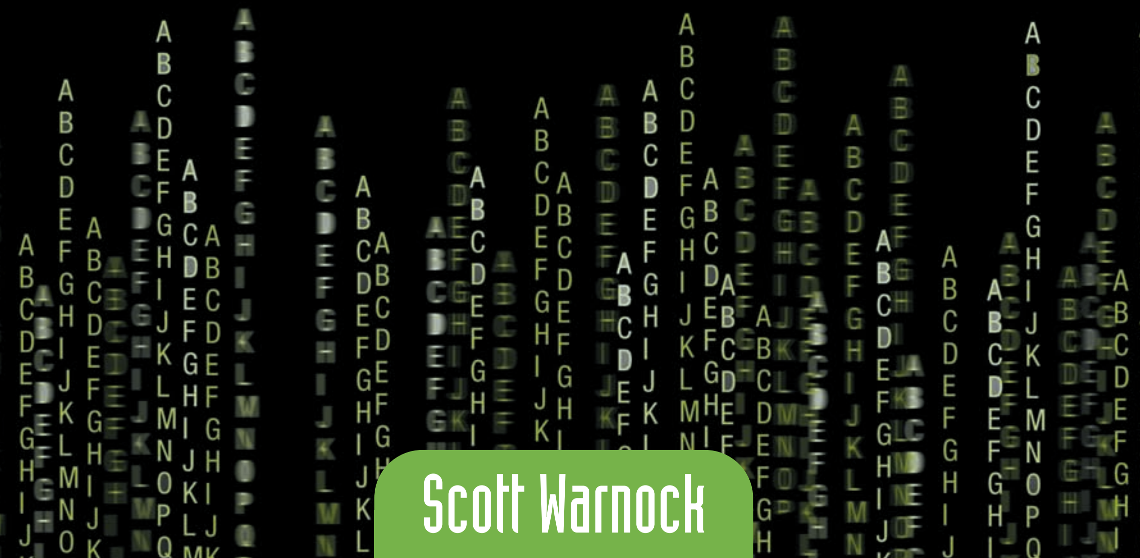
Teaching Writing Online

How & Why



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Introduction

Migrating *to Online Writing Instruction: How, Why, and Who*

The philosophy that underlies my approach to teaching writing online is that you can migrate *your teaching style and strategies to the online environment. I describe that philosophy below while explaining the structure of this book to you, my reader.*

My objective is to share my experiences as an online writing teacher and faculty trainer to help other teachers teach composition effectively with digital tools. Along the way, I will also explain how teaching online opens an array of intriguing teaching and learning opportunities for writing instructors and their students.

I joined Drexel University in the summer of 2004. One of the primary reasons I was hired was to guide a new initiative in the Department of English and Philosophy to offer first-year writing (**FYW**) courses in fully online formats. I became the leader of a group called the Online Writing Teachers (OWT); we worked throughout the summer of 2004 to prepare online versions of our first-year writing courses, starting with English 101: Expository Writing and Reading. (I describe the roller coaster–like experiences of that initial summer in the article “And Then There Were Two: The Growing Pains of an Online Writing Course Faculty Training Initiative.”) As OWT team leader, I have worked during the past few years with teachers who have a wide variety of experience with and interest in learning technologies. As I have refined my own approaches to teaching online and **hybrid courses**,

I have developed faculty training workshops, created faculty development materials, and devoted hundreds of hours to one-on-one sessions with teachers who were learning how to incorporate teaching technologies into their pedagogical approaches. All of these activities have worked synergistically with my research and scholarly interests, which increasingly have focused on issues involved in using learning technologies to teach writing. In training and working with so many teachers, I began to realize that although resources for teaching online are plentiful, materials specifically designed for teaching writing online and the teaching philosophy that accompanies online composition instruction are scarce. It was with that realization that I decided to write this book.

