Best Blogging Practices
Rhetoric and Civic Life | Robin Kramer

During this course you have the unique opportunity to blog publicly about anything you want, and you have a great responsibility to sustain this "anything" for the duration of the semester — and perhaps even beyond. Here are some strategies to successfully launch your blog:

1) **Identify your purpose.** What is the purpose behind your blog? It will be hard – if not impossible – to sustain a strong blog if the overarching concept is shaky. One way to determine the purpose of your blog is to consider your audience. While bloggers certainly write to express themselves, a blog is *not* a journal solely for personal reflection. Rather, it's a way to engage specific readers in specific ways.

   Who is the primary audience you're targeting? What will these readers gain by reading your posts? What would make your audience visit your blog again? In my own experiences as a blogger, I've discovered that readers gravitate toward three types of posts: 1) posts that make them think, 2) posts that make them feel, and 3) posts that teach them how to do something.

   Posts that make your audience think. Deliver insightful content, plain and simple. Consider how your blog can inform readers about something new, challenge their assumptions, or help them to see a familiar concept in a novel fashion.

   Posts that make your audience feel. Blogs that humor, touch, delight, entertain, or move an audience are remembered. Readers long for communal relevance, and this can be achieved if you tap into universal human emotions and experiences. Elicit a laugh or a sigh of understanding; make readers *feel* something.

   Posts that teach your audience how to do something. A well-written tutorial can empower readers to live in a better way. A reader will be motivated to visit a blog again if they gain practical skill sets, such as learning how to play a guitar chord, or cook a new dish, or maintain proper form while lifting weights, or stretch a college student budget, or pull together a stylish outfit, or live a more environmentally-friendly lifestyle.

   So, ask yourself honestly: What will my readers gain from reading my blog? Will my blog challenge them to think (cognitive value)? Will it make them feel something (emotional value)? Will it teach them how do something (behavioral value)?

   Knowing your purpose and considering your audience is foundational for successful blogging, so don't rush this stage of planning. A good concept is essential for good results.

2) **Craft an interesting title and a clear tagline for your blog.** Readers may quickly gravitate toward (or dismiss) a blog based on its title alone, so create something memorable. Similarly, consider using the tagline — the phrase or singular sentence underneath the blog's title — to *succinctly* explain what the blog is about, especially if the blog's title is ambiguous. Consider the tagline to be the blog's "catch phrase," or how you would describe the blog in an elevator pitch.

   Title: It Isn't Easy Being Green. (Or Is It?)
   Tagline: Your guide to living a more sustainable life. Changing the world one household at a time.

Title: Lend Me Your Ear!
Tagline: Weekly reviews of musicians you don't know, but should.

Title: Growing Up Southern
Tagline: An insight into everything below the Mason-Dixon Line

Continue this practice as you sustain your blog by giving each individual *post* an interesting title, as well. For example, I'm automatically predisposed to be more interested to read a post titled, "Public Speaking: Better Off in the Casket?" than one titled "Giving a Speech."

