

Blogging in Critical Reading and Analysis (HIST 3914)

Getting Started

- **Getting your own blog site.** Your first task is to set up your own personal blog page on VT's secure WordPress site. To do so is pretty simple. Go to <http://blogs.lt.vt.edu/> and click on "sign up for your own blog here." Consult this link to help you customize your blog and familiarize yourself with VT's WordPress site: <https://blogs.lt.vt.edu/support/documentation/>
- **Small things that will make a big difference:**
 1. Choose a user name on WordPress that is close to your real name. Good=rHirsh. Bad=Terminator94. If you already have a blog account, set up another site for use in this course.
 2. When you set up your blog, check the box that allows search engines to index your site. Go to Dashboard → Settings → Privacy. Next, click "Allow Search Engines to Index this Site," and make sure that no other option is checked.
 3. On the dashboard, choose "settings" and "discussion." You may keep the boxes checked that ask for a user to provide an email (this will not display when the comment is published), but please uncheck the boxes that hold comments for moderation. (It is easy to change this back at the end of the semester.)
 4. Check the main course website to confirm that your blog has been syndicated. Your post(s) will appear on the main page, and your blog's title will appear on the "contributors" page. It may take up to 24 hours for this action to occur, so please be patient. The main blog updates every hour, so even after your URL has been added, it may take a while for your post to show up.
- As soon as you have set up your account, please send the URL of the blog site to Prof. Hirsh (richard@vt.edu). He will add it to the mother blog for the course (<https://blogs.lt.vt.edu/criticalreading/>). Please set up the blog no later than 5:00 PM, Monday, August 28.

Blogging Basics

I expect the blog will help you become more engaged with the course materials and help you develop a deeper and more sophisticated reading and writing in the field of history. Moreover, I think these blogging exercises will assist you in becoming more adept at historical analysis and more proficient in locating and using historical sources.

For blog posts:

1. Write a summary of the information you found in the resource.
2. Explicitly identify the perspective and the historiographical approach taken by the author. As we move through the course, you should develop a better understanding and appreciation of different types of methodologies used by authors. Try to highlight and describe these methodologies and approaches.
3. Provide a critique of the author. Does the approach help or hinder your understanding of the historical event in a useful new way?
4. Include a proper Chicago-style citation of the source. If you're just citing a web page, provide the author of the page (when available), the title of the page, the URL, and the date you found it.
5. Put your name somewhere on the post, preferably in the title, or near the top of the post, as I also did.
6. Make sure you select the proper category for listing the blog post. Don't fret too much if you forget to take this step. The GTA or I can always enter the correct category after you post the blog.
7. Optional, but lots of fun: insert pictures and videos into the blog post.
8. Include a word count of your post. You can see the number of words used in the bottom left corner of the post-writing box in WordPress. Your post should be a minimum of 250 words in length.

Commenting Basics

Reading and responding to other people's blog posts gives you the opportunity to ask questions about a particular topic, elaborate on a point made in the blog post, relate the material in your own post (or another student's) to the post you're commenting on, and generally reflect on how the post helps you better understand your efforts to read and write history more effectively.

The Critical Reading Blog

Your individual blogs are syndicated to the main course blog, aka "the mother blog" (<https://blogs.lt.vt.edu/criticalreading/>). Syndication means that your posts will be "fed" to this site, which will serve as the gateway to the course.

Fair warning: The use of blogging in classes remains somewhat experimental, and the ride may be bumpy as we figure things out. It may also be necessary to make adjustments to assignments and expectations along the way. Please fasten your seat belts.

I am grateful to Professors Amy Nelson and Ed Gitre for allowing me to modify her instructions (above) and for their kind help in teaching me how to use blogs in ways that enhance the classroom experience.