I have found online writing instruction promising and intriguing for many reasons. **OWcourses** (bolded terms are defined in the glossary) offer opportunities to teach beyond the normal constraints of geographic and temporal borders. Indeed, students of all kinds continue to swell the enrollments in online classes. The Sloan-C report *Staying the Course: Online Education in the United States, 2008* indicates that the growth rate of online enrollments was 12.9 percent, compared with 1.2 percent overall U.S. growth in higher education enrollments, and more than 20 percent of U.S. students took an online course in fall 2007 (Allen and Seaman 1), so it appears that opportunities to expand our instructional offerings with online methods will continue to increase. The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) issued revised technology standards for teachers in June 2008, and the creators "began with the assumption this time that every teacher recognizes the importance of technology and how it can transform teaching and learning," said Lajeane Thomas, chair of ISTE's standards committee and director of the group's National Educational Technology Standards project ("ISTE Unveils," par. 5). Technology is increasingly becoming a given in instructional design—the question now is not *if*, but *how* teachers will use it.

Online instruction itself opens a number of opportunities, but I specifically find online *writing* instruction promising because I believe—and this is a core premise of this book—that online writing instruction provides the opportunity for not just a *different* approach, but a *progressive* approach to the way teachers

teach writing—an evolution of sorts in writing instruction. This belief stems from several factors inherent in the OWcourse. One is the sheer amount of writing exchanged among students and the teacher in an OWcourse; few onsite courses offer the chance for this amount of writing. Second is the number of opportunities that open up when students create so much writing, much of it informal and developmental. The third factor is that because the interactions in OWcourse format that I describe in this book are almost entirely written, students are faced with a unique educational challenge/pressure to write to communicate almost everything in the course.

"Teaching online privileges writing in ways that traditional classes cannot," wrote Susanmarie Harrington, Rebecca Rickly, and Michael Day in the introduction to their book, *The Online Writing Classroom*, because so much of the communication in an online class is through writing (8). Thomas Barker and Fred Kemp have called this ongoing reading and writing practice "*textualizing* the class" (20). Juan Flores prefers teaching FYW online because these "almost entirely text-based . . . environments require from students a constant and independently active participation in their own learning. Students not only learn to think through their reading and writing . . . but to engage in reflective thinking over the writing of others" (430). When you migrate your writing course online, students are writing to you and to each other in virtually all of their course communications, expanding ideas of audience, purpose, and context each time they contribute to a message board, create a **blog** entry, or engage in an email-based peer review. In that way, I see the possibilities of a progressive step toward, perhaps, a "better" composition class, and I expand on this premise throughout the book. Why *better*? Because the online format—*by its very nature*—requires students to learn to use writing to interact with others. Many teachers have reproduced this experience in onsite courses, but in the OWcourse, students often have little fallback position: if they want to express something in the course, they must write it. The OWcourse forces an environment that is not just writing intensive but also often writing exclusive. As writing teachers, we couldn't ask for a better lab or workshop to help our first-year students develop their ability to communicate using the written word.

Indeed, OWcourses allow teachers to enact many theoretical, and sometimes otherwise logistically tricky, ideas about composition pedagogy. The ideas of many compositional thinkers who strongly influenced my teaching practices are enlivened and, in some cases, given full form for perhaps the first time in the online learning environment. James Britton and his coauthors, for instance, recognized decades ago that children learn to write largely by writing (3). Kenneth Bruffee's ideas about collaborative learning, Linda Flower and John Hayes's ideas about composing, Peter Elbow's ideas about invention and risk, the **WAC** (writing across the curriculum) school's mantra of writing to learn—these concepts find new expression in the OWcourse environment. Julie Wood pointed out the natural link between computers and process-centered writing pedagogy, saying of the computer that students "learn to use this highly-flexible tool in ways that help them develop as writers in the truest sense" (par. 3). She expanded on the ideas of Edward Fiske, who observed the synergy for children between the writing process approach and the use of technology when he noted, "Computers are the most important new technology for writing instruction since the invention of the pencil—maybe even more so. Learning to write is essentially self-editing. . . . For little children, the biggest obstacle to learning to write is the physical act of moving the pencil across the paper, but computers make this unnecessary" (157). Some reasons for the natural connections between computers and composition have to do with theoretical ideas about digital writing; but others are straightforward, because the online environment enables the easy dissemination, sharing, and revising of texts. The continuous writing environment makes it ever possible for students to learn through their own work in a studio-like environment (Grego and Thompson 8). Computers and composition specialists have long been intrigued by the collaborative writing and knowledge potential of the *hivemind*, as Don Byrd and Derek Owens called it, where the informational hive exists only "as the contact among people who realize a shared consciousness within the sustained event of that writing" (55). These ideas come to the fore in the OWcourse.

