

You Can Blog and Your Student's Can Too! – A Class Newsletter to keep your parents informed and interacting with your class!

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Tips and ideas: Settings

When you are on the homepage, you find settings and any other editing options by clicking on 'customize' at the top right of the screen.

'BASIC' tab

1. The **title** is the name of your blog that your parents will see when they open the home page. You can change it at any time without upsetting any of the posts or other gadgets you have added.
2. Create a **description** for your parents. This will show up on your blog under the title on the home page. The description introduces what the blog is about and how the parents can use it to interact with the class. It can help to initiate excitement for what you are trying to do and the goals you have set with your class to create a great newsletter!

'PUBLISHING' tab

1. **Blog Spot Address** is your personal URL address that your parents will need to access blog. Make it a name that corresponds with the title of your blog if at all possible. This helps create familiarity and makes it easier to remember. Type in the word verification and save the settings.
2. Custom domain is a service you pay for.

'FORMATTING' tab

1. You edit the way your **posts** look on this page. Choose how many posts will appear on the home page and the format for the date of the post.
2. The **archive date** is how the post date will look in the archive. The archive is a list of earlier posts that can be viewed from the home page if you choose this option. (See Page Elements – Gadgets – Blog Archive)

'COMMENTS' tab

1. **Comments** are made by viewers at the end of posts. This should be set to **show** to allow the students to view what parents are saying about their articles.

2. Allowing **who can comment** is a personal issue. I allow anyone to comment because I also choose the option of reading the comments before they are posted. (See Comment Moderation) This also makes it easier for parents, grandparents and other relatives or friends who want to view the blog to do so. If you choose the option **only members**, then you will also have to type in their email addresses and invite them to create a password for viewing the blog. (See **Permissions**)
3. Using a **pop-up window** for your blog is standard and most internet users are familiar on how to use a pop-up window. It also keeps the home page clean and free from outside additions.
4. Make sure the **comments default** is allowing new posts to have comments. This is the purpose of the interactive class newsletter.
5. The **comments form message** is a fun feature. You can type something here that will be at the top of the comment screen. I put a quote from Dr. Seuss because my class knows I love him!
6. **Comment Moderation** is VERY IMPORTANT! In order for you to be in charge of what is written as a comment, you must click **'always'**. Type in your email address or one you want the comments sent to, so you can preview them before allowing them on the site. Yes, this takes time. But, it is worth it! Students immediately realize they cannot be mean. ** I also tell my students that I will not post a comment if it does not have their name on it! You say it – You own it! Be Proud of It!
7. **Deleting A Comment – On the homepage** Click on comment from the article that you want to delete it from. You will see a small trash can below each comment. Click on the trash can to delete the comment.

“ARCHIVING” tab

1. This is where you decide how often the posts will be archived or saved. You can allow readers to see the archived posts from the homepage if you choose this option in layout. (See Page Elements – Gadgets – Blog Archive) Viewing archived posts on the home page makes them available to read and comment on as well.

‘PERMISSIONS’ tab

1. The **Blog Authors** are people you allow to ‘work’ on your blog.
 - a. This is where you add your **students as authors**. Being an author gives students the ability to post only.
 - i. **Option #1:** I created an email address and password for the entire class before I set up the blog. This saved a lot of time and the students log on using the same ID. It meant that I had joined the blog for them and created the password so that they were up and running the first day of class.
 - ii. **Option #2:** You can use the parent’s emails. (At the beginning of the year, ask them for an email address that the student can remember. However, you will have to invite each parent/child to join and wait for them to create a password. You won’t know their password.

- b. If you have a **parent helper** or **aid** that is going to monitor or edit the newsletter, you can add them as an author. Type in their email address. They will get a message to join the blog in their email box. After they join and get a password, they will only be able to post. You will need to **grant them administration privileges** by clicking on that option under their email in the add authors box. Being an administrator means they can do what you can do. However, they will not get comments to preview unless you put in their email address under the *'comments'* tab. (Refer to *Comments tab #6*)
2. **A Blog Reader** is someone who is allowed to view the blog. I chose **'anybody'** because I have not had any problems yet with outsiders finding and commenting on the blog. I also want to give parents the option of sharing the blog with close relatives. If you use **only people I choose**, you will have to enter all the email addresses of your parents. However, if you have already used their addresses for creating student authors, then they can access the blog already. You could then choose **only blog authors**.