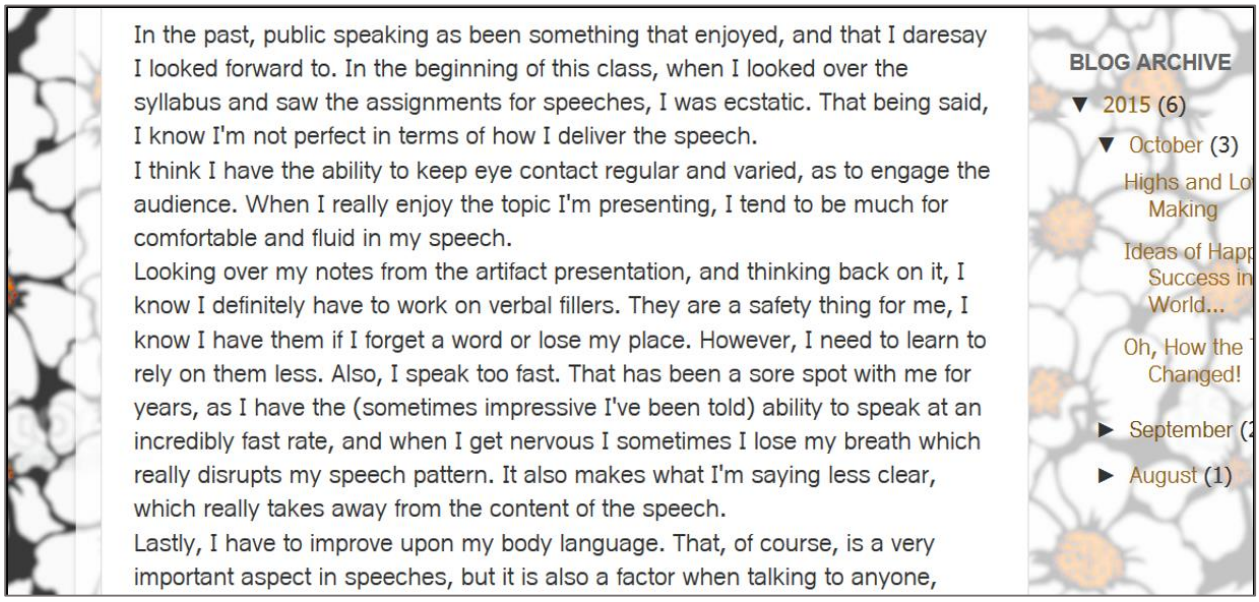
3) **Use web-appropriate formatting.** Unlike formal academic essays, online writing uses single-spaced formatting, and, as a general principle, it features paragraphs that are moderately short. To give the reader's eye a visual break between paragraphs, there should be double-spacing between paragraphs. (I.e., one line of open space to distinguish between paragraphs.)

Additionally, online writing should be left justified, without indentations at the start of new paragraphs.

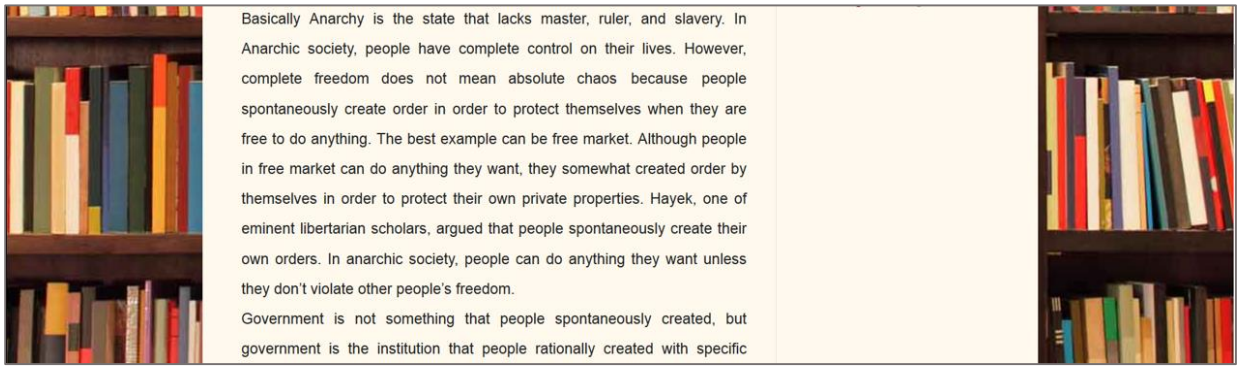
In other words, **do this:**

> Moments before I photocopied the syllabus for one of the college classes I'm teaching this semester, I noticed one mistake. Instead of writing *due* September 9, I had written *die* September 9.
>
> The *i* and *u*. So close together on the keyboard; so far apart in meaning.

