

## Website Project Guidelines

In this course, you will create a personalized, individual website that engages various aspects of 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> C. British literature through exploration of both critical and creative approaches. Your website will consist of three main sections: 1) an ongoing blog providing reflective responses to the assigned readings; 2) a Gender/Nation page that discusses more broadly any theme/topic from the Victorian and/or Modernist periods covered in Weeks 1-3; and 3) a Postcolonial Britain page that explores issues, texts, and themes related to the contemporary readings from Weeks 4-5. The last two sections are due at the end of the semester and blogs are submitted throughout the term while you will also be expected to read and respond to other students' blogs (see syllabus, "Online Participation," and class calendar for blog and peer response due dates). This handout provides you with directions for setting up your website and outlines general expectations for each section of your site. There are also other handouts available that provide useful tips for writing and responding to blogs; resources and tutorials for digital storytelling; and rubrics that identify how you will be assessed for each section of this project.

### Getting Started

By the end of Week 1, you will need to have your website set up with a clear template/design and your first blog posted to the homepage. You can choose to host your website through any platform of your preference, such as Weebly, Wix, or WordPress; since you are creating this for a class assignment, your website *must* be separate from your personal website if you already have one, though you may certainly use the same platform.

### Choosing A Platform<sup>1</sup>

Several user-friendly blogging platforms are commonly used in classrooms. No one platform is better suited to a specific discipline. Mostly the choice depends on your comfort level and personal preference when trying out each platform. However, I do not recommend Tumblr for this project and request that you do not use this site. Although it works well for sharing images, quotes or brief chunks of text, or consolidating and linking to other sites, based on my own past experience of using Tumblr with students, it does not work well for blogging and can be quite confusing, including following the threads of each other's posts.

[Weebly](#) is a free web-hosting platform that does not require any coding, provides multiple templates or design themes, and generally functions through drag-and-drop components. This is the platform that I've had students use in previous classes and the one that I use for my own [website](#). I think it's a good option for students, especially beginner students who have little to no experience with creating websites (much like me), and with a basic free account you should be given enough space for creating the main pages/sections required for this class. Here are links to the [Weebly Beginners Guide](#) and [Weebly Tutorials](#).

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<sup>1</sup> Some of this adapted from Gayle Morris, "Using Blogs in the Classroom," Sweetland Center for Writing, University of Michigan, <https://lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/instructors/teaching-resources/using-blogs-in-the-classroom.html>.

Other user-friendly platforms include Google's [Blogger](#), which is intuitive, easy to start up, and allows for flexibility with color palettes and multiple fonts. [WordPress](#) is one of the more popular blogging platforms; it is an all-purpose platform with multiple free design templates ("themes") and high capacity for text, images, and video. Users appreciate the extensive how-to support features and video tutorials available on the WordPress site.

### **Other Helpful WSU Resources for Creating Websites and Digital Media Projects**

WSU STAC: <http://guides.libraries.wright.edu/stac>

WSU New Media Incubator (Inc): <https://liberal-arts.wright.edu/about/new-media-incubator>

### **Creating your Blog Homepage**

Once you've chosen your platform, you will need to create a homepage for posting your blogs and also include a brief introduction of yourself—basically, an "About Me" blurb of 3-4 sentences (see below). Your blog page should be your homepage so that this is where readers first land when they connect to your site. Most blogging platforms provide templates and themes for creating your homepage as a blog page; see my own website homepage for an example of what I'm looking for here—the main thing is that the homepage should be where readers immediately see/find your blog posts. You will also need to choose a template design that reflects your personality/personal tastes. You are, after all, creating a personal blog, so beyond what you write, viewers should get a sense of who you are (or at least a sense of your media presence and style) through visual aspects such as design/layout, images, and color choices. Also, the more successful blogs [keep things simple](#) — don't overload your site by making it too "busy" or chaotic. Overall, then, the main thing that I want to see in your initial website set-up—**due Friday, May 17**—is that you are using a clear, coherent template or design theme, and that you've created the homepage as your blog page with the first blog posted and provided a brief "About Me" blurb.

### **The "About Me" Blurb**

You may blurb about yourself in whatever way that suits your personality, though typically blurbs should contain three main components: who you are, why you've created this website, and what your interests are as they relate to the website. It's nice to include an invitation to readers to leave comments, but not necessary; if you do, you'll want to phrase this in a way that sets some parameters for feedback, gently reminding readers of the purpose of this website and that this is not an open forum for rants, trolls, or anything else not related to the topics you're discussing. Whether you do the "About" blurb on the homepage or in a separate bio section, keep in mind that you will later revise/expand upon this to include a reflection on the overall website, including the other two sections due at the end of the semester.

