Chapter No. 6
"Creating the Student Blog"
In this package, you will find:

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A preview chapter from the book, Chapter NO.6 "Creating the Student Blog"
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About the Author

Bill Fitzgerald was born in 1968, and worked as a teacher for 16 years. During that time, he taught English and history, and worked as a Technology Director at the K12 level. Bill began using technology in his own teaching in the early '90s; from there, he moved on to database design and systems administration. During that time, Bill began developing strategies to support technology integration in 1:1 laptop systems, and in desktop computing environments.

In 2003, Bill and Marc Poris founded FunnyMonkey, a Drupal development shop working primarily within the education industry. Bill started, and manages the Drupal in Education group on http://groups.drupal.org, and is active in various educational and open source communities. Bill blogs about education and technology at http://funnymonkey.com/blog.

When Bill is not staring deeply into computer screens, he can be found riding his fixed gear bicycle through Portland, OR, or spending far too much time drinking coffee.

For More Information:
This book took nearly six months to write, and I would not have been able to complete it without the support of numerous people. First, my wife Isabelle gave unending support and understanding throughout the entire process—when I was stressed, she helped me laugh, and that was a gift beyond words.

Additionally, Marc Poris and Jeff Graham, compatriots at FunnyMonkey, provided support of a different kind: when I was stressed, they wrote code, and their snippets and modules grace the pages of this text.

Finally, the team of people I worked with at Packt provided a great blend of guidance and support. David Barnes, Brinell Lewis, and Swapna Verlekar all worked with me to keep the project on track, and I thank them for the opportunity to write this book.
Drupal for Education and E-Learning

Drupal has its roots in building and supporting online communities. These roots have helped Drupal meet the needs of schools, teachers, and students in countless countries, and in countless different learning contexts. Compared to a traditional Learning Management System, Drupal can feel less restrictive; Drupal has been designed to interact with the Web, and to make the most of the array of possibilities offered by the Internet.

Drupal allows site administrators to set up as closed or as open a site as they desire. Using Drupal, a site administrator can create a learning environment where no content is visible outside of the site, and where all courses are entirely private. At the other end of the spectrum, a site administrator can create a learning environment where students and teachers have complete control over the content they share with classmates, other site members, and/or the entire Internet community. The purpose of this book is not to recommend one approach to teaching and learning over another, but rather to highlight the freedom that comes with having choices. In this text, we will cover the technical approaches to crafting the ideal social learning environment for your specific goals.

For More Information:
What This Book Covers

Chapter 1: Introduction provides an overview of Drupal, including a brief section on Drupal terminology.

Chapter 2: Installing Drupal covers how to install Drupal. This chapter takes you through the installation process, and covers how to enable some of the core modules you will use in this book.

Chapter 3: Getting Started begins by going through the options enabled in the core installation. From there, you will learn how to install additional modules and themes. Using these instructions, you will then install and configure two commonly-used modules: the Content Construction Kit (also referred to as CCK) and views. This chapter includes detailed instructions for creating new content types, adding fields to those content types, and displaying content using views. The foundation provided in this chapter is referenced extensively throughout the rest of the book.

Chapter 4: Creating a Teacher Blog describes how to set up a blog. This chapter includes instructions for setting up a text editor (also known as a WYSIWYG editor), and instructions for adding two new content types: one for blog posts, and a second for assignments. The chapter continues by covering how to create custom views to display content, and closes by showing how to clone an existing view to create a calendar to display assignments.

Chapter 5: Enrolling Students covers how to add users to your site. This chapter provides details on creating roles, and using roles to create granular permissions for the people who will use your site.

Chapter 6: Creating the Student Blog includes more details on using roles effectively to structure your site. Additionally in this chapter, more advanced techniques with views are covered, as we begin to use views to track student and teacher blog posts.

Chapter 7: Bookmarks describes some of the uses in the classroom of social bookmarking. In Chapter 3, we created a content type for storing and categorizing bookmarks, and this chapter goes through various methods of using bookmarks to support student learning.

Chapter 8: Podcasting and Images covers how to use your site to publish audio and images. In addition to covering the technical details of publishing a podcast, this chapter covers various uses of audio in the classroom. In particular, the chapter focuses on skills that can be honed through creating podcasts.

For More Information:  
Chapter 9: Video describes how to embed media that is shared on the Web. As part of this chapter, we examine how to integrate video production into a curricula, and how video production can relate to other types of content stored on the site. As with podcasts, the emphasis in this chapter is on what can be learned through video production, and on how to use the medium of video effectively.

