



Expert guide: Using Wordpress Blogs for Real-World Portfolios

Dr. Wayne J. Cosshall

Having a portfolio during study and after graduation can be a great asset for gaining work. It can also provide a tangible tool for identity development. While many universities have ePortfolio tools, why not take the opportunity to use a portfolio system that develops students' employability?

An ePortfolio can provide many benefits for the student, from a repository of evidence and information through to an interface with future employers and clients. The ePortfolio process can also encourage and facilitate reflection and deeper learning through the creation of artefacts. ePortfolios are useful when seeking work, both while studying and afterwards, and students can email a link to whichever aspects they want to share.

Wordpress is a blogging platform that powers, by some estimates, 30 to 40% of websites on the Internet. It is available in two forms: as a cloud-based service or as a self-hosted website platform. There are hundreds of themes that make customisation easy, plus it is so well documented that it is pretty easy to create a completely unique look.

There is a whole ecosystem of companies providing plugins that allow a Wordpress blog to do pretty much anything from full shopping cart systems to dynamic displays and more. Wordpress makes a great platform for an ePortfolio because it is one the students own, control fully, can customise to any degree and can serve them long after graduation.

How does this relate to employability?

Having students build an ePortfolio in Wordpress develops their digital literacy and their overall employability.

Blogging experience can be valuable in the workplace, as can experience with managing a website and familiarity with social media and how to link to a website. Other sought-after capabilities include understanding issues of privacy, the control of public-facing information, and the re-purposing of material for new media or audiences. These capabilities can all be useful to employers and they are vital for graduates who are creating their own work and following an entrepreneurial path. Running a website also leads to the development of marketing skills and a better understanding of its importance and pitfalls.

Top tips

1. There are no financial barriers to participation as students can start with a free Wordpress.com blog. This is fine for first-year students. They can progress to a self-hosted website version of Wordpress later in their course as and when they wish to customise their web presence. It is easy to move across the content.
2. Provide students with a guide to online security as this is an ideal opportunity to build additional knowledge and good practice in data backup, understanding digital threats and developing mitigation strategies.
3. Encourage students to provide peer support via the commenting system of Wordpress.
4. You don't have to be the Wordpress expert. Allow the students to assist each other with building expertise in expanding Wordpress, using less obvious features and much more. This is also a good opportunity to encourage self-directed and supported learning by directing students to online forums and training materials.

Challenges

1. There may be institutional objections to using an outside and very public platform over which the university has no control. The counter argument to this is the industry pervasiveness of Wordpress and the need for students to develop their digital literacy. The benefits far outweigh the risks.
2. Circumvent the potential issues early by educating students about the legal and personal implications of what they publish on the Internet. This is good opportunity to extend the discussion to social media and to explain that what they post can affect their careers many years later. Provide examples of what to do and what not to do. Workshop ways to deliver a message without getting into dangerous waters!
3. Reinforce to the students that they have total control over their blogs and can delete unwelcome comments, learn to deal with spam and rework anything they publish whenever they need to. This can avoid fears they may have about being too public with work in progress.

Further reading and resources

- [University of Pittsburgh advice to faculty](#)
- Michael Seery's slightly old but excellent paper on using [Wordpress for educational ePortfolios](#)
- Helen Barrett's [process guide](#) for using Wordpress in both K-12 and higher education
- Wordpress itself has two sites - <https://wordpress.org/> for content and the software for self-hosted sites and <https://wordpress.com/> for free sites or paid sites where they look after everything.
- An expert guide from Associate Professor Jo Coldwell-Neilson on [embedding digital literacy to enhance employABILITY thinking](#).
- The developing EmployABILITY [What is digital literacy?](#) resource for students
- Digital literacy section (Page 13) of the [Student Starter Kit: Personalised EmployABILITY Profile](#)

Contributed by [Dr. Wayne J. Cosshall](#) , Swinburne University of Technology, May 2018