

The Main Issues of Teaching Writing Online for Adult Learners

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we're going to look at one of those things that was found great online teaching writing techniques. It seems that writing in a new language has lots of advantages. It's a useful skill to develop anyway, but also, it slows things down, allows the thinking time that speaking doesn't, and it's a tangible product that allows you as a teacher to see where the problems are and correct them or get the learners to correct themselves or each other. There are three main issues with teaching writing face to face and online.

Introduction. Traditionally, many writing teachers explicate the writing process as a linear process [4]. For example, Paltridge, et al. identifies four distinct sub-processes in writing. First, in the conceptualizing stage, writers generate and select ideas that they can use in their writing, and organize the ideas in a neat way (e.g., an essay must have an introduction, body, and a conclusion) [6]. The second sub-process is called formulating, which means putting ideas into sentences. The third sub-process is revising, where writers rewrite and improve the essays. The revisions can be related to the content, grammar, and mechanics. The fourth subprocess is reading. Writers read the essay's instruction. They read to gather information for the essay topic. They re-read their writing to make sure that they are answering the essay's prompts. The linear process model may "under conceptualize and oversimplify" the writing process [8]. This oversimplification may be problematic because it can be inflexible and limits the freedom to explore, whereas writing in practice could be an unstructured process of self-discovery. More recently, some writing scholars suggest that writing is a recursive, non-linear activity. Clark and Ivanič's work highlights that both novice and experienced writers go through various stages of the writing process several times and may not follow a fixed and particular order. Clark and Ivanič (1991) identify (equally important and inter-related) stages of the writing process, involving the following: accumulating knowledge and opinions (e.g., doing the necessary reading to gather information about a particular topic, or gathering primary data through surveys and interviews to find out the participants' opinions on a particular topic); deciding how to take responsibility: whether to mask or declare the writer's own position (e.g., using first person pronouns vs. passive constructions in presenting the writer's view); analyzing the assignment (e.g., the question prompt and the instruction words, and the purpose of writing the assignment); planning (e.g., information to be included in the assignment so as to achieve the macro-rhetorical goal of the

paper); establishing goals and purposes (e.g., setting the macro rhetorical goal of the essay, and the goal of each paragraph); establishing the writer identity (e.g., showing the writer's commitment to a particular position/argument); drafting (e.g., putting together the ideas to construct an argument); considering constraints of time and space (e.g., deadline of submission of work and the word limit); formulating the writer's own ideas (e.g., the writer's own opinion on that particular topic); experiencing panic, pain, and anguish (e.g., going through the complicated and difficult process of writing); experiencing pleasure and satisfaction (e.g., finishing the assignment, and learning something new from the writing experience); revising (e.g., making sure that the arguments are persuasive, and the macro-rhetorical goal is achieved); considering the reader (e.g., making the writing reader-friendly and anticipating possible counter-arguments from the reader); clarifying writer commitment to his/her idea (e.g., confirming the writer's stance about a particular issue); putting knowledge of the language to use (e.g., choosing language that can help the writer achieve the macro-rhetorical goal of the paper); and making the copy neat (e.g., checking the overall presentation of the paper) [3].

Literature review. Obviously, it's much easier for learners to edit and correct their writing if it's done electronically and I think that it's useful to teach learners how to use spell checks and grammar checks effectively, too. They have access to these things in the real world- so why not in class? How about the issue of monitoring? Enter Google docs! You could use these in a couple of different ways. The first is for a combined class doc- when you give them a writing task, just share a link to a single Google doc in the chat and on that doc, have a designated space for each of your learners to write. When you all have that Google doc open, you can then see all of their writing as they are doing it and add correction comments to help them to edit their work. You can see how everyone is doing on one screen, you can help all of them, it's fast and easy and my learners find it really helpful [5].