Not this (no visual break between paragraphs):


In the past, public speaking as been something that enjoyed, and that I daresay I looked forward to. In the beginning of this class, when I looked over the syllabus and saw the assignments for speeches, I was ecstatic. That being said, I know I'm not perfect in terms of how I deliver the speech.
I think I have the ability to keep eye contact regular and varied, as to engage the audience. When I really enjoy the topic I'm presenting, I tend to be much for comfortable and fluid in my speech.
Looking over my notes from the artifact presentation, and thinking back on it, I know I definitely have to work on verbal fillers. They are a safety thing for me, I know I have them if I forget a word or lose my place. However, I need to learn to rely on them less. Also, I speak too fast. That has been a sore spot with me for years, as I have the (sometimes impressive I've been told) ability to speak at an incredibly fast rate, and when I get nervous I sometimes I lose my breath which really disrupts my speech pattern. It also makes what I'm saying less clear, which really takes away from the content of the speech.
Lastly, I have to improve upon my body language. That, of course, is a very important aspect in speeches, but it is also a factor when talking to anyone,

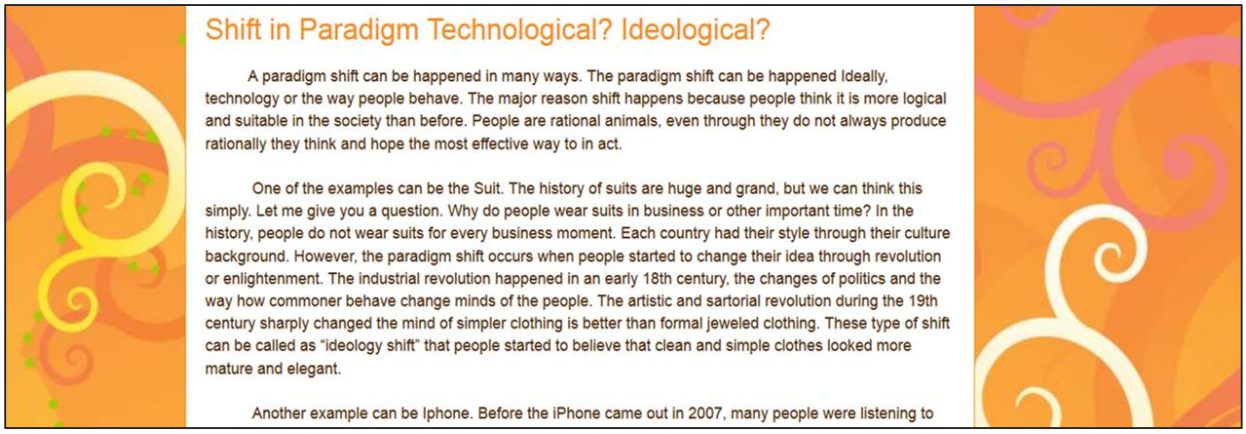
Or this (double-spaced text throughout the post, with no visible break between paragraphs):



Basically Anarchy is the state that lacks master, ruler, and slavery. In Anarchic society, people have complete control on their lives. However, complete freedom does not mean absolute chaos because people spontaneously create order in order to protect themselves when they are free to do anything. The best example can be free market. Although people in free market can do anything they want, they somewhat created order by themselves in order to protect their own private properties. Hayek, one of eminent libertarian scholars, argued that people spontaneously create their own orders. In anarchic society, people can do anything they want unless they don't violate other people's freedom.

Government is not something that people spontaneously created, but government is the institution that people rationally created with specific

Or this (visual breaks between paragraphs, but use of indentations instead of left-justified text):