Throughout this book, I offer a series of core guidelines to help direct you in the most important things you might consider as you prepare to teach online. Here is the first:

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 student texts.

Some go so far as to say that in many composition classrooms, writing is "taught only incidentally" (Kitzhaber 36), but I will simply state here that the OWcourse allows us to refocus our teaching efforts on the core element of the FYW course: written work our students create.

Migration: A Concept That Can Work for New Online Teachers

This book operates from a premise that contradicts what many experts in online instruction have said about the transition to the electronic teaching environment. Many say that online teaching is completely different from onsite or face-to-face (**f2f**) teaching. In an effort to emphasize the potential of the online environment, these experts often highlight acute differences between online and onsite teaching. For instance, right up front in *Conquering the Content*, Robin Smith stated that online learning "is very different" from classroom learning, so onsite teaching materials that worked before are "not going to be suitable for Web-based teaching," and the resulting adjustment is "tough" for faculty (4–5). In their book *Teaching Online*, Susan Ko and Steve Rossen were more reserved but still contended that "a strict translation of what you normally do on the ground into the online environment isn't always desirable" (45). Although I understand that we want to prevent teachers from moving online casually, I think that these types of cautions plunge new teachers immediately into a zone of uncertainty, where they may feel there is too much to overcome to begin teaching online.

I believe that you can approach teaching online more confidently if you view it as *not* being that different from teaching onsite. I say this not just because I think that people who perceive

online instruction as totally alien to their normal, tried-and-true teaching practices are often scared off from teaching online, but because teaching online, like teaching onsite, is about recognizing your teaching talent zones or areas and finding ways to translate those talents to the teaching environment in which you are working. Barbara Stedman states this well: "Know your pedagogy, find those points where pedagogy and technology genuinely meet, and develop highly specific goals, tasks, and instructions that facilitate such a union" (28). This book investigates the many good ways to make this transition, and I believe that if you focus on what you do well in the classroom, you will find the move to online teaching less difficult—and more enjoyable.

Even authors who caution about the stark difference between online and onsite teaching do recognize that core strategies can be preserved. For instance, despite the initial warnings above, Smith also pointed out that central teaching concepts, such as Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson's seven principles for undergraduate teaching, still apply regardless of modality: contact between students and faculty, reciprocity and cooperation among students, active learning, time on task, feedback, communicating high expectations, and respecting diverse talents and ways of learning (6). Ko and Rossen, too, could see how "converting your course to an online environment means adapting it to use some of the tools available in the new environment" (36). And Patricia Addesso said that contrary to what many think, "there are many transferable skills between traditional and online facilitation" (113). Like these authors, I recognize that teaching online is different from teaching onsite, perhaps as different as teaching a writing course in two radically different parts of the world, but the foundation of what you do *conceptually* can still remain very much the same. Remember that you don't have to "dazzle students to be effective" (Ko and Rossen 40) in online instruction. In short, I have become convinced that good onsite teachers who are willing to spend some time developing their technological literacy can quickly become good online teachers.