The other way that you can use Google docs to build up portfolios of writing is for each learner to have a single Google doc that they share with you. When they've done writing in class, they can cut and paste it into this doc or when they do writing homework, they can do it on there. If they always write at the top of the doc, with a clear heading for each new piece, you'll build up an archive of their writing, arranged in reverse chronological order over the weeks and months that you teach them. They'll be able to look back and see the progress they've made, and so will you. Hopefully, this will be motivating. You could encourage them to add pictures to it, make it look nice, and perhaps print it out at the end of the course.

Warnock then argued that several aspects of online writing tutorial need to be taken into consideration: (1) peer-review that can help the students assist each other; (2) give adequate feedback without discouraging; (3) grade student's work online, as well as pacing and also predictability that helps them get comfortable with the online writing course; (4) create collaboration among the students to work virtually in groups; (5) intellectual property in association with plagiarism, copyright and trust, the amount of time and efforts that tutors make; (6) marking as part of course assessment can tell us how well they are doing in the given tasks.

By keeping in mind that different modes of teaching, like different modes of writing, have "particular affordances that offer potentials and limitations for communication and representation," we can make better use of our new online teaching spaces [1].

One of the latest references widely quoted by many scholars in relation to teaching writing online is *Teaching Writing Online: How and Why* by Warnock (2009). He proposed a number of core guidelines for teachers of online courses to consider. Some book reviewers consider some of those guidelines as more or less similar to the methods that are widely practiced in face-to-face classrooms, whereas some other critics regard them as something quite useful since they contain a theory and a pedagogy for teaching writing online. Below are some of the guidelines proposed by the writer.

Guideline 1: Teaching writing online offers you new ways to apply theoretical and pedagogical concepts about writing. It can provide you with different ways of disseminating, sharing, reviewing,

and responding to students' texts.

Guideline 2: Initially, you want to think migration, not transformation, when teaching online. Think about what you do well, and then think about how you can use various resources to translate those skills into the OWcourse.

Guideline 3: Most prepackaged course management systems (CMS) have everything you need to help you translate your pedagogy into the OWcourse.

From the tutor's perspective, instructions given online can be both a different and a progressive approach since online writing tutorials provide opportunities for the students, including tutors, to exchange their writing that face-to-face classrooms cannot do.

In addition to this, online writing tutorials also give opportunities for the students to produce more informal and developmental pieces of writing that can be developed into essay formats. This kind of activity is actually in line with writing a draft as part of the process of writing. More importantly, online writing tutorials make it possible for the students to communicate everything in the form of written work. This in turn indirectly forces them to write with the audience, purpose and context in mind, as pointed out by Warnock (2009, p. ix) "how teaching online opens an array of intriguing teaching and learning opportunities for writing instructors and their students."

Methodology. Here are six practical approaches that embrace the affordances of online teaching from our composition and business writing classrooms:

Don't Ditch the Workshop: If you normally teach using hands-on writing workshops, you may worry that the online classroom is too cold or impersonal to support your practice. It can be, but it doesn't have to be! While the asynchronous environment tends to reduce the spontaneity of unravelling a writing challenge while sitting around a table, it provides more time to reflect.

Take advantage of this by using your LMS's discussion board to allow students to answer questions that will help them reflect meaningfully on their work and the work of their peers. Ask students to identify the main strands of argument in their partner's paper, for example, and then put together a reverse outline. By so doing, you'll provide much-needed structure while also inviting students to dig deeper into their peers' work, more so than they might do during a more free-flowing face-to-face workshop. Finally, you'll engage students in meaningful reflection, which has been shown to improve learning and retention [2].

Keep It Hands-On: With a little planning, you can reproduce the key lessons of your face-to-face writing instruction using screencast software. If you would normally show students how to effectively break down and analyze a piece of evidence during a student workshop, you still can! Ask for a student volunteer to submit their work a bit early, select a passage with particularly strong evidence, and then open it up in Word. Record yourself making the same changes you'd make in class, offer the same helpful commentary, and end with the same types of suggestions for further application. You can then share the screencast with students as content or incorporate it as part of your discussion board workshop instructions. If you're not comfortable making your own videos, there are many videos on YouTube and elsewhere that you can share with your students—the key is to do so in response to help them overcome specific learning challenges.

