



## Writing a blog

The Arts and Humanities Research Council's blog is a great platform to tell both the wider academic community and general public what you're up to, and promote your research.

Blog entries are typically fairly short, informal and focused pieces of writing that aim to make a simple point well.

They will contain a few links that will allow the reader to click through and access more detail, if they choose. But they are not the place to present a detailed and fully-referenced argument.

As with all writing for a general audience, grabbing and maintaining your readers' attention is key.

To do this:

### 1. **Blog entries need a great headline.**

Something that does two jobs: Grabs the attention of your audience and grabs the attention of search engines.

Your headline needs to be simple, catchy and explicit. Remember, people turn to the internet for information and tend to approach text in a very literal way; avoid puns and other word play.

Your headline also needs to have as many keywords as possible. This will help grab the attention of search engines such as Google and make it more likely that your post will be found by someone browsing the internet. (As opposed to someone purposely looking at the AHRC website and clicking through to the blog.)

### 2. **Your writing needs to be direct.**

The attention span of readers on the internet is notoriously short and you need to work hard to overcome this.

Whereas in print people tend to start at the beginning of an article and read through to the end. Online they seem to approach text differently. People may scan text for keywords. They may read a bit, scroll to the end. Then dive back in again. Or they may click a link and disappear off after glancing through the headline. As a result you need to make any key points quickly and economically. It also helps to front load your writing to make sure that the most important points are in the first couple of sentences.

In addition, keep your sentences short; ideally no more than 10-15 words. This can be tricky, especially if you are used to writing in an academic style. But studies have shown it makes a real difference to the way readers engage with writing online.

As with headlines, remember that search engines will be 'reading' your blog as well. So, include useful, relevant keywords where you can without making your writing clumsy or awkward.

### **3. Make the content useful.**

Good blogs contain a good story that is relevant to readers.

Ask yourself: What is the most interesting aspect of your research? What can you tell people that they will want to share with their friends and colleagues? What have you discovered that is relevant to a general audience's experience of the world? If you are challenging some orthodoxy, say so. If you are offering a new perspective on the world, be clear what it is. If you are inviting the public to get involved with your data, be direct.

Put bluntly: Why, with all the distractions available online, should a reader care about what you are doing enough to stop clicking and read your blog?

Thinking about your work in these terms may seem brutal. But remember it's only an exercise to strengthen your writing.

The audience *is* interested and does care a great deal about arts and humanities research. In an increasingly confusing, rapidly-changing world, where old certainties are being relentlessly challenged, intelligent readers are hungry for content that offers insight.

The AHRC blog is a great place to talk to your audience directly. Have fun with it.