### **Privacy and Sharing Your URL**

Remember, this is going to be a public website so although it's a personal blog you want to make sure that it remains professional and focused on the academic objectives; you are not required to share personal details of your life, only to the extent that is comfortable/safe for you. I also encourage you to make sure you set up your website with whatever privacy settings that are made available by the platform. For example, on my website, I have the privacy tool enabled so that my personal contact details are not openly visible or attainable and visitors can only contact

me through leaving comments or a message on the “Contact” page. In your blurb/bio, leave out details that identify where you live or family names/pictures (especially children). In other words, you can be personal but in a way that protects your privacy. If there are extenuating legal/personal safety circumstances where your online identity needs to remain protected or anonymous, then there is no need for you to use your “real” name; you are more than welcome to use a pseudonym or just your first name and no identifying pictures (and any student has the option to do this). More tips on best practices for protecting your privacy are noted below and available in the handout, “Tips on Writing and Responding to Blogs” (in Pilot).

After you’ve created your homepage/blog page, you’ll need to submit in the Pilot dropbox a link to your website (and don’t forget to publish your site—now or anytime you make updates). Once I have everyone’s URL, I’ll provide links for these on our class website so students can access each other’s blogs. Links will be listed with either the name of your website (if you provide one) or your first name. In blog posts and comments, students are expected to respect each other’s privacy. Anyone who fails to respect the privacy of their peers—identifying them by their full or real name, revealing personal details about someone, retweeting or reposting links to other students’ blogs without their permission—will be asked to leave the class, no exceptions.

## **Blog Guidelines**

You must write a minimum of 8 blog posts (50 points each), one for each unit, reflecting on any shared themes in the unit’s assigned readings. Keep in mind that blogs are a form of public writing (see “Tips for Writing and Responding to Blogs”), so you will want to ensure your writing is as clear and free of errors/typos as possible; in other words, blogs (and peer responses) must meet the general evaluation criteria for academic writing (see syllabus). These guidelines provide you with my general expectations of what is required in your blog; following these guidelines will help you see your writing develop over the course of the term. Blogging can take multiple forms and work in multiple contexts, and so this section of the project guidelines describes strategies for using blogs as a writing tool in the context of a classroom assignment or project.

## **Why Blogging?<sup>2</sup>**

You may already be used to writing and communicating in the digital landscape whether it be through Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, email, or a personal website. Blogging is a mode of online communication that can help improve your writing skills and build your confidence as a writer. By blogging, you can take ownership of your writing, become a better observer of others’ writing, and develop a more immediate and powerful understanding of audience. Blogs encourage experimenting and risk-taking, seriousness and play, and they foster an increased awareness of private and public writing. Blogging blends both the freeing aspect of short pieces that can be written in a relatively low-stakes environment with the sense of claiming one’s own voice and learning how to articulate ideas to a larger public. While reading your fellow students’ blogs and comments, and responding online with your own comments, you will come to recognize the value of clarity and what makes for strong and engaging posts. You will be able to see your own writing as something “real” with a practical application.

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<sup>2</sup> This section to top of p. 8 is adapted from Morris, “Using Blogs in the Classroom.”

Creating a blog can be a bridge between the familiar digital world and what is being asked of you in academic essays and other university-based assignments. Blogging can be a gateway or learning experience for students who will likely use digital technologies and media in their future endeavors and/or professions regardless of their discipline. Also, for the specific format of this class, an online course, blogging is a more dynamic form of engaging with the material and each other as opposed to using a static discussion board.

**Students may use blogging for various reasons and modes of writing:**

- responding to readings, maintaining a writer’s notebook or journal
- posting personal, reflective, exploratory, or open entries
- sharing student-generated research or links to class-related articles
- exploring visual rhetoric and digital media/writing
- practicing writing by:
  - developing voice and considering tone
  - working on titles, conciseness
  - brainstorming, drafting, facilitating peer review
- creating a showcase for final projects
- crafting an on-line image or presence

**Content/Style**

- Although you have plenty of leeway in determining *what you say*, it’s still important to keep in mind my expectations for *what you’re aiming to accomplish*. First and foremost, I want you to use the blog to reflect on course readings. There are multiple ways in which you might do this:
  - exploring specific themes and/or cross-cultural contexts in the readings;
  - analyzing a text’s stylistic choices, genre, structure;
  - making connections between the readings and your lived experiences;
  - or, posing questions for further reflection/exploration.
- Your blogs might take more than one of these approaches or any approach not included above. Mainly, these are **NOT** book reviews or summaries and should go beyond merely discussing whether you loved or hated the reading. Blogs should be analytical, reflective and/or probing in ways that prompt further ideas/responses to the texts. Blogs that only provide summaries or opinions limited to what you liked/disliked or were confused about, will only receive partial credit; you will be allowed to revise blogs for an improved grade.
- Remember your audience; assume that they too have read the texts. Your blog is intended to invite and encourage comments and participation from readers. Your blog should be interesting to read and attempt to show different ways of looking at or understanding aspects of the readings through your personal lens and/or insights.
- Write in a clear, engaging manner that develops **YOUR** voice—not necessarily an academic voice; this includes writing comments in response to each other’s blogs. Peer responses can be lively, debating different views, but in all instances should remain respectful and professional, following course guidelines for conduct (see syllabus).

