

# Soviet Culture In the Digital Age

## Getting Started...

Your first task is to set up a blog. You have some options here. Consider the following and then act accordingly.

- 1) Create a blog (website) on VT's WordPress installation. It is free and secure, but maybe not permanent. Follow the directions here: <http://blogs.lt.vt.edu/>. Consult this link to help you customize your blog and familiarize yourself with VT's wordpress site: <https://blogs.lt.vt.edu/support/documentation/>
- 2) Create a self-hosted blog (website) on WordPress.com: <https://signup.wordpress.com/signup/>. You have the option of a free account (there will be some advertisements and limits on the kinds of themes you can use) or, a premium account for \$99/ year (no ads, better support, option of using premium themes – which cost additional \$).
- 3) Get a student account through Reclaim Hosting (<https://reclaimhosting.com/>). Reclaim is a full-service web host geared specifically for academic audiences. All of my websites are there, including the main course website. A student / individual plan costs \$25 / year (<https://reclaimhosting.com/shared-hosting/>) but if you use this discount code: **anelsons15** you will get a \$5 rebate.

Reclaim offers much more than WordPress. If you are a web geek or aspiring web geek, you will be awed by all of the applications they support and how much fun you could have playing with them. If you just want WordPress you'll need to whizz through (ignore) lots of the bells and whistles of your control panel (C panel). From the C panel you want to "install Wordpress" and then choose a URL for your blog. Once you get your blog set up you should be able to work on it without using the C panel.

⇒ **As soon as you have a blog, please copy the URL here:**

<http://goo.gl/forms/bYVSJ1hNZy>

**and we will add it to the mother blog for the course**

**\*Do this no later than 5pm Thurs. 8/27.**

The form is also embedded on the course website if you want to access it there.

⇒ **Minor things that will make a major difference:**

1. Choose a user name on Wordpress that is close to your real name. Good = V. Putin.  
Bad = Vlad99
2. When you set up your blog check the box that allows search engines to index your site.
3. On the dashboard, choose "settings" and "discussion". You may keep the boxes checked that ask for a user to provide an email (this will not display when the

comment is published) but please, please, please uncheck the boxes that hold comments for moderation. (It is easy to change this back at the end of the semester.)

4. Check the main course website to confirm that your blog has been syndicated. Your post(s) will appear on the main page, and your blog's title will appear on the "contributors" page. It may take up to 24 hours for this to happen, so please be patient. The main blog updates every hour, so even after your URL has been added, it may take a while for your post to show up.
5. If you have trouble syndicating your blog, please double check the steps above. If you deleted the first "hello world" post, create a new one.
6. If you are still having trouble, please contact \*\*\*\*

## Blogging Basics

You are required to post (or create some other kind of digital content) at least seven times over the course of the semester, and you are required to comment on another person's blog (or digital artifact) at least three times per week (about 33 times over the course of the semester)\*. You may, of course post and comment more frequently. Everyone will complete the blogging / digital artifact assignments through the first Midterm Assessment (on 9/24). After that, you may choose your remaining posts from the remaining prompts and projects.

\*This is the first time we have run this course in this format and therefore the exact number of blogging opportunities and digital artifact making projects is a bit uncertain. You will need to post / create something at least 7 times and will need to comment or respond to your colleagues' work every time the opportunity presents itself. My guess is that there will be 10 such opportunities over the term. I will firm up the exact schedule after we see how the first few weeks go.

There is no assigned length or format for your blogging. You may use and include texts, images, video and audio files in your posts. If there are suggested materials for the week (i.e. [Seventeen Moments in Soviet History](#) or [The Current Digest of the Russian Press](#)), you need to use them as the foundation for your post, but can and should use other resources as well. Hyperlinking in the blog format simplifies the "citation" process, so take advantage of that to incorporate a range of materials and perspectives into your posts.

The main assignment here is to engage the course materials thoughtfully and substantively, to use them to develop your understanding of the key developments and dynamics of Soviet culture, to become more adept at cultural analysis and more proficient locating and using historical sources, and to explore and play with the blogging modality. The common print

readings are provided as touchstones and jumping off points. We will be working closely with some of these materials in class. But you will be creating the majority of the course content on your own websites and in your discussions with each other, both on the blogs and in class.

## Commenting Basics

Reading and responding to other students' blog posts gives you the opportunity to ask questions about a particular topic, elaborate on a point made in the blog post, relate the material in your own post (or another student's) to the post you're commenting on, and generally reflect on how the post helps you better understand Soviet culture.

## Great Culture Deserves A Great Website:

Your individual blogs are syndicated to the main course website, aka "The Mother Blog" (<http://amynelson.net/sovietculturef15/>) This means that your weekly post will be "fed" to this site, which will serve as the gateway to our course. Each week, we will identify exemplary posts to highlight at the top of the blog. These posts, and others that display exemplary analysis, research, and creativity will be awarded a "red star." Some posts will also be designated as "Iconoclasts" or "conservatives" for further discussion during class. (These are not value judgements, but rather ways of thinking about different kinds of creativity and our responses to it.) The class will also identify a "student's choice" post each week, and that post will also get a prominent position on the website that week. So in effect there will be a weekly digest of the main blog, focusing on a particular set of issues in Soviet culture, and we will all contribute articles / artifacts to each issue. We will also use the course blog at some point during most class sessions.



Fair warning: This is an experimental format and it may be bumpy as we figure things out. It may also be necessary to make adjustments along the way. Please fasten your seatbelt.

## One Week in the Life of the Motherblog

In order for this to work, we will need to stay on the following schedule:

Sundays before 10pm — individual blog posts due.

Mondays — read and comment on other blog posts

Mondays before 10 pm — comments on individual blog posts due.

Wednesdays — start working on next blog post.

Wednesdays before 5pm — “Press time” for the Weekly Edition of Soviet Culture Fall 2015.

### Your Audience

Is the class (and me and the editorial team). But it also includes EVERYONE. All the time (because it's on the World Wide Web). So put your best, most accomplished, mature and professional foot forward. Don't put anything on line that you wouldn't want your grandmother or Stephen Colbert to read. And if you do make a mistake, or realize something is not quite right with what you posted, please fix it. One of the many beauties of the blog is that it's easy to touch-up and re-edit a post.

### Evaluation

Individual blog posts and comments are not graded, but will be considered holistically as evidence of your general commitment to the course and its content.