Actually, the reason that some teachers may be scared of moving to a fully online environment is that they need to do something that, as a teacher, can be painful and even a wee bit

embarrassing: closely evaluate your own teaching. As we all know, we often find it difficult to determine whether the things we do in the writing classroom are effective. We *think* and often *hope* they are effective, but the reality is that we often simply do not know. (In 2000, Richard Haswell said that the 40-year-old mission of documenting how college students change their writing "has not been much advanced by researchers" ["Documenting" 307].) I think that most dedicated teachers—writing or otherwise, including people in any profession of which teaching/mentoring is a foundation—go through periodic moments of malaise during which they suspect that everything they are doing is wrong; they may even wonder if they are doing things exactly *opposite* to the way they should be done. That's an unsettling feeling, and I have gone through similar cycles during my decade and a half of teaching. Part of the problem that some teachers have when migrating to online teaching is that malaise and uncertainty seem to bubble up from their very classroom souls—while they are trying to learn a new *course management system* (**CMS**). (I prefer the term *learning management system* [LMS], but generally LMS is used for corporate training incarnations of e-learning, whereas CMS is used for learning on the academic side.) The combination of these constraints can be enough to make some teachers want to give up. I hope to help you feel comfortable about converting what you do in the onsite classroom, so that this teaching introspection can lead to discoveries, not frustrations, and help you see technology as a productive partner in this development of your teaching abilities.

The *How*: Writing Instruction Is Different

One focus of this book is on the *How*. How do you teach writing in an online environment? I want you, the teacher, to use this book as a guide to help you take instructional strategies that have worked in the onsite classroom and migrate them to the online environment. Many teachers can become rapidly acclimated to the online environment if they think about migrating their long-developed skills, instead of thinking an OWcourse requires a

brand-new teaching approach. So let's consider what this means (which may also help you choose the chapters in this book most applicable to you). Say that your class . . .

- **is built around conversations your students have about readings.** You will want to think about how your moderator skills transfer to the e-environment, facilitating message boards, **listservs**, chats, and other conversational technologies. (See Chapters 7 and 8.)
- **is built around highly student-centered conversations**. You can use a variety of online communication tools to de-emphasize your role in conversations. In fact, students can take over the conversation in an online environment perhaps even more effectively than they can with you present in the f2f room. (See Chapter 8.)
- **uses lots of workshop-like peer evaluations of student writing**. You can use similar strategies in perhaps even more efficient and effective ways online. (See Chapter 10.)
- **relies on content lessons about the course subject matter**. There are numerous ways to convert such materials. Content delivery is the common paradigm for many guides to online instruction. (See Chapter 4.)
- **is based on personalized interaction you have with your students about their formal writing projects**. You can use many different strategies to provide comments on students' writing. If you have always provided comments in handwriting, you will find new opportunities for individual feedback and broader assessment in online instruction. (See Chapter 11.)
- **involves quizzing**. Almost any CMS provides quizzes. (See Chapters 7 and 12.)
- **involves presentations**. Most software tools allow you to facilitate student presentations. Voice tools are continually improving; and using other technology tools, you can achieve multimedia capability with assignments and presentations. (See Chapters 3 and 14.)
- **features your efforts to model writing.** With audiovisual (AV) technologies, you can provide highly stimulating lessons that feature you as the writer. Using these technologies, students can also revisit these lessons. (See Chapter 3.)

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 to the OWcourse.

Although I cover many general aspects of teaching online in the following chapters, I want you to understand that the technical instructions for almost all online tools are covered well elsewhere, as are instructions for teaching online in general. There are many fine websites, articles, and books on the topic of teaching online, and I list some particularly useful resources in Chapter 18. (In terms of technical instruction, the best source for this kind of information may be your own campus's IT department.) This book focuses on the specifics of teaching *writing* courses online. I will try to help you understand how to bring together some of the basic tools and strategies of the writing teacher's trade using online tools and techniques: How do I conduct a peer review? What constitutes a useful **informal writing** assignment? What's the best way to provide feedback on student papers? The chapters address the main areas teachers need to understand to teach writing effectively online.