**See:** “Tips for Writing & Responding to Blogs” and [“Blogging Basics”](#)

### Basic Blog Requirement Checklist

- **Title:** For each blog post, provide an engaging title to attract readers!
- **Format:** Type your blog post in a Word document, upload this to Pilot by the dropbox deadline, then, copy and paste into the appropriate location on your website.
- **Length:** Each blog post should be at least 300-500 words; anything below the minimum length will not be graded.
- **Links:** Good blogging etiquette includes linking to relevant sources or other bloggers, news articles, etc. wherever you discuss these in your post; see the handouts for tips on blogging and other student samples via the Student Projects section on my website.
- **Images:** Each blog post should be readable and visually appealing (think about font and make sure you use the same font for all posts). You must include at least one picture in each blog post: either photos you take, hand-drawings, an original meme, or relevant images found online (be sure to credit the source if it is not from an open access website).

**Timing:** Successful blogs remain consistent in theme and style and are frequently updated with new posts. For this class, you are expected to make weekly posts responding to each of the units, at least one blog for Weeks 1 and 4, and two for Weeks 2, 3, and 5. You will also need to comment on peers' posts at least ten times during the semester (see syllabus).

**Participation:** Reading and responding to each other's blogs can help create a more interpersonal online classroom community. Addressing peers by name in comments on each other's blogs and commenting on specific points in someone's blog can instill a sense of responsibility to, respect for, and familiarity with each other. Engaging with the material together will help you learn from each other through a lateral, peer-to-peer process. As noted in the syllabus, I will post my own readings of the texts to help clarify some of the more difficult readings but will refrain from commenting directly on your blogs. From my own experience, instructor prominence or high activity in online discussions/projects can often stifle student participation.

### Gender/Nation and Postcolonial Britain Pages

By the end of the semester you will be expected to create two additional sections or pages for your website. Like the blogs, you are allowed complete creative freedom in these sections but should still follow the general guidelines outlined here. In the **Gender/Nation** section, you will create a page that explores any theme/topic from the Victorian and/or Modernist periods covered in Weeks 1-3, with a focus on the intersections of gender and nation. In the **Postcolonial Britain** section, you will explore issues, texts, and themes related to the contemporary readings from Weeks 4-5. Because *Heart of Darkness* is a modernist text that deals with gender, colonialism, and the legacy of empire, you may explore this text in either page (but not both).

These sections of your website are not intended to provide the equivalent of a literary research analysis paper; rather, they are thematic explorations of cultural, social, and historical contexts for the literary time periods that we are studying in this class. Although online research is required, the pages are a space and opportunity for you to explore topics in British literary history through a more creative approach. Some suggestions include:

- exploring further any questions, issues, or interests that came up in your blog writing, making connections between several texts and socio-cultural contexts of the time period, and providing links to relevant articles, websites, etc.;
- doing some research into a key theme, topic, or historical context relevant to British literature and literary culture during the Victorian, Modernist and/or Contemporary periods, providing links to other online sources and media that readers of your website might want to explore;
- writing a profile of one or more writer(s) whose work(s) we have read in this class, including analysis of their literary relevance or influences as well as links to any related websites, literary texts, historical contexts, etc.

The options are wide open and I encourage you to contact me if you have any questions about how to create the research pages. No matter the topics that you explore in either page, don't forget to include interesting visuals and images where appropriate (and credit these where necessary); as part of the research components for these pages, I expect to see you make relevant links to other websites and online sources. You might also create your own podcasts, short videos, or digital media to include as part of your research. Both the STAC and Inc. are great resources here on campus and I've provided a handout in Pilot: "Digital Storytelling Resources and Tutorials." The main thing is that you should be creative in whatever way that best suits your interests, skills, and strengths. All written components of your research pages must be submitted to the Pilot dropbox in a Word document by the deadline, Friday, April 21 11:59 pm.

### **Bio Page**

You will need to create a bio page if you didn't already do this page when you wrote your "About Me" blurb. Here you might say more about your background, interests, accomplishments, future plans; look at some of the student samples on the course website. You should also reflect on the overall content of your website—its aims, interests, thematic scope, approaches, thoughts on British literature in general or major themes and topics (as explored in this class and your website), and so on and so forth—signaling to readers what they can find in each section, discussing what you've accomplished/created, or even where you might go further with this project. Maybe you'll plan to keep blogging on other literary periods, narrative artforms, or personal interests. Ideally, the objective of this entire project is not to be something static, created for a grade in a class, but something that allows for further exploration and engagement with literature, online/creative writing, and/or professional/personal blogging. Even if you don't continue this website you might decide to start a new blog. Also, you might use the blog and research pages that you created for this class as something you can show to potential employers.

Thus, the overall assessment of your "final" website will include consideration of its cohesive, appealing, public presentation. See the specific rubrics for each part of this project and be sure you carefully review these. Always communicate with me if you have any questions or need advice about how to approach any component of your website. More than anything, make something you can be proud of and something that will foster or sustain lifelong exploration!