Chapter 10: Forums and Blogs describes how to set up and configure forums in Drupal. The chapter also explains the similarities and differences between forums and blogs.

Chapter 11: Social Networks and Extending the User Profile gives an overview of building user profiles. The chapter begins with the core profile module, and then goes deeper to show how to extend user profiles using the flexible Content Construction Kit and custom fields.

Chapter 12: Supporting Multiple Classes describes how to set up the Organic Groups module to support formal and informal learning spaces. The chapter covers using different privacy settings, group wikis, email notifications, and varying group types.

Chapter 13: Tracking Student Progress shows how people can find content created by other users within the site. The chapter starts by examining the core Tracker module, and then looks at using views and short code snippets to group users and make their work easier to find.

Chapter 14: Theming and User Interface Design provides some introductory details of how to create an intuitive navigational structure. The techniques described in this chapter are predicated on keeping your site as simple as possible by using customized menus. The chapter also introduces Drupal's theming layer, and describes how to get started modifying a theme.

Chapter 15: Backup, Maintenance, and Upgrades gets into one of the most commonly-overlooked aspects of running a website: making sure that you have a working backup, and keeping your codebase up-to-date. The goal of this chapter is to take the sting out of site maintenance. This chapter describes how to use the DB Maintenance module to automate the core tasks required for backup, as well as backing up using browser-based and command line tools.

Chapter 16: Working Effectively in the Drupal Community provides an overview of how to begin working with the Drupal community. One of the primary benefits of working with Drupal is the community of users and developers associated with the software. This chapter points out some of the methods of getting involved with and contributing back to the project.

Creating the Student Blog

In the preceding chapters, we built the framework for our teaching and learning platform.

In Chapter 3, we set up the ability for users to share categorized bookmarks. We also added a view that collects and displays these bookmarks in one central location. The instructions in Chapter 3 provide a baseline set of instructions for two frequently-repeated administrative activities: creating new content types, and creating new views to organize and display content.

In Chapter 4, we created the beginning of the teacher blog. We built on the instructions laid out in Chapter 3 to create the two new content types, and to create the view to organize and display teacher blog posts. To create an assignment calendar for the assignments, we covered how to use a convenient shortcut: cloning a view.

These site-building techniques will be used and referenced as we build out the rest of our site. In this chapter, we will add the functionality to power the student blog; in Chapter 7, we will take a look at how these different pieces fit together. Then, in Chapters 8 to 13, we will look at more advanced functionality: adding images, audio, video, tracking student responses to assignments, and managing multiple classes.

As discussed in Chapter 4, blogging in Drupal encompasses a range of learning activities. When incorporated into a course as a regular part of the coursework, blogs provide an incredibly powerful means of tracking student growth. For students who are disorganized (that is, students whose backpacks resemble tumbleweed), the blog can also be an organizational tool. Most importantly, though, blogs create a record of student work that can be accessed at any time. As such, blogs provide a convenient window into both process (how students work) and product (the end results of student work).
Creating the Student Blog

Setting Up the Student Blog

In Chapter 4, as we set up the teacher blog, we created a blog post content type, and a view to display the teacher blog posts. To create the student blog, we need to do two things:

1. Give users in the student role permissions over the blog post content type;
2. Clone the teacher_blog view, and edit it to display student blog posts.

Assigning Permissions

To allow students to blog in the site, we need to allow users in the student role the ability to create blog posts. Click the Administer | User management | Roles link, or navigate to admin/user/roles. Click the link to edit permissions for the student role.

For additional reference on assigning rights to content types, see Chapters 3 and 4.

Navigate down to the section for the node module. Select the options for create blog_post content, delete own blog_post content, and edit own blog_post content.

Click the Save permissions button to save the settings.

Students can now blog in the site.

Clone the Teacher Blog

Now that students have the ability to create blog posts, we now need to create a central place where people can read these posts. We have already set up this structure for the teacher blog; cloning this pre-existing view will allow us to quickly replicate this structure for the student blog.

The process of cloning a view is also discussed in Chapter 4.
To begin, click the Administer | Site building | Views link, or navigate to admin/build/views. Scroll down to the teacher_blog view and click the Clone link.

Change the view name to student_blog; change the view description to All posts to be displayed in the Student blog; change the View tag to student. Click the Next button to continue.