One thing is certain: you want to "consider your course objectives, the preferred teaching strategies and approaches to the material that you want to preserve, and any new approaches you would like to try in the online environment." In terms of course design, you want to make sure "course objectives are defined in terms of the **learning outcomes**" and that all activities in your course are aligned with those outcomes as well (Ko and Rossen 46). In this way, you will be engaging in the same kind of internal Socratic dialogue as in preparing for any teaching experience: asking yourself questions about how you want to teach the course and what you hope students will take from that learning experience.

A Certain Style of Teaching

Note that I emphasize a certain style of online teaching in this book. I will mention other approaches, but my core approach to

teaching online involves the intensive use of **asynchronous** writing tools in an already packaged CMS. *Asynchronous* means using technology tools that do not require all students to be present at the same time; so your students write when they wish, as opposed to attending a class electronically at a specific time and using chat or voice software to participate in real time.

There are many tools you could use to teach online, but because I assume you are new to online instruction, I think the best way for you to progress is to use an already available CMS, probably provided and supported at some level by your institution. Some object to the use of a password-protected CMS in an era of open-source information, but I think your writing students need to operate in a semiprivate, safe area of the Web, and your institution's CMS accomplishes that. You can also teach online by using voice technologies and convening the class electronically, or by using a combination of external blog, **wiki**, and message board software. I will mention many of these options, but I will focus on a certain method that I think can be used effectively by most teachers. If you become interested in this mode of teaching, you will soon discover that in terms of technology, the possibilities are endless; but I'll assume that you want to lower the technology barrier as much as you can, and for teachers new to the online environment, that means using a prepackaged CMS.

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

The *Why* of Teaching Writing Online

As Nietsche once said, in a more dramatic context, "If you have your *why?* for life, then you can get along with almost any *how?*" (6).

I don't want you to "bear" the responsibility of online instruction carelessly or blindly, but in explaining how to teach writing

online, I also express what I consider important reasons for us to explore this teaching modality. One of the primary reasons is that this environment, as I mentioned, can be purely textual. Students are in a rich, guided learning environment in which they express themselves to a varied audience with their written words. Even if you are reluctant to teach hybrid or online courses, the electronic communication tools in every CMS allow your students to write to you and to each other in ways that will open up teaching and learning opportunities for everyone involved.

OWcourses can also be more than just textual environments for students. They can provide a needed method of delivering courses to people whose lives have undergone significant disruption. After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, I not only used electronic tools to volunteer teach a Sloan-C-sponsored composition course, but I also was able to place the New Orleans student who enrolled in the course—the only student who was able to make the whole process work well enough to remain in the class—into an existing hybrid class I was teaching at Drexel, taking advantage of the electronic community of the existing course. In 2004, when Belarus's dictator abruptly shut down the European Humanities University (for being too Western), members of the university fled, many to nearby Lithuania. Despite the obvious problems that the school's closing caused, many stranded students were still able to take courses online. One student told the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, "I have three different virtual classes, and every week I write a paper and send it off by e-mail" (MacWilliams, par. 13). A student living in a small town on the Rio Grande in Texas was the only one in his seven-person senior class interested in certain courses, and he was able to take them virtually through the Star Schools Program (Withrow 3). Smith told another story, of a husband and wife with three children who are trying to improve their lives and are able to do so via online learning (vii).

Hearing and living through stories like these, I realize the humanistic potential of this environment. Writing teachers have a unique opportunity because writing-centered online courses allow instructors and students to interact in ways beyond content delivery. They allow students to build a community through electronic means. Perhaps for some—but not all!—such a community will never wholly replace the interactions of an onsite class, but for

students whose options are limited, these electronic communities can build the social and professional connections that constitute some of education's real value.

