

Churchill Fellows are increasingly using blogs to **communicate their findings** and **build an audience**, during and after their travels. Here are some suggestions for how you can create and use a blog. Personal advice is available from our Communications team: email Ben on [ben.anstis@wcmt.org.uk](mailto:ben.anstis@wcmt.org.uk).

### **What is a blog?**

Blogging can look daunting if you haven't done it before, but essentially, it's your own soap box to address the world. These days it can be done very quickly and cheaply using user-friendly hosts like Wordpress, and there are lots of free online tutorials if you get stuck or need extra support.

A blog is like an online journal, typically written from a **personal perspective**, that records your activities and reflections. It is usually formatted as a very simple website that displays your posts in the order they were published, starting with the most recent. It can have different sections for different types of content (for example 'findings', 'visits', 'photo gallery' etc).

Blog posts tend to be **bite-sized** and **digestible**. For example, you wouldn't expect to learn everything there is to know about an issue by reading one post. But you might learn about a particular aspect of that issue or how it has affected an individual or a particular group of people.

Posts are also usually about something that is happening now. They have a very short shelf-life, so it's important that they're **relevant and topical**. For the same reason, they can also be more **informal and transitory** than other types of content.

### **Why should I blog?**

Firstly, a blog is a great way of keeping track of your observations and reflections as you investigate your issue on your travels. It will be much harder to recall information and ideas once you have completed your trip. You may also find that the act of writing things down (or more accurately, typing them up) will actually help you to **develop your thinking** and to analyse and interpret your experiences.

The advantage of a blog over keeping a private notebook or diary is that it will allow you to get a head start on **sharing your findings** with others. You should think of it as a chance to **begin a conversation**, test ideas and get feedback from people who care about the issues you are researching as much as you do. If you can start to get people interested in your Fellowship while you're still travelling, you'll have a ready-made audience for when you're ready to publish your [Fellowship report](#).

In this way, you can use a blog that begins while you're on the road as a way to build and mobilise an audience. Readers will be attracted to follow a 'live' account of your travels, as this has an inbuilt

sense of discovery and drama. Once you return to the UK, that audience can be mobilised as a network of supporters and collaborators for your ideas.

### **How can I create a blog?**

There are many free, easy to use blog providers ('platforms') that you can use to 'host' your blog. These are sufficient for most non-commercial bloggers, and certainly for most beginners. The most popular free platform is [Wordpress.com](https://www.wordpress.com), but there are plenty of others, including [Wix](https://www.wix.com), [Blogger](https://www.blogger.com) and [Weebly](https://www.weebly.com). They all come with templates enabling you to easily create an appealing visual design for your blog. Which host is best for you mainly comes down to taste. One way you could decide is by checking out our list of [blogs](#) by Fellows currently travelling, and seeing which ones you like the look of.

With free platforms, your host's name will be included in your blog site's URL (eg [www.winstonchurchill.wordpress.com](https://www.winstonchurchill.wordpress.com)). If you want a customised URL that doesn't include your host's name, you'll have to use a paid-for platform. That might mean buying your own domain name and web hosting, for which the most popular UK provider is 123-Reg. Or it might mean using a 'disguised' platform such as Wordpress.org (not to be confused with its '.com' sister.)

The main reason to use a paid-for platform would be that you anticipate your blog developing into a long-term professional tool. In this case, you might want to be able to add more sophisticated 'plug-ins' (widgets and other bits of functional software), to sell things (eg a book on your ideas or tickets to your events), to accept donations, or to have a stand-alone domain name (eg 'www.yourname.com'). All of these become easier and more sophisticated with a paid platform.

### **Or should I vlog?**

You might decide that the written word isn't the best way of documenting your Fellowship travels. Some of our Fellows have opted to keep a 'video blog', or vlog, instead of a traditional blog. It's easy enough to do this by filming on a smartphone and creating a [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com) or [Vimeo](https://www.vimeo.com) channel for your Fellowship.

In deciding between a blog or a vlog, it's worth **considering who your audience is**. Are the people you want to reach with your Fellowship more likely to engage with film or the written word? Which medium will present your findings in the most appropriate way? Which are you best placed to create?

### **How should I structure my blog?**

Once you've created your blog or vlog, you should write a very short introduction to your project, ideally by creating an 'About' section. This should state who you are, the issue you are researching, why it matters and why you're interested in it. You should also explain what a Churchill Fellowship is and what you'll be doing on yours.