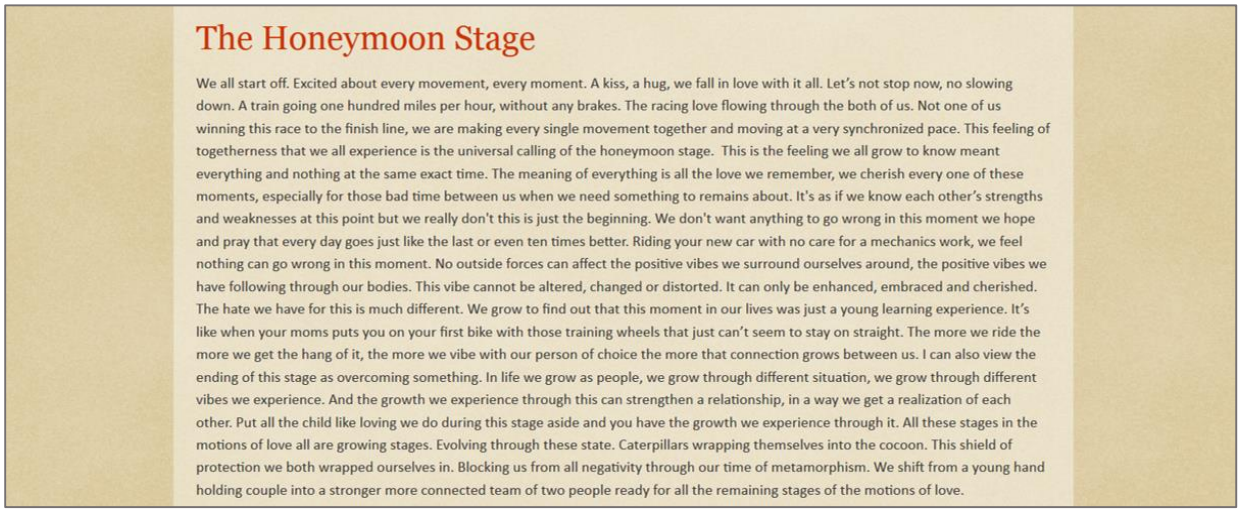
Shift in Paradigm Technological? Ideological?

A paradigm shift can be happened in many ways. The paradigm shift can be happened Ideally, technology or the way people behave. The major reason shift happens because people think it is more logical and suitable in the society than before. People are rational animals, even through they do not always produce rationally they think and hope the most effective way to in act.

One of the examples can be the Suit. The history of suits are huge and grand, but we can think this simply. Let me give you a question. Why do people wear suits in business or other important time? In the history, people do not wear suits for every business moment. Each country had their style through their culture background. However, the paradigm shift occurs when people started to change their idea through revolution or enlightenment. The industrial revolution happened in an early 18th century, the changes of politics and the way how commoner behave change minds of the people. The artistic and sartorial revolution during the 19th century sharply changed the mind of simpler clothing is better than formal jeweled clothing. These type of shift can be called as "ideology shift" that people started to believe that clean and simple clothes looked more mature and elegant.

Another example can be Iphone. Before the iPhone came out in 2007, many people were listening to

Or this (one really long paragraph, or, to put it another way, a formidable "wall of words"):



The Honeymoon Stage

We all start off. Excited about every movement, every moment. A kiss, a hug, we fall in love with it all. Let's not stop now, no slowing down. A train going one hundred miles per hour, without any brakes. The racing love flowing through the both of us. Not one of us winning this race to the finish line, we are making every single movement together and moving at a very synchronized pace. This feeling of togetherness that we all experience is the universal calling of the honeymoon stage. This is the feeling we all grow to know meant everything and nothing at the same exact time. The meaning of everything is all the love we remember, we cherish every one of these moments, especially for those bad time between us when we need something to remains about. It's as if we know each other's strengths and weaknesses at this point but we really don't this is just the beginning. We don't want anything to go wrong in this moment we hope and pray that every day goes just like the last or even ten times better. Riding your new car with no care for a mechanics work, we feel nothing can go wrong in this moment. No outside forces can affect the positive vibes we surround ourselves around, the positive vibes we have following through our bodies. This vibe cannot be altered, changed or distorted. It can only be enhanced, embraced and cherished. The hate we have for this is much different. We grow to find out that this moment in our lives was just a young learning experience. It's like when your moms puts you on your first bike with those training wheels that just can't seem to stay on straight. The more we ride the more we get the hang of it, the more we vibe with our person of choice the more that connection grows between us. I can also view the ending of this stage as overcoming something. In life we grow as people, we grow through different situation, we grow through different vibes we experience. And the growth we experience through this can strengthen a relationship, in a way we get a realization of each other. Put all the child like loving we do during this stage aside and you have the growth we experience through it. All these stages in the motions of love all are growing stages. Evolving through these state. Caterpillars wrapping themselves into the cocoon. This shield of protection we both wrapped ourselves in. Blocking us from all negativity through our time of metamorphism. We shift from a young hand holding couple into a stronger more connected team of two people ready for all the remaining stages of the motions of love.

Proper web-based formatting is easy to enact, and it should become part of your standard blogging practice.