I am aware of the pitfalls of the online environment, and by that I mean the broader dangers of becoming dependent on digital tools for some of the most meaningful aspects of our lives, including education. Marshall McLuhan recounted an Eastern proverb about a man who would not use a lever to do his work, saying, "I have heard my teacher say that whoever uses machines does all his work like a machine. He who does his work like a machine grows a heart like a machine, and he who carries the heart of a machine in his breast loses his simplicity. He who has lost his simplicity becomes unsure in the strivings of his soul. Uncertainty in the strivings of the soul is something which does not agree with honest sense. It is not that I do not know of such things; I am ashamed to use them" (63). In the pre-iPod and Google days, Billie Wahlstrom was blunt about this view of technology: "The computer-supported literacy that students develop may prepare them for an exploitative environment rather than protect them from it" (185). There is a long tradition of suspicion of technology; more than half a century ago, Siegfried Giedeon said, "Never has mankind possessed so many instruments for abolishing slavery. But the promises of a better life have not been kept" (715). More recently, Langdon Winner, in his aptly named chapter "Mythinformation," said of the 1970s and 1980s computer revolution, "Once again, those who push the plow are told they ride a golden chariot" (115). Indeed, you don't have to be a **Luddite** to think that many who have sprinted headlong into the technological future seem enthralled by digital technology to the point of risking being used by the technologies instead of the other way around.

However, caution about technology is not an excuse for inaction. Some compositionists have argued that those of us in writing studies have been too passive regarding technologies, with a few groundbreakers as exceptions. In discussing machine scoring of student writing, for instance, Haswell said bluntly, "Composition teachers had come late to the analysis of language by computer" ("Automatons" 61). As a result, according to Haswell, we have witnessed the increased use of artificial intelligence assessment

tools and the seemingly uncontrollable growth of standardized testing. In the introduction to their book, Harrington, Rickly, and Day wrote that if those interested in writing do not get involved with technological development, "we will have no control over the educational resources that are developed" (7). We cannot become so concerned with the negative aspects of technologies, particularly educational technologies, that we miss their potential for us and for our students. Using technology tools in the composition class space can help us, as a field, lend a smarter, more humanistic approach to these learning technologies. This is the view advocated by Andrew Feenberg, whose *critical theory of technology* includes refusing to let technology represent an unavoidable destiny, instead calling for a reconstruction of technology that allows it to work in conjunction with cultural forces rather than control us (14, 127). Walter Ong applied a similar line of thinking to the relationship between language and technology, saying that since the world has been technologized, "there is no effective way to criticize what technology has done with it without the aid of the highest technology available" (80). Throughout this book, I describe reasons for using technological means to teach writing that I hope will resonate with the reasons many of us became teachers of writing and the humanities in the first place.

The online environment also provides us with an opportunity specifically because of the subject matter of the writing course. This is an interesting twist. During the past few years, almost all higher education publications have described the concerns of faculty about placing their course materials online, as the faculty then could perhaps be replaced by anyone with some knowledge of the subject matter (Maguire). Feenberg, in "Distance Learning: Promise or Threat?" voiced the same fears a decade ago. Not so in composition. In his composition classic *Themes, Theories, and Therapy*, Albert Kitzhaber observed that writing teachers "are the most complicated and versatile of all teaching machines" and are unlikely to be replaced (92). Our constant efforts to work with student texts are unique and irreplaceable, and our model of technology use can be perhaps the most humanistic in the academy. For instance, Smith described with considerable expertise how to set up and teach a course, but for her and for most other teaching

disciplines, the pedagogical paradigm is clear in her discussion about responding to student messages: "I did not want to become a personal tutor to twenty-five individual students, a highly inefficient use of time" (86). That "inefficient use of time" is at the foundation of the way that writing instructors work with and improve their students' writing. The technology can allow us to hone that role even further.