Employ Exemplars. To write effectively across disciplines, students must produce writing that is strategic, audience focused, efficient, and precise. To help students understand how to do so—a particular challenge when transitioning to online learning—instructors should provide examples of the desired completed writing assignment, especially examples of past graded work. As Pytash and Morgan note, "The study of models provides students with quality examples to inform their writing" [7]. These exemplars make expectations clear, so they can be a great basis for helping all students meet expectations. Instructors can then facilitate an examination of a range of graded papers asking students to share their analyses, via discussion board or web conference, of what they think is good or bad about the papers reviewed. This offers students the experience of critically thinking through what

is required to produce a passing paper, and greatly advances student success.

It is important that students understand how their work will be graded. In addition to the exercises outlined above, students can benefit from support provided by the writing lab, where they can explore examples of memoranda, letters, informal and formal business reports, etc.

Self-Directed and Peer Revision: Mastering writing requires both repetition and critical analysis by the student to enhance understanding and to minimize future errors. One effective technique is to require students to conduct a self-assessment of their writing assignments prior to submission; this type of self-assessment builds valuable metacognitive skills. Grammarly is a resource that students can apply to their writing to help them catch some spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors at no cost. Students can copy and paste their paper in Grammarly and reflect on the mistakes they made by comparing the initial version score with the final version and score. They should be asked to include in their reflection common errors discovered and the steps they will take to avoid repeating the mistake(s). This reproduces the kind of self-analysis many of us employ in face-to-face courses [8].

Proofreading the writing of other students can be an excellent way for students to enhance their understanding of effective writing. One useful approach is to pair students and require they proofread the writing of their partner. Students can be informed that both the author and proofreader will receive credit for the assignment. A rubric on expectations and how students will be graded should be provided.

Encourage Revision, Progressive Grading, and Extra Credit: Providing opportunities for students to improve their skills by providing opportunities for revision, by weighting later assessments higher than early assessments, and by submitting extra credit assignments are useful techniques for promoting writing success.

Embrace Multimodality: One of the greatest benefits of teaching writing online is the opportunity for faculty and students to engage new modes of writing. Since students will already be completing all work in digital format, you can easily incorporate multiple modes of expression. At the simplest level, you might encourage students to upload a brief response video when offering feedback to other students. You might make the assignments themselves multimodal by incorporating video or text, or give students multiple options for completing a given task.

However, a large virtual classroom comprising of hundred of registered students could be a heavy workload to the tutors when it comes to providing individual feedback on the writing exercises using the eight initiations for all the students. The workload would even get heavier when it is time to mark or grade the students' works on the basis of task-and-language criteria in dealing with the three main written tasks as part of the whole tutorial package [3]. In other words, each of the two feedback types mentioned above has advantages and disadvantages.

To conclude, online advanced writing skills course tutorial in particular, and the online tutorials in general, need more serious efforts in upgrading the tutors' qualifications and their subject-matter knowledge, computer/technical skills, skills for designing online learning materials and tasks, as well as soft skills, as not all of these are practised in face-to-face classrooms. Based on the findings of this research, it is recommended that further research involving data on the students' achievement in Writing course – a comparison between their performance during the tutorial sessions and the performance in the end-semester assessments be carried out in the future. A research that focuses on designing a model of language entry test for recruiting new students is also highly recommended. It is expected that the research findings will be useful for policy makers at UT and other institutions of distance higher education. As part of the stakeholders, it is crucial for the University to start administering a specially designed language entry test for two different study programs – a programs of study in translation (a specialization), which requires a high English language proficiency level, and a program of study in General English, which is English language skills oriented.

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