Optionality in Assessment: Case Studies

Case Study 12

Author: Jon Chandler

Institution: University College London

Discipline/Field of Study: History

Type of Assessment: Website and report

Credits: 15

Level: 5

Unit Type: Mandatory or core for all students on a particular programme

Type of Optionality: Submission format and negotiated assessment task/question
Assessment Details:

a. Instructions for completing the assessment.

Overview:

A blog is an effective way to publish a series of short articles or reflections, often enhanced by the inclusion of images, audio, videos and other multimedia. Blog entries are ordered by date, with the newest entry generally displayed at the top of the page. These articles can be about anything, and they can be any length. In short, a blog is a very simple website consisting of a series of webpages focused on a particular theme or problem. Blogs require minimal technical knowledge to create and operate. There are additional tools and features that you can use to make them more complex, but the content is by far the most important aspect of any blog. Clarity of presentation and ease of navigation are also a distinctive feature of good blogs.

This assessment asks you to collaborate to produce a project blog to showcase your research and the conclusions you have drawn from it. Historians increasingly use blogs to share their research with others in their field and beyond. There is no limit to who can read or write a historical blog. You will find historical blogs by academics, archivists, librarians, museum curators, students, and enthusiasts. These blogs serve many purposes. Some might discuss their personal research or their professional experiences. Others might promote an archive, a library, or a museum. Some contain extensive datasets—online galleries or databases, for example.

Your blog and your report (which will constitute the second half of your assessment for this module) both need to be based on your assigned research project, but they do not have to cover identical topics within that project or, together, to cover all of its dimensions. Choose aspects of your project that best fit the two assessments and your group’s skills and interests to complete them.

The Task: Your task is to create a blog using UCL Reflect (discussed below) to showcase your research project for a public audience. Your blog should include 20 minutes of content, which can include:

- Articles
- Images (including online exhibitions)
- Podcasts
- Videos
- Interactive Maps

The purpose of your blog is to explain why your project is significant and what we can learn from it. What important historical questions does your research allow your group to answer? Your blog should include appropriate attention to the themes of material culture and/or space and place. Although every group will approach the blog differently, it is important that you all consider the following questions:

- What point(s) are you trying to make?
- What evidence are you using?
- Who is your target audience?
- How successfully have you communicated historical ideas and concepts?
- How creative, innovative, and imaginative is it?

Your blog will be assessed according to the Making History Assessment Criteria. Assessors will only spend 20 minutes on each blog: it is therefore important that you only include 20 minutes of material. If your blog includes video or audio then timing is straightforward. If your blog includes text, images, maps, diagrams or other content you should estimate the time required. You should work on the assumption that an average reader can digest 200 words per minute.

Your group should decide, with advice from your tutor, what content will be most effective at conveying your research to your chosen audience. Remember, producing a five-minute video poses different challenges to writing five minutes (1000 words) of text. The best projects use a combination of different media for different purposes.

You are not expected to provide footnotes in your blog posts. If you wish to refer to a specific publication by a specific author, simply insert a surname, short title, and date reference into the body of your text. E.g. “Starr, What is Public History Good For? (1973) argues that…” Nor are you expected to provide a bibliography for each blog post. However, you should provide a separate blog post entitled ‘Further Reading’ that lists up to 12 books or articles that have influenced your blog. This will not be included in the reading time (in the same way that an essay bibliography is not included in your word count.)

Your project blog must be complete by Wednesday 10th March 2021 at 4pm. Your blog will be frozen at this time and no more changes will be possible.

**UCL Reflect:**

The software will be using is called UCL Reflect which is UCL’s education blogging service. UCL Reflect is based on WordPress which is an industry-standard blogging and website-building tool. At the end of the module your group can choose to keep your blog private or to make it public. Some students choose to make the blog public so it can serve as a portfolio of your work.

UCL Reflect requires very little technical skill to create and operate. You should begin by exploring the Making History Blog, which has had been made by two finalists, Parmal and Urja. In this blog they reflect on their experiences from the course and offer some guidance and advice. Further guidance can be found on the UCL Reflect Wiki. You can also find an infinite number of guides for WordPress by searching online. We recommend EduBlogs as a good place to start but there are countless others.

