**UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY**
Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning

# TI CONNECTIONS GUIDELINES

TI Connections is a dynamic, online communications channel of the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning. It consists of both a magazine-style blog and an e-newsletter. Content is first produced on the blog and a curated, thematic collection of blog posts is presented in the monthly newsletter. Contributors consist of TI staff and guest bloggers – key influencers and experts in their fields — invited to participate.
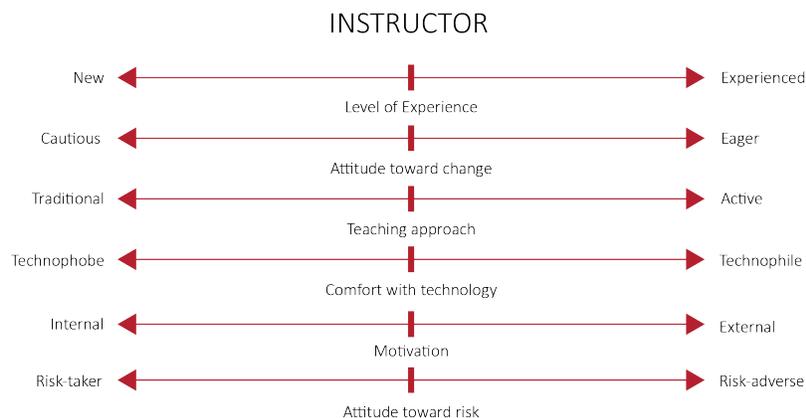
## OBJECTIVES

1.  Share and disseminate the discoveries made by faculty, staff and students in teaching and learning at the University of Calgary.
2.  Raise the profile of the Taylor Institute and grow our networks.
3.  Celebrate and communicate our initiatives and successes.

## KEY AUDIENCES

**Internal:** When developing your blog, try to visualize who you are writing it for. **Most of the work at the Taylor Institute is targeted to academic staff and graduate students. Other important internal audiences to consider include: undergraduate students, university leadership and policy-makers and support staff.** When writing for instructors consider some of the following factors shown in Figure 1 when you are developing your message. Are they a new instructor nervous about confronting a studio full of technology? Are they a seasoned professor itching to break out of their traditional lecture-based teaching approach? Are they motivated by the possibility of a teaching awards nomination? **By considering these factors, you can better tailor the message and content of your posts to specific groups. Also take into account culture, discipline, faculty or departmental norms and university-wide guidelines that may influence your readers.**

*Figure 1*



INSTRUCTOR

| New | Experienced |
| Level of Experience |
| Cautious | Eager |
| Attitude toward change |
| Traditional | Active |
| Teaching approach |
| Technophobe | Technophile |
| Comfort with technology |
| Internal | External |
| Motivation |
| Risk-taker | Risk-adverse |
| Attitude toward risk |

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**External:** A key part of raising our profile involves recognition of our work beyond the University of Calgary. Take into account, that your readers may include representatives from national and international teaching and learning centres, national and international colleges and universities, University of Calgary alumni, former staff, as well as press and media.

STRATEGIES

| Audience-driven | Innovative content | Excellent visuals | Unique voice |
|---|---|---|---|
| All readers have a need. It's our job to identify that need and think of creative ways to satisfy that it. Content should be tailored to and developed for specific audiences. Who reads about digital posters? Are they the same as people who read about flipped learning? Reflect on who you are writing for because tailored, content-based posts drive readership. The blog will also provide a venue for readers to give feedback and post comments. | TI spaces and technology give us an advantage that is almost unique in the world to experiment and share our findings. People are interested in the building and the possibilities it presents. It will facilitate the creation of unique, innovative content. This is our window of opportunity to establish ourselves as leaders in teaching and learning among potential readers. | The TI connections blog will use a magazine-style WordPress template. Every post will need to have an accompanying visual. The visual could be an infographic, an icon or a photograph. | TI staff and guest contributors will help form the voice of the blog and newsletter. Unlike a static webpage or a fluctuating social media profile, these channels will allow individuals to develop their voice and style over time – lending a more human context to TI communications. |

POTENTIAL FORMATS

1. **Resource:** This kind of content-driven blog post is great for increasing traffic. Readers love information that helps them do something. The headline of a resource-style post should clearly state what the direct benefits are for the reader. Key words to use include strategies, techniques, tools, etc. They can be presented in a numbered/list format or in paragraphs.
   - CTE Waterloo, Resources, Teaching Tips, Course design: planning a flipped class

- Turn to Your Neighbor: The Official Peer Instruction blog, 7 Myths about the flipped classroom, debunked
- UC Berkeley Center for Teaching & Learning, Save Time, Add Value with these Teaching Time Savers
- Kaneb Center for Teaching and Learning, Fall Break Active Learning Challenge

2. **UToday style news article:** This type of blog post should closely follow a news story format. It may highlight an event that took place, announce the launch of an initiative or the release of a staff publication. This type of blog post should always be accompanied by a couple of quotes from the people involved and be no longer than 800 words.

3. **Personal narrative:** Usually written in first-person, only use this style of post when you want to tell a story. Try conveying the basic elements of a story arch (introduction, conflict, rising action, climax, falling action).

   If you went to a conference and had to be evacuated because of a hurricane that makes a great story. If you attended a workshop that challenged everything you know about teaching, perfect! Outline your internal struggle. Tell us why you were elated, irate, embarrassed or struck senseless. Then tell us what you learned, what you did or didn't do and wish you had. Tell us about the people you encountered. Give physical descriptions of yourself, the place and the people. Paint a picture for the reader with words. You could say "I was tired." Or you could say, "The purple bags under my eyes had only deepened throughout the course of the day. My pants – plucked that morning out of the dirty laundry basket – had a sizable coffee stain on the left thigh from an unfortunate run-in at Starbucks…"

4. **Book reviews and recommended resources:** This type of post can highlight useful resources produced by or external to the Taylor Institute.

