issue of Forbes.

Another academic blogger who provides practical insights into scholarly blogging and the craft of writing is Lucy Allen. In a January 2017 post, Allen, a Lecturer in Medieval Studies at the University of Cambridge, wrote in her blog, Jeanne de Montbaston: Reading Medieval Books that blogging helped improve her writing. This comment is frequently made by academic bloggers. Allen also suggests that writing blog posts can help to break writer’s block when dealing with difficult concepts in academic research. She provides tips for academic bloggers and insights into scholarly blogging in addition to insights into her work in medieval studies, feminism, and the topics of gender and memory.

Humanists don’t have a lock on scholarly blogging since we know that scientists also blog. In a novel blog post, represented in fifteen Tweets, Morgan Jackson, an entomological researcher at the University of Guelph, recounts his seven years as a blogger stating that blogging and other social media activity provided “countless professional and personal opportunities.” His blog, BioDiversity in Focus, was selected by From the Lab Bench, another science-focused blog, to “help researchers understand how readers use and view science blogging.”

William Yates, a physician and research psychiatrist at the Laureate Institute for Brain Research, blogs regularly about aspects of neuroscience in his blog Brain Posts. He started Tweeting about his work to sharpen his writing skills and then transitioned to writing blog posts so he could explain complex neuroscientific developments and diseases in clear and simple language. We can read about this contemporary topic in a recent blog post: “Opioids, Benzos, and Risk for Overdose” where he summarizes the findings of a study by the British Medical Journal that found a link between concurrent benzodiazepine prescriptions with opioid overdose, an important step in treating opioid addiction.

What is emerging from the scholarly blog literature is a disciplined academic writing that calls for citing and archiving in the scholarly press. Credentialed academics are writing and publishing outside the formal channels of publication and are looking for ways to have this work recognized as components of their research and scholarly communications. Scholarly blogs are becoming an important component in this research chain.

Endnotes

*Editor’s note: An asterisk (*) denotes a title selected for Resources for College Libraries.