



BLOGGING TIPS

THIRD
GOAL
TOOLKIT

Why Blog to Support Peace Corps' Third Goal?

To expand your reader's understanding of your host country

Never again will you have such a captive audience as you do during your service, so take others on the journey as your understanding of your country evolves and expands.

It's one third of your job as a Peace Corps Volunteer

When your first goal work in country gets difficult or leaves you less-than-satisfied, remember that Goal Three of Peace Corps is also a part of your job. Blogging, when done to support the Third Goal, is a great way to feel a sense of accomplishment – even when your first or second goal activities are slow or hit obstacles.

To foster communication with your World Wise Schools classroom

If you're involved in World Wise Schools (WWS), blogging is an easy way to keep in touch with your classroom. You may want to have a special section on your blog specifically geared toward your WWS audience, or create an entirely new blog to separate your posts for your WWS class from other personal content.

Exercise:

Consider what others in the US think of your country.

What three words would they choose to describe your country of service?

How might you want to change that?

What content could you create for your blog to affect that change?

Responsibilities of Peace Corps Third Goal Bloggers

Peace Corps bloggers serve as unofficial ambassadors between the United States and their host countries. As such, it is important to consider how various readers – friends, family, your Peace Corps community, PC staff, etc. – might view your posts. When blogging ask yourself, “Would I be embarrassed if my community at site read this? What would my parents, grandparents, or a future employer think of this?” Your blog should reflect a balanced view of your country and culture. Every place has its good and bad; but, when you really just need to vent, it's best to do that through private communication channels.

Follow the guidelines for blogging or social media use in the Peace Corps Volunteer handbook and guidance provided by your post. For example, local policies include guidance on online safety and security, publication policies, expanded guidance on logo use, etc.

Blog Set Up

Choose your blogging platform and format

Peace Corps Volunteers who choose to blog can use any blogging platform they prefer. There are several free blogging platforms. See the tutorials on each blog platform's homepage to learn more about the technical aspects of setting up a blog.

You'll notice that some platforms offer various layouts. Some may be more suited for media content while others may work better for more text-heavy content. Keep this in mind as you research which blogging platform and format is right for your blog.

Inform your post that you're blogging

Volunteers who create their own social media profiles or websites, including personal blogs, or post material to websites created by others are responsible for discussing the content with their country director in advance. This ensures that the material is suitable and complies with this general guidance, any country-specific guidance, and any safety and security considerations.

Tell Peace Corps about your blog. If you feel your blog is more about cross-cultural understanding than solely a place to process your experience, be sure to let Peace Corps know at rpcv@peacecorps.gov.

Post the Peace Corps disclaimer

Post the Peace Corps disclaimer prominently on your blog: “The content of this website is mine alone and does not reflect the views of the U.S. Government, the Peace Corps, or the [insert host country name] Government.”

Monitor site traffic

Use your blog’s privacy settings to control the accessibility of your blog. It’s your decision whether you want only friends and family to see your blog or if you want to share it with the general public. You can avoid problems of trolls and spam by setting up your account so that readers’ comments post only after you approve them.

Start generating ideas for blog content

- Brainstorm all the time. Carry a notebook and camera to collect ideas when away from the computer.
- Be creative. Use storytelling exercises to experiment with ways to convey your story online.
- Get inspired. Check out other blogs for blog post/series ideas.
- Be a collaborative blogger. Link to posts from other Volunteers who are blogging in your country or around the world.
- Integrate your Twitter posts into your blog. Add Twitter status updates to your blog’s homepage so that you can Tweet via text message for speedy site updates to your blog.
- See Appendix A for a list of ideas to get you started.

Blogging Best Practices & Tips

Post consistently and frequently

Posting consistently and frequently will set expectations for your audience and encourage them to check your blog often for updates. Do you have lots of content to post? Don’t exhaust your audience with one long post or overwhelm them with multiple posts on the same day. Try to separate your thoughts into multiple posts, and then use the schedule function on your blog to publish them in the future at appropriate intervals.

Use themes to organize your thoughts and your content

Themes keep your posts focused and to the point (see Appendix A for examples). They also help you connect your individual experiences to a larger context. To help you organize your thoughts and select themes that might make sense for you, consider keeping a “story bank” of ideas that come to you throughout your daily activities. You can then look back on the bank for specific stories when compiling later posts.

You might also consider creating a thematic series of posts. For example: Photo Fridays where you post a favorite picture and caption each week.

Make your site easy to navigate

- Create pages in the menu tab to store/post static content like FAQs or your “About” information.
- Create and use thematic tags for your posts to help people find the content they’re interested in. These tags also make it easier for search engines to find your blog. Examples are Jamaican Recipes, Mexico Photo Diary, Thai Language, Ethiopian Culture, etc.
- Use hyperlinks to link readers to additional resources, news stories, other blogs, or websites.

Use headings to make your posts more scan-able for your readers

When reading online, people scan content before deciding “*if*” they want to read and/or “*what*” they want to read. Make it easy for your readers to do this by using headings. Make headings as concise and descriptive as possible in order to entice your reader to continue reading. Bullet points, lists, and bolded/highlighted text also help to make your text more digestible for your readers.