In the default settings, we want to change the User: Roles filter. As shown in the following screenshot, you can verify that you are editing the Defaults as indicated by Item 1; to edit the User: Roles filter, click the link as indicated by Item 2; and to edit the Title, click the link indicated by Item 3.
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Change the **User: Roles** setting to **student**; this will only select content posted by users in the student role. Change the **Title** setting to **Student blog**.

As we add more content types (audio, video, and images) we will need to revisit this view to update the **Node:Type** filter. At this stage, this filter only selects **blog posts** and **bookmarks**.

Then, as shown in the following screenshot, click the **Page** link (indicated by **Item 1**) to change the settings for the **Page** display for this view. We need to edit both of the options under **Page settings** (indicated by **Item 2**). We also need to edit the **Header** (indicated by **Item 3**) in the **Basic settings**.

Under **Page settings**, change the **Path** to **student-blog**, and change **Menu** to **Normal: Student blog**.

Under **Basic settings**, edit the **Header** to read **Hello! You are viewing posts from the student blog. Enjoy your reading, and comment frequently.**

Click the **Save** button to save the view.

All student blog posts are now visible at **http://yoursite.org/student-blog**.
Getting Interactive

Now that students can create blogs in the site, you have the ability to foster dialogue within your class. The easiest way, of course, is simply through commenting. Students have the rights to comment on assignments, and on teacher and student blog posts. However, students might also want to reference other pieces of content in their work. In this section, we will set up a mechanism that will keep track of when one post within the site references another post within the site. This way, people can see when exchanges are occurring about different posts, and it provides another way (in addition to comment threads) for people to hold discussions within the course.

These ideas (including tracking student responses to assignments) are covered in more detail in Chapter 13: Tracking Student Progress.

Seeing Who's Discussing What

Within the site, we will want to see who is discussing what posts. In web parlance, this is referred to as a backlink. Fortunately, the Views module comes with a means of tracking backlinks by default. We will clone and customize this existing view to get exactly the functionality we want.

The process of cloning this view includes the following steps:

- The default backlinks view needs to be enabled and cloned.
- In the cloned view, the different displays need to be edited:
  - In the Default display, Fields need to be added to the view, the Arguments need to be adjusted, and the Empty text needs to be deleted.
  - As the new view will only generate a block, the Page display should be removed.
  - In the Block display, the Items per page needs to be increased, the More link needs to be removed, and the Block settings needs to be changed.
- Then, once the new view has been saved, the block created by this view needs to be enabled.
Enabling and Cloning the Backlinks View

To get started, click the Administer | Site building | Views link, or navigate to admin/build/views. As shown in the following screenshot, enable the default backlinks view.

Once we have enabled the backlinks view, we want to clone it. So, we click the Clone link.

Change the View name to conversations, and change the View description to Cloned from default "backlinks" view; displays a list of nodes that link to the node, using the search backlinks table. The View tag can be left blank.

Click the Next button, which brings us to the Edit page for the view.

Editing the Default Display

As shown in the following screenshot, we will make four main edits to this view. We will add Fields, adjust the Arguments, delete the Empty text, and remove the Page display.
Adding views is introduced in Chapter 3, and cloning views is introduced in Chapter 4.

To add Fields, click the + icon as indicated, in the preceding screenshot, by Item 1. Add three fields: Node: Post Date; Node: Type; and User: Name. Click the Add button, and then configure the new fields to your preferences.

Next, edit the Arguments by clicking the Search: Links to link as indicated in the preceding screenshot by Item 2. We will edit the argument handling as shown in the following screenshot:
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Select the options to only validate for Blog posts and Bookmarks. Additionally, check the option for Validate user has access to the node.

These argument settings confirm that we are only checking for backlinks on Blog posts and Bookmarks. As we add more content types (for audio, video, and images) we will need to update this view to check for backlinks on these additional content types as well. We will also use a version of this view in Chapter 13: Tracking Student Progress.

Click the Update button to store these changes.

Then, we will remove the Empty text by clicking the Filtered HTML link as indicated by Item 3 in the screenshot just above the preceding one. Delete the existing empty text string, and click the Update button to store the changes.

Deleting the empty text makes it so the view will not be displayed if the view returns no content. Although this would not be useful on a Page display, it is useful for a Block display, as this hides the block when there is nothing to show.

