

Blog assignment 2: Blog review

Learning goals: You will become familiar with the blog genre, gain experience in writing for a web audience and develop your skills in describing, contextualising, interpreting and expressing opinions about websites.

Deadline: midnight, Friday 27th February 2004.

- **600-1000 words.** Your grade will drop by a letter if you submit more than 10% less or more than these limits.
- To be posted in your blog with a **trackback** to the main course blog within midnight of Friday 27 February
- You can review a blog of your choice, so long as it doesn't belong to another student or employee at our department. The blog should be written by an individual or by a small, stable group (not Slashdot).
- Include at least **one screenshot and one quote** from the blog you're reviewing, and **link** to the pages you mention.
- You should **describe, contextualise and express an opinion** about the blog you're reviewing.

Grade	General description	For this assignment that means:
A Excellent	An excellent performance, clearly outstanding. Shows a high degree of independence.	Describes the blog well and explains its context. Interprets well and makes a convincing argument. Shows good knowledge of the blog genre and uses relevant vocabulary correctly. Demonstrates ability to theorise, generalise and develop new ideas as well as comparing, assessing, analysing and explaining. Excellent use of language, links and images. The text is very well organised. Original and/or independent approach.
B Very good	A very good performance, above average. Shows a certain degree of independence.	Describes the blog well and explains its context. Interprets well and makes a convincing argument. Shows good knowledge of the blog genre and uses relevant vocabulary correctly. Demonstrates ability to compare, assess, analyse and explain. Good use of language, links and images. The text is well organised. Somewhat original and/or independent approach.
C Good	An average performance, satisfactory in most areas.	Gives a sufficient impression of the blog and some information about its context. Has some knowledge of the blog genre and mostly uses concepts in a relevant and constructive manner, though there may be some misunderstandings. Shows some ability to interpret, compare, contrast and explain. Mostly good language and good organisation.
D Fair	A performance below average, and with some significant shortcomings.	Unclear description of the blog, uneven knowledge of the blog genre and related concepts. Few independent insights. A lot of description and very little interpretation or explanation. Uneven use of language.
E Sufficient	A performance that meets the minimum criteria	Minimal knowledge of the blog genre and related concepts. No independent insights. A lot of description and very little interpretation or explanation. Uneven use of language. Links broken.
F Fail	A performance that does not meet the minimum criteria	Does not meet the criteria stated above.

This is an assignment given to students in HJIN105: Web Design and Web Aesthetics at the University of Bergen, Norway. It's heavily inspired by Scott Rettberg's blog review assignment: <http://caxton.stockton.edu/BlogOnBlogs/>

General advice about this assignment

Your **target audience** consists of Norwegian web surfers who are interested in finding new websites and want information and an honest, understandable opinion on the blog. Your readers will have some knowledge of blogs but they are not experts on the genre. Imagine that most of your readers will not have visited the blog you're reviewing. Think about your reader as you write!

When you write a review you should **describe, contextualise and express an opinion** about the work. If you **interpret** aspects of the blog as well, that's good.

Beneath I've collected some points to consider as you write. This is *not an outline* for the review, but a starting point as you study the blog and start to take notes. Not all these points will be relevant for all blogs, not all will be relevant to your review and I may have left out something that turns out to be important about the blog you're reviewing. In practice you won't want to separate these points as rigidly as I have, and you don't need subtitles in a review as brief as yours will be.

Describe the blog

- Themes
- Writing style
- Organisation, use of archives, categories, information about the blogger
- Visual design
- Links, blogroll
- Frequency: how often do the blogger post?
- How long has the blog existed? Is there anything interesting in the first posts? Often the first post will explain the reason the blog was started.

Contextualise the blog

- Who is the blogger? (who does the bloggers say he/she is?)
- Is the blog part of a community? Nettdagbok.no, Livejournal, webrings, etc.
- Does the blogger appear to take part in other communities, offline or online?
- Does it seem likely that the blog might be fictional?
- Who links to the blog? Are the many links? What kinds of people/websites? (Use Technorati, Google, etc)
- Is discussion encouraged? Are comments enabled? Are there many comments? Are they all from the same people?
- Is there a clear target audience for the blog?

Express an opinion about the blog; interpret it

- Give a subjective but reasoned assessment that builds upon your discussion of the blog. Would you recommend it to other readers? Will you continue to read it? Perhaps you'd recommend it to some but not to everyone? A lot of your opinion will be implicit throughout, but your conclusion should include some kind of personal opinion.
- How would you interpret elements of the blog? What seems to be the main point of the blog? Is the relationship between the graphical design and the style of writing harmonious or conflicted? What do you read between the lines?

Examples of blog reviews:

- Scott Rettberg's students had almost exactly this assignment last year, and you can find the results here: <http://caxton.stockton.edu/BlogOnBlogs/>
- The Peer-to-peer Review Project was a project where bloggers wrote reviews of each others blogs: <http://acutecut.com/p2p/>
- The best blog review I've ever read is Rob Wittig's review of Justin Hall's Links.net, in the Electronic Book Review in March 2003. (search, it's online)