

## Best Practices for Safe Blogging

Web logs, or “blogs,” are on-line journals that are regularly updated. According to blog search engine Technorati, there are over 112 million blogs worldwide. Although many professional blogs are designed to keep readers informed of new trends pertaining to a specific topic such as politics or sports, most students are using these sites as personal on-line journals. In some cases, friends will create a blog which multiple users can access to create a forum for ongoing conversation or to connect with friends abroad. Teachers use blogs as a vehicle for assignments, making changes to course syllabi, or to create a platform for class discussion.

Unlike a Web site (which requires some technical savvy), bloggers can easily update their journals using on-line templates. A typical blog consists mostly of text, but can be imbedded with images and links to Web sites or other blogs. Entries are usually displayed in reverse chronological order, and levels of written formality vary by author.

Social networking Web sites, such as Facebook and MySpace, allow users to link blogs to their profiles by using “web feeds.” These feeds periodically check for updates and automatically revise pages when changes have been made.



Because updating a blog is so simple, bloggers can inadvertently publish too much personal information online. This creates a personal security risk. Many bloggers forget to take advantage of the “privacy” settings that Web sites such as Xanga, Blogspot, and Blogger offer. Following are tips which will enhance the security and safety of any blogger:

- ◆ Use the privacy and security settings that are available on each site to set limits on who can read your blog, and who can comment on it. Security settings could allow you to block readers from commenting on your blog entirely, or let you allow only certain users to comment.
- ◆ Do not tolerate offensive comments on your blog. “Flaming,” or any sort of insulting message, should be deleted immediately. Often, this sort of behavior is posted by “trolls,” or web users who intentionally post hostile or irrelevant messages. Immediately report any abuse of your blog.
- ◆ Disable the feature enabling viewers to use web feeds (some common formats are *RSS* or *Atom*) for personal blogs, which would allow readers to automatically post your updates to other sites.
- ◆ Disable search engines from being able to find your page and distribute it to the general public. This way, someone using a search engine to find information on “bicycles” will not find “Betty’s Bicycling Blog.”
- ◆ Do not “go offline” (meet in the real world) with someone you meet through blogging, and avoid posting unnecessary personal information on-line. That includes your last name, phone numbers, addresses, financial information, and where you live, work, or go to school.

The 2007 DoDEA Prevention Programs Guide provides resources on cyber security, including Netsmartz, an interactive, educational safety resource from the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, and i-SAFE, a non-profit foundation dedicated to internet safety education. For more information on cyber security practices, contact the Safe Schools Team at [safeschools@csc.com](mailto:safeschools@csc.com). ■