Remove the Page Display

As shown by Item 4 in the screenshot just above the preceding one, click the link to show the Page display type.

We are going to be displaying the backlinks in a block, and will not need the Page display. Therefore, we want to remove it by clicking the Remove display button as shown in the preceding screenshot.

Once we have clicked the Remove display button, click the Block link to edit the Block display.
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Edit the Block Display

When we are editing the Block display, we will need to edit three values.

![Block display settings]

Change the Items per page option (as indicated by Item 1 in the preceding screenshot) to 10.

Change the More link option (indicated by Item 2) to No by unchecking the Create more link checkbox.

Change the Admin text under the Block settings option (indicated by Item 3) to conversations.

Click the Save button to save the view.

Then, return to Administer | Site building | Views link, or navigate to admin/build/views, and disable the default backlinks view. Although we used it as a starting point, we now have no further need for it; therefore, we can disable it.

Enabling the Block

As a result of the modifications we have just completed for our new view, we created a block that will display any backlinks when we are looking at Blog posts or Bookmarks. For the final step, we will enable our new block.
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Click the **Administer | Site building | Blocks** link, or navigate to admin/build/block.

We named this block when we adjusted the **Block settings** as shown in the preceding screenshot by **Item 3**. The value of the **Admin** text, which we set to **conversations**, is the name of the block.

To display the block, use the drop-down menu to select the desired region.

```
| Disabled |
|-----------------|-----------|---------|
| ✗ conversations | <none> | configure |
| ✗ Author information | Left sidebar | configure |
| ✗ Book navigation | Content | configure |
| ✗ Calendar Legend. | Footer | configure |
```

Select **Right sidebar**, and then click the **Save blocks** button at the bottom of the page to save the settings.

Blocks, and their role in creating an intuitive navigational structure, are covered in more detail in Chapter 14: *Theming and User Interface Design*.

### Seeing It Work

In this chapter, we have built the framework for the student blog, and started to build out the functionality that will support various types of interaction and discussion between people on the site. Now that we have built out this functionality, it's time to see how it fits together.

The backlinks functionality uses the site's **search index** to track links. The search index gets updated when **cron jobs** are run. We will discuss how to automate cron jobs in Chapter 15: *Backup, Maintenance, and Upgrades*. Until cron jobs are automated, you can run a cron job manually by navigating to http://yoursite.org/cron.php when logged in as a site administrator. If your backlinks are not showing (or any time search gives you unexpected results) triggering a cron job manually can help resolve the issue.

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For More Information:

In this section, we will add some sample content to illustrate the functionality we have just built. To start, add some sample student users as described in Chapter 5. For this example, we will add two new students—lucy and helen.

We will then log in as helen and create two new blog posts. Helen's first post is shown in the following screenshot:

Copy the URL into your clipboard, and then, while still logged in as helen, create another blog post.
When creating this second post, add a link to Helen’s first awesome blog post.

To add the link, highlight the text you want to be the hyperlinked, and then click the link icon, indicated by the arrow in the screenshot above. Paste the URL into the Link form, and then click the OK button.

Finally, submit the post.
Next, log out, and log back in again as lucy. As shown in the following screenshot, lucy will click the Student blog link to see what her classmates have been writing.
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Lucy will read Helen's first awesome blog post, and after being inspired or motivated by Helen's post, Lucy will create her own post where she links back to Helen's first awesome blog post.
At this point, both Helen and Lucy have linked to Helen's first post. When we navigate to this, we will see a screen which looks like the following screenshot:

![Screen shot of Drupal blog post](image)

The **What links here** block that we created earlier in the chapter shows all posts within the site that link back to this blog post. This allows site members to communicate with one another through comments, or through their own blogs.
Creating the Student Blog

Summary
In this chapter we created the foundation that will support both teacher-led and student-led led interaction. The instructor blog, appearing on the home page of the site, can give structure to the class and provide guidance to students. The student blogs, collected and displayed via the view we created, provides a place for students and teachers to see each other's work, and to provide feedback via comments.

In the upcoming chapters, we will learn how to use the blog to share audio, video, and pictures. The upcoming chapters will also demonstrate how these different media types can be used in concert to provide support for organized, structured, and student-led inquiry.
Where to buy this book


Free shipping to the US, UK, Europe and selected Asian countries. For more information, please read our shipping policy.

Alternatively, you can buy the book from Amazon, BN.com, Computer Manuals and most internet book retailers.