Use visuals

Not only are readers drawn to visual content, but it also helps them to visualize all the great things you’re writing about. Make it fun for your audience to read your blog by including at least one picture or video per post. The visual should relate to the rest of your post and help reinforce the message you’re trying to convey. Remember to ask permission before you post photos or videos of people publicly. If a slow Internet connection is an issue, reduce the size of your photos before trying to post them. If the photo or video already exist online, link to it instead of uploading them.

Always proofread

Remember that your writing is your reader's first impression of you, so take time to proofread and correct mistakes. Your readers will quickly move on if they don't see you putting effort into providing quality writing. Remember when proofreading to make sure your hyperlinks work and lead to the intended location.

Make it easy for people to follow your blog

- Add a "subscribe" option on your homepage so people can receive email updates whenever you share new posts.
- Promote your blog via social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.).

Write what you're passionate about

If you care about what you're writing, it shows. It's more compelling for your audience, and it's easier for you to write.

Tell a good story

- Draw your reader in with a hook that catches their attention and gets them interested.
- Make sure there is a change. It is not really a story unless something fundamentally, and often internally, changes, like a shift in perspective.
- Leave out events or characters that don't move the story along.
- Engage your readers' senses by including descriptions of characteristic sounds, textures, scents, and tastes.
- Be specific. Instead of saying, "breakfast was great," describe what you ate.
- Use snippets of conversations to make posts more dynamic. This can really bring your characters to life.
- Create tension and raise the stakes. Think about where the tension is and how you can build it.
- Allow yourself to be vulnerable and humble.
- Have closure. Don't introduce ideas or events that aren't addressed at the end.

Blog effectively, even with limited Internet access

- Before uploading photos, reduce the size of the photos to make it upload faster.
- Save your blog posts in a Word document and then upload multiple posts when you can access the Internet.
- Schedule posts so that your blog is updated at the desired frequency.

Special thanks to *Blog It Home 2013 winners Jedd and Michelle Chang (Volunteers in Jamaica), Joshua Cook and Jennifer Klein (Volunteers in Ethiopia), Sara Kline (Volunteer in Thailand), and Jessica Lavash (Volunteer in Mexico) for compiling this list of tips.*



Appendix A: Blog Post Ideas

- **Community Member Profiles or 'Meet My Community':** Highlight a different person in your community in each post by sharing their picture and telling their story.
- **Recipes:** Share photos and instructions of how to make your favorite local dishes.
- **How To's:** Craft tutorials, how to ride public transportation, how to leave a party gracefully, how to say no, how to deal with unwanted attention (can be serious or humorous, to give your readers an idea of the cultural norms).
- **Comparisons:** Explain how you would do something at home (like baking cookies or purchasing vegetables) and how the process is different in your country.
- **Living without _____:** Explain what it's like to live without things such as indoor plumbing, an oven, etc., and what new adaptations you use to do without.
- **Photo Galleries:** Home, community, work, faces, tools, signs, etc.
- **Travel Writing:** Share resources and tips for others who might want to get off the beaten path in your country.
- **Culture 101:** Share "Do's and Don'ts" and other tips for visitors to your host country.
- **Rude or Acceptable?:** Start with a list of scenarios (e.g., picking your nose, yawning in public) and reveal whether each one is considered rude or acceptable in your new culture.
- **Best text messages** received in country.
- **Dating cross-culturally**
- **Fashion:** Share photos and explanations about what people wear on a daily basis and/or for special occasions.
- **Day in the life of a host country national.**
- **Day in the life of a PCV.**
- **Lists:** Top ten favorite phrases, five ways to eat a chicken, top twenty favorite names in my community, etc.
- **By the numbers:** Share fun facts by starting with a number (e.g., 10 is the number of cockroaches I found last week, 1247 is the number of people living in my village, 1.3 is the number of kilometers I walk to work).
- **Quotes:** Share an inspiring or thoughtful quote (maybe from a community member) and relate it to your experiences.
- **Share what other people in your country are doing.** Promote their projects and fundraisers
- **Pop Culture:** Share the most popular songs, fashion, and celebrities in your culture. Use links or music videos.
- **Adventures on My Bike:** Post stories of your encounters and photos of what you find on the road.
- **Community Member Interviews:** Ask them what they think of Americans, their favorite thing about their country, what's the best way to recover from the common cold, etc.
- **Things I never thought I would say or do.**
- **What can you buy for a dollar?** Take pictures of the objects in your community that can be bought for the equivalent of one American dollar.
- **Local festivals and what they mean to you on a deeper level:** Share your thoughts on death after Dia de los Muertos, family after attending a mother's day festival, etc.
- **Greeting and goodbye routines.**
- **What is the local concept of time?** How did you learn it, and how have you adapted?
- **Telling Jokes:** What is the sense of humor like? Have you learned to be funny in a new context?
- **Life at Site is...:** e.g. a spectator sport, noisy, romantic, etc., and describe why.
- **Food Safari:** What are the best or worst foods available in your country
- **785-day photo project:** Take a picture every day of your service.
- **Time lapse videos:** Make time-lapse videos by taking pictures of a subject over a certain period of time.
- **Weddings, funerals, births**
- Take 3 secs of video footage a day and loop the video together for a defined period of time.