4) **Make hyperlinks clean and live.** A benefit of blogging is that you easily can embed hyperlinks to direct readers to other sites or sources. To maintain a professional appearance, hyperlinks should be both *clean* (meaning that they don't contain any unnecessary and clutter-causing elements) and *live* (meaning that they directly link to the referenced site, rather than show the URL in text only).

Bad: Visit the Penn State website: http://psu.edu	Neither live nor clean
Bad: Visit the Penn State website: http://psu.edu	Live, but not clean
Bad: Visit the Penn State website.	Clean, but not live
Good: Visit the Penn State website.	Both clean and live

5) **Be mindful of additional aesthetic design choices.** Whether we acknowledge it or not, a cursory glance at a blog (or any website, for that matter) can yield many judgments. Without reading one word, we may be able to discern important matters – such as whether the site is credible – and we glean these initial perceptions based on appearances alone. Blogs that look attractive and professional in terms of their formatting, color schemes, and graphics are judged more favorably than blogs that appear visually sloppy, unbalanced, or amateur.

   So, how can we be mindful of our blog's aesthetics? In addition to the aforementioned tips about using web-appropriate formatting and clean/live hyperlinks, the most essential principle is to ensure that the blog is readable. Fonts should be an appropriate size and form – neither too small (which causes eye strain), too large (which make the writing, regardless of content, appear elementary), or too ornate (which, again, strains a reader's eyes). Choosing a standard serif font (like Times New Roman) or a crisp sans serif font (like Calibri) is smart.

   In terms of colors, consider your blog like a room where walls are painted in a neutral hue so colorful accents can pop. If your entire blog is a bold red, a highly-saturated royal blue, a whimsical pink, a shocking yellow, or even entirely black (minus the font), readers can feel overwhelmed. Instead, select a neutral background that's balanced with a crisp and contrasting font, and then add color through key textual features (the blog title, the tagline, and the post titles) and other visual features such as images and videos.

   Curious about what colors look good together when designing your own site? Learn more about complimentary hues here.

6) **Write strong introductions.** If you don't reach your readers quickly, it doesn't matter if your post ends well; they might have given up before reading that far. Good introductions establish your ethos as a genuine, likeable, informed, or otherwise trustworthy author, and they increase the likelihood that your audience will continue reading.

   Each time I write an introduction, I consider how to *hook* and *orient* my readers. First, a clever, insightful, humorous, relatable, or otherwise engaging opening sentence or paragraph (the hook) captures the audience's attention and draws them into the post. Second, the introduction should orient the reader to the topic, especially if you've discussed it in prior posts. Consider how you react when you enter a conversation that's already in progress. You might feel confused or distant until one of the participants catches you up to speed. Orienting your readers from the onset does the same thing: it succinctly provides any missing context so the reader can jump comfortably into the conversation, even if he or she is new.

7) **Incorporate relevant visuals.** If the adage is true that a picture is worth a thousand words, then why not harness the power of images in your blog? Search photo-sharing websites (such as Flickr) and select from the "Creative Commons" licensed images, providing attribution as requested.

   If you can't find a fitting image, consider making one with a website such as PicMonkey, a user-friendly site that provides quick and interesting visual templates. (I created the image below for a blog post using PicMonkey in under 2 minutes.)

   Embedding video clips is also a useful way to incorporate visual elements into your posts, if appropriate for your topic.

8) **Develop a clear and memorable voice.** It's okay to sound conversational. It's *essential* to sound interested and interesting. Dazzle us with delicious verbs. Sideswipe us with unique expressions. Lovingly attend to your language, and readers will love you.

9) **Reach outside readers.** Yes, really. Your classmates know you, like you, and are encouraged to comment on your blog. Outside readers don't have the same obligation, which is why having outside readership is so meaningful. Blogging opens the door for genuine readership. Build on this, and consider how you can share your posts across social media to garner new readers.

10) **Above all, be passionate.** Blogging, like all skills, takes time and effort to develop. As you write, find your niche, hone your style, and genuinely commit to what you have to say. After all, if you're not interested in your content, your audience won't be either. As someone who has written nearly one thousand blog posts, I can attest that given the right focus, blogging can be a creative and rewarding outlet for both you and your readers.