



**Skill in the spotlight** : Legal Blogging

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This is a two-page guide written for students explaining how and why writing a blog post could be useful in your education.

**What is blogging and what is the difference between a blog and a blog post?**

A weblog or blog is a webpage containing a collection of entries, often referred to as posts. These blog posts are normally of about 500 to 2000 words and they bring a particular message/argument/news item or idea.

**Why should you blog?**

There are at least three reasons to blog. Firstly, blogging can help you distribute your research findings which otherwise would be only used for your academic paper or thesis. In this way, you can contribute to society during your master's education (see this [video](#) about this idea).

Secondly, you may be asked to write a blog post once you start your professional career. Judges, law firms, public authorities and academics increasingly use blogs to comment on ongoing developments and circulate new research, judgements and opinions. Blogging has become a way to deliver academic ideas, as it has a more immediate and widespread reach. Its form mean blog posts often have a broader appeal than traditional (legal) publications.

Thirdly, the exercise of writing a blog posts pushes you to think hard about the key message of your research, which, if combined with writing a lengthy paper or thesis, can often promote the quality of the latter. This is because writing a short blog post requires you to distil the key problem of your research and formulate your position/finding on it. As a side remark, whereas you could write a blog post for an existing blog, you could also set up your own blog for free (see e.g. how to do this in this [instruction](#)). This exercise will certainly help you to advance further your IT skills.

**When might you write a blog post?**

Some teachers use legal blogging in their class as an obligatory part of the final grade (see [my example](#)). You could also decide to write a blog post yourself. Ask the teacher of the course you really like which blogs exist in that area and discuss how he/she could help you in connecting to the editors of that blog or write to those editors on your own. Writing a blog post for an existing blog will involve a peer-review process. The comments and suggestions from those peer-reviewers could promote the quality of your blog post and research in that area.

**Are there any reasons to be cautious?**

So far we have discussed why and how blogging can be useful and fun to do. At the same time, it is important to be cautious about what you put online and how. Be considerate about the sensitivity of certain topics and think carefully about how 'judgmental' you wish to be, if you are still a student. In some areas, it may be better to opt for a more descriptive and neutral writing style in order to avoid undesirable comments (also in your future career) if you are not yet the expert in the field of writing. Also, make sure to give a disclaimer if you are uncertain about certain things or if they are simply your thoughts or assumptions. Ask whether relevant persons in your network will check it before you send it for publication, so that they can reflect on the final text for both substance and grammar. Make sure to use hyperlinks, pictures and videos that are allowed to be distributed and respect copy right.

## Tips to get started

You write a blog post with the aim that it is going to be read. Here are some tips to make your post more attractive and encourage your reader to read it. Please, note, that many people read only the first paragraph of a blog post to get the key message out of it. Therefore, tip number 1 is to make sure that your first paragraph summarizes your key argument or message!

### Make your blog post accessible to your target audience

When writing a blog post, bear in mind your target audience. In academia, blogging is a way of delivering academic ideas that can accompany journal articles or outline directions for further research practice. It is a good advertisement for your published or forthcoming paper or book, future or past event-discussion. Your target audience may also be legal professionals. In any case, online blogposts have an advantage of reaching many more people as they are available worldwide. So, make sure to employ that advantage: the easier the language of the blog post, the more successful it will be in this regard!

To make your blog post accessible, make sure that:

- you do not use any excessive legal jargon, that only a niche of academics might be familiar with;
- you use short sentences and any possible difficult terms or words are hyperlinked to a page explaining them; and
- you put your topic in a broader context. So, if you describe a recent judicial decision or opinion, for example, give a really brief summary of past-precedents and the state of the art of the law in simple words. This will be helpful for those readers who are not fully familiar with the topic.

### Play with tone and visual effects

Depending on the type of audience and the topic addressed, you may like to use a different tone. Unlike journal articles, writers of blogposts are in principle freer to experiment with language and different sorts of writing. However, this may vary per blog platform: some blogs prefer to have a rather academic journal-like style of writing. The length of a post may vary as well but normally is between 500 and 2000 words. Your blogpost could be more captivating with:

- multimedia and visual aids such as video links, tables and schemes;
- anecdotal descriptions and/or first-person accounts of a topic; and
- personal insights, experiences and statements.

### Be aware of coherence, structure and the law

Style should not come to the detriment of coherence and clear structure. To that end:

- Structure your blogpost with (sub)headings, depending on the text length. Headings need not be numbered but it is useful if they are catchy;
- Ensure that there is an introduction which clearly states the main message, followed by a body of arguments building towards that main message;
- Be reminded that, obviously, the prohibition of plagiarism and copyrights (if you use multimedia) extends to blogposts;
- Make the content scannable, such that the reader can get the gist even without an in-depth read; and
- Go straight to the point: do not be afraid of spoilers, especially in the title – a clear title can make your blog easily discoverable on the internet.

#### *Additional Resources:*

Pat Thomson, [‘Seven Reasons Why Blogging Can Make You a Better Academic Writer’](#) (2016)

The University of Edinburgh, [‘How to Write an Engaging Blog’](#) (2018)

LSEImpactBlog, [‘How to: Academic Blogging’](#) (2012)

University of Kent, [‘Our Research Out There: Resources For Writing Academic Blogs’](#) (Jul 07 2019)