Further Guidance on Historical Blogs: There are thousands of historical blogs online on a vast number of topics. Here are some of our favourite blogs that might provide you with some inspiration:

- British Library Untold Lives: [https://blogs.bl.uk/untoldlives/](https://blogs.bl.uk/untoldlives/)
b. Marking rubric

UCL History Department Undergraduate Marking Criteria – Public History Outputs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class [Mark range]</th>
<th>Typical characteristics of coursework in different undergraduate classification brackets. Markers will look for a preponderance of criteria in three key areas of assessment.</th>
<th>Historical Knowledge</th>
<th>Audience and Communication</th>
<th>Creativity and Originality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exceptional: [80-100]</td>
<td>A work that meets all of the First Class criteria and in one or two respects truly exceptional (e.g. in offering striking insight and originality, showing extreme sophistication in use of evidence, or developing a uniquely compelling mode of public communication) will be given a mark in the range 80-88.</td>
<td>Exceptionally clear and detailed understanding of intended audience, including prior knowledge, skills and interests. Displays language, tone and style of communication ideally suited to that audience.</td>
<td>Describes novel, consistent and sophisticated line of argument throughout all parts of the work.</td>
<td>Assesses a sophisticated conceptual and practical understanding of how to communicate historical material to non-specialist audiences while maintaining historical accuracy. Assesses outputs designed and delivered to the highest professional standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First (70-79)</td>
<td>A work that meets most of the First Class criteria and in a few respects exceptionally good.</td>
<td>Exceptionally clear and detailed understanding of intended audience, including prior knowledge, skills and interests. Displays language, tone and style of communication ideally suited to that audience.</td>
<td>Describes a consistent line of argument, but occasionally lacks clarity in communication.</td>
<td>Assess a good understanding of the challenges of communicating historical knowledge to non-specialist audiences while maintaining historical accuracy. Assesses outputs designed and presented to a very high standard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Second (60-69)</td>
<td>A work that meets most of the First Class criteria and in a few respects exceptionally good.</td>
<td>Good understanding of intended target audience but lacks precision or makes incorrect assumptions about their needs and capacities.</td>
<td>Describes a consistent line of argument, but occasionally lacks clarity in communication.</td>
<td>Analyzes a reasonable understanding of the challenges of communicating historical material to non-specialist audiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Second (50-59)</td>
<td>A work that meets most of the First Class criteria and in a few respects exceptionally good.</td>
<td>Reasonable understanding of intended target audience but lacks precision or makes incorrect assumptions about their needs and capacities.</td>
<td>Describes a consistent line of argument, but occasionally lacks clarity in communication.</td>
<td>Critical thinking and assessment of the historical debates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third (40-49)</td>
<td>A work that meets most of the First Class criteria and in a few respects exceptionally good.</td>
<td>Reasonable understanding of intended target audience but lacks precision or makes incorrect assumptions about their needs and capacities.</td>
<td>Describes a consistent line of argument, but occasionally lacks clarity in communication.</td>
<td>Assess historical conclusions are drawn in a manner that is logical and links coherently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part (2-3)</td>
<td>A work that meets most of the First Class criteria and in a few respects exceptionally good.</td>
<td>Reasonable understanding of intended target audience but lacks precision or makes incorrect assumptions about their needs and capacities.</td>
<td>Describes a consistent line of argument, but occasionally lacks clarity in communication.</td>
<td>Assess that a range of sources is used to support and explain the argument.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


c. Teaching materials:


d. Other links or pertinent information

Students choose from a list of 6-8 research projects. Students are then assigned to work in a group of 4-5 on that research project. The research project is scaffolded through weekly lectures/seminars, and they receive support from a PGTA. However, they are free to pursue their own research. Their assessment is framed as 20mins of content on a website, but this can be any mix of text, images, audio, and video. (We have also had augmented reality!). Students have free choice to decide how to present their research. The second assessment component is a report, which is a more structured assessment, in which students draw on their research to write an action plan for the Mayor of London's Commission on Diversity.