This is not the same as writing an introductory post for the main section of your blog site. The latter is a good idea, but it will move further down your stream of posts as you create more above it. So a separate 'About' section will allow people to always locate your basic summary information.

You should also create a Contact section, so that people who are interested in your Fellowship can get in touch with you, typically by email. Be wary of showing your personal phone number in such a public context.

A photo of yourself is always handy, as it allows readers to relate to you better. It can be on the home page or the About page. If it shows you engaged in your topic or your travels, that will look lively and attractive.

Once you've got these basics out of the way, you're ready to start blogging.

### **How do I write a blog post?**

There's no set formula for writing a blog post. It's your blog, so put your own stamp on it. If you're not an experienced writer, just try to **write things as you would say them**. Ask yourself, 'Would I really talk like that?' You're more likely to create engaging and accessible posts by writing in your own voice than by attempting a style that you don't feel comfortable with. Bear in mind that this is not academic or business writing, it's usually a personal account of activities and ideas, so it doesn't need the third-person formal tone of other genres.

Each post you write should **address one particular subject**: an organisation you visited, an idea you've had or a story someone told you. You should start the process of writing a post by deciding what this subject is. Inevitably you'll find yourself straying into other territory as you write, but don't try to cover too much. Blog posts are supposed to be limited in scope.

As with everything you write, it's a good idea to think about your audience. What observations from your travels are relevant to them? What details will be of most interest? You should think of each post as **the start of a conversation**. Invite your readers to respond to your post with their own views or get in touch with you if they'd like more information. When they send a comment, respond to it.

**Your posts should be short** as visitors to your blog are unlikely to have limitless time. 600 words is probably the maximum you should write. Keep it short and sharp and always have a point to make.

It's also a good idea not to spend a long time writing each post. You should aim to start and finish in the same sitting. As we mentioned previously, blog posts have a very short shelf-life, so it's important that they have a current, of-the-moment feel. If you visit an amazing organisation, write a post about them that day. Your blog isn't the place for your definitive take on your Fellowship, so try not to agonise over what you write. It's much more important to **capture the moment**.

### **How often should I blog?**

You should **blog regularly**. You want visitors to your blog to be in no doubt that it's active and being updated often, otherwise they probably won't return for a second visit. You might not feel like blogging every day, but you should try to set yourself a target and stick to it. Blogging once every three days might be a good and realistic aim. Even if you can only manage a very short, 100-word post, it will keep momentum going and it's far better than stale material.

### **What makes for a good blog?**

If you follow the advice we've already given in this guide, you won't go too far wrong. To recap, our top tips are:

- Keep it short.
- Write about what's happening now.
- Write with your audience in mind.
- Invite feedback.
- Write in your own voice.
- Cover only one subject in each post.

- Write quickly.
- Post regularly.

Using a **mix of media** (images, video clips and audio clips, as well as text) will also make your blog more inviting and interesting.

### **How to spread the word**

Another vital ingredient of a good blog is an audience. It's important to spend time finding people interested in reading your posts, particularly if you've spent a lot of time writing them.

**Talking about your Fellowship on social media**, particularly Twitter, can be really helpful. Tweet about each new blog post several times and make sure to tag us @wcmtuk so we can retweet you to our 6,000+ followers. Make sure that each tweet conveys what your project is about in a way that will be very clear to someone who isn't already familiar with your Fellowship. If you tweet 'Take a look at my new blog post about my Churchill Fellowship in the USA', or something similar, this won't help to get new people interested in your project. Another good tip is to identify people and organisations who you know have an interest in your issue and tag them in your tweets.

Make sure to talk about your blog in our [thematic networks](#). Whatever your subject, there are bound to be other Churchill Fellows who will be interested in your findings, or who possibly even researched a similar subject on their Fellowship.

### **Glossary**

**Blog**: An online journal, usually used to document someone's personal perspective.

**Blogger**: Somebody who has their own blog or contributes to a blog.

**Blogosphere**: All blogs, or the blogging community. 'This is a hot topic right now in the blogosphere'.

**Blog post**: An entry to a blog.

**Blogroll**: A list of other blogs you want to direct your reader to.

**Listicle**: A type of article, often used by bloggers, that uses a list as its thematic structure. '10 amazing things I learnt on my Churchill Fellowship'.

**Permalink**: The unique URL of a post within your blog. Use this when you want to link to a post.

**Platform**: A site you can to act as a host for your blog.

### **Further advice**

Contact Ben Anstis, Communications Officer, on [ben.anstis@wcmt.org.uk](mailto:ben.anstis@wcmt.org.uk)