How to Write an ESID Blog Post

Blogging basics

1. **QUICK**: Blogs are a platform for really quick communication, allowing for the kind of immediacy that we cannot expect from papers, policy briefs, or even newspaper pieces.
2. *TOPICAL*: This immediacy means that through blogs we can chronicle what is happening right now or react to current events and public debates as they unfold.
3. **EPHEMERAL**: A blog post cannot hope to establish the definitive answer to any question; in fact, it should never try to do so, as blogs inhabit a region of the internet characterized by a relatively short attention span, with older posts pushed to the bottom or to the archive pages.

Why write a blog post

You have attended an interesting presentation: Perhaps you are at a conference, or have just attended a lecture, and you have some reactions about the content. Blog about it! Tell us where you were, what the speaker(s) said, and why you think they are incredibly right or incredibly wrong.

You have read an interesting book/article: Sometimes we read academic works that really makes us think differently about important issues. A blog post is a quick and easy way to share your reflections on a popular new idea or finding.

You disagree with another research blog: Every academic field has some scholars who moonlight as bloggers, in some cases really popular ones. The simplest reason for writing a blog post is to respond what these online scholars say, especially if you disagree with them.

You have an opinion about current events: Perhaps a minister has made a controversial statement, or the leaders of a country are proposing a new policy initiative. As an expert in the field you are likely to have an opinion on the topic, and a blog is a quicker way to publicize it than through the regular print media.

You want to respond to new research: Universities, NGOs and international organizations release new data and findings all the time. What do you think about those finding? How significant are they? What do they tell us about our world?

You want to contribute to an ongoing debate: Some issues are rarely settled, and yet researchers and policy-makers alike are likely to stir debate about them when they see a political window of opportunity, like an international conference or a new major report on the topic. What is your position on this debate?

Your own research has interesting new implications: Most of your research will be communicated through papers, books and policy briefs. But some ideas are either too speculative or too premature for peer-reviewed publication: a blog post is an ideal medium for sharing these emerging ideas.

You want to chronicle ongoing work: Researchers often think of research as a private process eventually leading to public outputs. But there are good reasons for sharing more about our day-to-day work: students, stakeholders and particularly funders will probably be interested in it!

Blogging tips

Short and sweet. The combination of immediacy, short lifespan, and levity should lead you to write short and engaging pieces of opinion. Most posts should be around 700-800 words long, reaching 1000 words only very rarely when a particular topic warrants it. This means that, when you get used to the format, it should take you no more than 1 hour to write a decent post. Since it is going to be an ephemeral piece of writing, there is no point in agonizing over perfection.

Expertise is your calling card. You can write a blog post about anything that you want, but that does not mean that anyone will want to read it. ESID's greatest communication asset is the expertise and knowledge embodied in our researchers: if you are an expert on topic A, I would like to know what you think about current event X. Your blog post will be first judged by your intellectual authority: write about things that you know very well and people will tend to trust your words.

Conversational style. That being said, a blog post is often too short to convey systematic reviews of arguments or evidence: popular posts tend to be succinct, direct and provocative. Instead of an academic piece of writing, think of a blog post as a conversation such as you might have at a dinner party: consider how you would phrase your thoughts in an interesting and compelling way without needing a powerpoint presentation or 60 footnotes.

Connect to a broader conversation. Blog posts rarely attract much attention when released as isolated pieces of opinion: it is when they tie into ongoing conversations –online or otherwise- that they become relevant.

Respond, react, challenge. In general you should write your blog with a concrete interlocutor in mind, engaging them through your opinions or findings. Controversy keeps blogs alive, and as long as you keep it civil and respectful you will be considered an opinionated or dissenting voice instead of a "troll" or attention seeker.

Link, link, link. Since your post is likely to connect to what others are saying, you should make sure to refer and link back to relevant blogs and websites in the text. This not only allows readers to delve deeper into the question you are addressing, it also lets your interlocutors know – through web analytics- that you are addressing them, which increases the chances that they will read and react to your post.

Ask for help

If you have any questions or need advice on drafting an ESID blog post, please contact:

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Some popular development blogs

From Poverty to Power (OXFAM), edited by Duncan Green: http://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/.

William Easterly, NYUDRI: http://www.nyudri.org/.

Chris Blattman, Columbia University: http://chrisblattman.com/.