   When writing a book review, consider the purpose of the review. What were the key points or arguments in the book? What were its strengths and weaknesses? Organize three or four key arguments into brief paragraphs. Don't forget your introduction and conclusion. Record your ideas as you read and highlight good passages for quotes.
   - Consider these two examples of reviews of the *Slow Professor*. University Affairs framed it as an interview, while Inside Higher Ed did more of a traditional review.

   If compiling a list of top resources, make sure you have thoroughly reviewed all of them. Consider a theme for you resource list. For example: top five books on teaching large classes, ten inspirational blogs on teaching philosophy, etc.

5. **Other media to consider:** Podcasts, webinars, slideshows. video
   - CFT Vanderbilt Podcast: Episode 40 – From a Student's View: AXLE Writing Requirements
   - Webinar from D2L and the University of Guelph: Increasing Accessibility – Strategies from the University of Guelph, D2L and a former student

## POTENTIAL TOPICS

- Student engagement
- Active learning
- Balancing teaching and research
- Grading
- Inclusive teaching/ accessibility
- Online teaching
- Team or collaborative teaching

- Working with multilingual students
- Controversial issues
- Instructional Skills
- Course design
- Learning Technologies
- Etc.

## WRITING GUIDELINES

### DO's and DON'Ts

- DO use short sentences and direct active language.
- DO use pronouns such as I, we, you when writing a personal narrative or an interview-style article. DON'T use them for a how-to or news article.
- DO keep acronyms to a minimum and when used, always write out the long form first followed by the acronym in brackets.
- DO READ YOUR WRITING OUT LOUD. PROBLEMS WITH FLOW CAN EASILY PICKED BE UP BY THE HUMAN EAR.
- DO emphasize human experience and context, use quotes whenever possible. Paint the scene for the reader, pose a question, tell a story.
- DON'T use specialist terms, buzzwords and jargon. For example, the difference between teaching practices, approaches and knowledge may be clear to a specialist; however, the average reader would not understand the subtle differences. If you must use them, define or describe them in plain language.
- DO consider tone. Maintaining a personable, friendly and professional voice is key to blogging successfully.
- DON'T start your blog off with a series of academic references. Leave them for the body.

### Style Guides

- UToday has a great style guide online that is relevant to blogging and succinctly summarizes Canadian (CP) Press Style.

- The Canadian Press Stylebook: A Guide for Writers and Editors can be found in our library.
- CP style does not provide guideline for academic citations. When citing, add a "References section" at the bottom of the blog and use APA style.

### Headlines

Never underestimate the importance of a good headline. It is what will draw readers in further or send them away.

- A good headline should be anywhere from six to 12 words
- Make the reader a promise of something valuable. Be bold. Be daring. Be original. Then deliver what you promised.
- Try starting with how, what, when, where or why
- Use interesting adjectives. Good, nice, hard, bad are frequently used in everyday language and that makes them boring. Try effortless, high-impact, challenging, etc.
- Try to hook the reader with a surprising or unexpected headline. For example: *Why you will fail to have a great career,* Larry Smith, TEDxUW

**Subtitles:** They are important because they provide a visual break in long passages of text. They also help to facilitate scanning and reflect an important idea.

## PUBLISHING

A thematic selection of blog posts will be curated by the Communications and Marketing Lead. These posts will form the basis for the TI Connections monthly newsletter that will be sent out on various TI listservs. Blog posts destined for newsletter publication will go through a more comprehensive revision process than a regular blog post to ensure accuracy and clarity in language and to avoid overlap in content.

## EVALUATION METRICS

We can evaluate the performance of our blogs using pageviews, RSS subscriptions and pingbacks. Once our blog becomes more established, it would be useful to set goals using these metrics. Google Analytics gives us useful information on pageviews and unique pageviews:

> *A* **pageview** is defined as a view of a page on your site that is being tracked by the Analytics tracking code. If a user clicks reload after reaching the page, this is counted as an additional pageview. If a user navigates to a different page and then returns to the original page, a second pageview is recorded as well.

*A* unique pageview*,* as seen in the *Content Overview* report, aggregates pageviews that are generated by the same user during the same session. A *unique pageview* represents the number of sessions during which that page was viewed one or more times.[1]

RSS subscriptions: RSS stands for Rich Site Summary (but is often called Really Simple Syndication). Subscribing to a website RSS removes the need for the user to manually check the website for new content.[2]

Comments & Pingbacks: WordPress creates pingbacks. A pingback is a special type of comment that's created when you link to another blog post, as long as the other blog is set to accept pingbacks. To create a pingback, just link to another WordPress blog post. If that post has pingbacks enabled, the blog owner will see a pingback appear in their comments section. Think of them as automated comments:

- Person A publishes a post.
- Person B publishes her own post, including a link to Person A's post.
- WordPress.com automatically sends a pingback to Person A's post, letting Person A know that someone has linked to them.

Person A's post then displays a special type of comment linking to Person B's post. Pingbacks appear mixed in with any other comments on the post.[3]

## MORE RESOURCES

- Problogger: How to write great blog content
- Entrepreneur: How to create an awesome blog More of a business-oriented blog but has some great points on researching the market to identify what makes your blog different and building relationships with influencers.

Other Teaching Centre Blogs

- Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching
- UC Berkeley Center for Teaching & Learning Blog
- University of Waterloo Centre for Teaching Excellence
- University of Notre Dame, Kaneb Center for Teaching and Learning

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[1] https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/1257084#pageviews_vs_unique_views
[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RSS
[3] https://en.support.wordpress.com/comments/pingbacks/