Tips and Ideas: Layout

When you are on the homepage, you find layout and any other editing options by clicking on 'customize' at the top right of the screen.

PAGE ELEMENTS tab - ADD A GADGET

From here you can arrange and add gadgets to the home page. These features do not scroll down when new posts are added. You can drag and drop these features to any area you would like on your home page. They stay there until you delete them. You delete them by clicking 'edit' found on the gadget and choosing the remove button.

PAGE HEADER (Basics)

This is a great way to create a catchy and fun Headliner for your page. I created a graphic art picture first in 'Microsoft Paint'. Then, I uploaded that picture. I copied and pasted the title and description of the blog from the 'Basic' tab under settings. This header stays at the top of the blog.

TEXT (Basics)

When you add text, it does not scroll down like the posts do. I used this feature to write a 'welcome' which serves as a general explanation for parents use. Drag and drop this feature to the top of your home page. I have also used this feature to add a "Teacher Note" from time to time and placed it on the side bar.

POLL (Basics)

I use this feature for the interviewer articles. Students can guess who was interviewed. It is a fun way to create drama and interaction. I have also used it for fun review questions like, “Which scientist developed the Periodic Table?”

BLOG ARCHIVE (Basics)

Choose this option to show previous articles (archiving) from past months and years. Comments can be made to past articles as well.

HTML/JAVA SCRIPT (Basic)

From this portal I create **slideshows of pictures** from class. Here’s my easy way. I use Picasa Web Album as the place to store class photos. Picasa is a free photo editor and organizer that you download onto your computer. You upload your pictures from your computer in Picasa to the web album. From there, the HTML code is ready to cut and paste into this gadget. Another advantage to using Picasa is parents can click on any picture from the blog home page and it will redirect them to the Web Album. From there, they can download pictures they would like of their students. If you would like to know how to do this, at the end of this handout I have included brief instruction on getting that code from Picasa Web Album. Note: Our school has a disclaimer in the registration packets that allows us to use pictures of the children. I have never had a parent upset that pictures are on the blog. They have loved being able to download pictures they wanted for personal use.

Tips and Ideas: Posting

When you are on the homepage, you find posting and any other editing options by clicking on ‘customize’ at the top right of the screen.

CREATE tab

- The students will **create new posts** here. They have simple editing tools. You can allow them to use them or not. I would keep it simple. This is better for the ‘overall’ appearance of the homepage.
- I have them put on 3 specific **labels** separated by commas: First name last initial, school year, and subject of their article (e.g. alena s, 2008-09, history) I do this so that they can easily view their articles all at once, to read other articles of the same subject matter for ideas, and to keep articles organized by years. The labels have to be typed exactly the same way each time they are used or a new label is created. (e.g. history, History – are 2 different labels)
- When they are finished with the post, they **DO NOT PUBLISH POST!** They only **SAVE NOW**. Then, I have my parent volunteer read the posts, do some brief editing and publish the post. If a

student accidentally publishes a post, you can click on the 'edit post' tab, click on the student post to 'edit', then click save and it takes it off the homepage until you publish it again.

- Published posts scroll down putting the most recent post on top.

EDIT POSTS tab

You will be able to view and edit posts from here. If you click on the arrow to the left of each post, it opens the post on the current page, rather than directing you to a new page. You also see the labels that have been added to posts and can view posts by label as well. (See Posting - Create tab)

How to insert a slide show from Picasa Web Albums

1. From your Picasa web album home page **click on the album** you want to create a slide show with.
2. On the right side bar, click '**link to this album**'
3. Click '**embed slide show**'
4. **Highlight then Copy** the HTML code from the box highlighted in yellow
5. Return to the gadget HTML/JAVA SCRIPT (Basic) and paste the code in the content box. Give your slide show a title and save.