



# Teesside University Excellence Case Studies

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Utilising student blogs for learning,  
consolidation, and assessment

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“The short-form nature of blog posts means that producing a post could be done relatively quickly, supporting the expectation of a weekly contribution”

**Christopher Hayes**

**Background:**

One of the key challenges we face as lecturers is ensuring that students are utilising their self-directed learning time effectively. This is particularly important for our first-year students, who are transitioning from college-style education, where homework and regular assessment are common, to university education, where the emphasis is placed on independence. In designing modules, “formative assessment” is generally discussed in terms of engagement during seminars and week-to-week participation. In conversations with colleagues, there is an apprehension to ask students to do work outside of class or to do in-class tests that “don’t count,” because the students will not engage if it will not contribute towards their final grade. How do we encourage students to continue their studies outside of the classroom? And how do we monitor that learning?

**Approach and Implementation:**

The BA (Hons) International Tourism Management degree is a completely redesigned and rewritten programme, replacing the old BA (Hons) Tourism Management course. All new modules were created, and a new assessment strategy was required that would align with the University’s new Academic Delivery Model (Teesside University, 2022), the Academic Enhancement Framework, and the approach of “Future Facing Learning” (Teesside University, 2019) and the International Business School’s New Learning Model. Assessments should be meaningful and valuable for the students, contributing to their skills development, ensuring that they are “Future Ready” for their careers. In this digital age, it is critical that our graduates are visible online as

employers will be looking at their LinkedIn profiles and other platforms. As such, it is important that students get on these platforms as early as possible to begin building up a portfolio of expertise that will set them apart from other applicants when it comes to applying for jobs. However, to do this, students must feel comfortable with online technologies and digital tools.

For the tourism students’ first module, “Understanding Tourism,” I wanted students to be assessed in such a way that it met some of the University’s core dimensions of academic enhancement:

- The assessment itself would mirror activity they might do in their professional lives (Future Ready);
- The assessment would require students to go beyond what they were taught in the classroom (Research Active);
- Students would develop digital skills through the assessment (Digitally Empowered).

I was also highly mindful of the issue addressed in the background section: how do I get the students to engage with content and study throughout the semester?

The resultant assessment was a portfolio comprising a selection of student blog posts. Each week, students would be given a question or prompt based on the topic discussed in the lecture and would have to write a short, 300-word blog post in response. At the end of the semester, students would then choose the best three blog posts and write a reflection on the experience. Teesside University already maintains a blogging platform (blogs.tees), which uses WordPress, a web content system used by many professional

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“By encouraging regular writing, students would build up a body of material from which to choose for submission, lessening the amount of work that has to be done for assessment after the end of the semester.”

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websites. This meant that students could sign up using their University accounts and create sites within minutes. To support the students in this activity, seminars were utilised to guide them through the WordPress platform and to teach basic Adobe Express skills so that they could personalise their individual blogs.



Figure 1. A student's blog, which has been customised with a patterned background and header graphic

### Outcomes and Benefits:

By engaging with the blogging activity, students could reflect on the topics discussed that week, ensuring that students would continue to engage with the learning beyond the scheduled lecture and seminar. Recall of topics was strong in the classroom and students appeared confident. Indeed, the blogging activity gave the students a degree of agency, making them responsible for their learning. Although the assigned blog topics related directly to topics discussed in class, students were responsible for applying that learning, carrying out further research online, and bringing in their own ideas and examples. From an assessment perspective, the continuous blogging activity meant that students had already completed part of their end assessment before the end of the

semester, lessening the amount of work to be carried out over the Christmas break and reducing the accompanying stress.

The blogs also form part of preparation for professional communication. In another module, the students were encouraged to create LinkedIn profiles and begin posting regularly to build up their online professional identity. I encouraged my students to consider continuing the practice of blogging to highlight their knowledge and expertise for future employers. Through this continuous engagement with digital communication platforms such as blogs or LinkedIn, students are developing their digital competencies and thinking about professional development and careers.

### Challenges

Although the blogging activity was largely successful, some issues did arise. First, while allowing students to choose a selection of their best blog posts for the assessment was done to enable students to reflect on their strengths, some students asked whether they could write only the minimum number of posts required for submission in the assessment portfolio and not complete any others. Second, not all students were able to write their blog post each week and would write several in one go, often a few weeks after they had studied the topic they were writing about, meaning that it was not fresh in their mind.

### Lessons Learned and Future Plans

I will continue to use the blogging activity with my first-year students going forward. To ensure that students write their blogs consistently week-to-week, I plan to incorporate active discussions into seminar sessions, as well as encourage students to respond to each other's posts. I hope that by using students' posts in the classroom will encourage students to write their posts each week, rather than either prioritise their "favourite" topics or write multiple posts intermittently in wellbeing week or over the holidays.