A Different Student Population

Finally, students have changed, as has our culture. In the introduction to their book about **blended** learning, D. Randy Garrison and Norman Vaughan were direct: "It is beyond time that higher education institutions recognize the untenable position of holding onto past practices that are incongruent with the needs and demands of a knowledge society" (ix). Indeed, students have unprecedented access to technology. There was a time when I felt uncomfortable making such a general statement, because the United States, not to mention the world, consisted of a stark contrast between technological haves and have nots. This is still true, but some studies, at least in the United States, indicate that access to the Internet is much higher among lower-income children than once commonly believed (Nagel). Our students are becoming increasingly digital, regardless of background. They are open and sometimes disturbingly familiar in the social and informational network of the Web. In talking about the use of "disclosure" Web tools like social networking sites, communications professor Julie Frechette wrote, "The new millennium may be the right time to reexamine our philosophical hesitancies to cross the digital line and engage in pedagogical experimentation online" (par. 6). Indeed, part of the *Why* is that we can place our students in a writing context in which they are comfortable, channeling their vast text production skills into a complementary teaching methodology.

According to a Pew report, "Teens write a lot, but they do not think of their emails, instant and text messages as writing. This disconnect matters because teens believe good writing is an essential skill for success and that more writing instruction at school would help them" (Lenhart, par. 1). We can help them

address this disconnect, and I believe we will get continually better at helping them contextualize their "school" writing based on the other types of writing they do in their lives. I recognize the potential for an unsettling paradox here, because introducing layers of technology between us and our students can have negative, and, in the parlance of Edward Tenner, unexpected *revenge effects*, in which the side effects of introducing the technology in the writing classroom could directly counter its benefits (8). However, the introduction of layers of technological infrastructure to students' writing education may not complicate their learning, but instead place it within contexts with which they are comfortable and familiar. Christine Hult and Ryan Richins cited studies that 93 percent of thirteen- to seventeen-year-old Internet users also use **IM** (instant messaging) to communicate with peers (par. 1). Teachers often view technology as a distraction, but that's because our teaching is at odds with the e-environment. I, too, can be annoyed when students "do screens" while in my onsite classrooms, but think about it: in our writing classes, while we are talking, they are often diligently writing away—and yet we see this as an obstacle (Slager). The text-based e-environment is an increasingly familiar environment for students. Tom Lavazzi talked about "pedagogic 'happenings'" (127) while students surf the Web; in short, we can teach them while they are there.

Who Are You?

The final question is this: Who are *you*? My target audience for this book is teachers who have taught writing—mainly, although not necessarily exclusively, first-year composition—in onsite classes and are now, for one reason or another, going to teach writing online, in a hybrid environment, or in an environment with many digital tools. I wrote this book for you as a practical, helpful guide to the nuances of the OWcourse. Reader, in my imagination you have several traits. Here is how I picture you, my *primary audience* for this book:

- You are an earnest and interested teacher of writing.

- You may be nervous about teaching online, but you also are meeting this challenge with some enthusiasm.
- You feel that you will eventually get comfortable with the technology, but right now you need some help getting started. That is, you have the will to move your teaching online, but you are not sure how to work in this environment.
- You don't consider yourself a Luddite, but you do not necessarily have tremendous technological knowledge. You use email and the Web and word processing, and you are more than willing to give technology tools a chance.
- You have *some* patience in understanding that it takes time to learn to migrate your classes online, yet you are willing to see how this shift affects your teaching and the learning of your students.
- You don't have easy, regular access to a course designer; in other words, you will create and design much of the course.

A *secondary audience* is faculty and administrators who train faculty to teach using technology. This book offers a particular approach, as described above, and may present you with some new training tactics. A *tertiary audience* is those who are interested in how different technology tools are being used to improve the writing classroom environment, regardless of discipline. In fact, I think that the electronic writing environment may open up some of the most interesting writing opportunities for those trying to use writing in electronic WID (writing in the disciplines) or WAC courses. Although this book seems to feature technology, at its foundation it is about writing instruction. Throughout, I reinforce my beliefs that in the spectrum of teaching, writing instruction is its own peculiar teaching animal, and although it may not always be perceived that way, writing is difficult to teach. Some things we assume about teaching writing are challenged when we move to an online environment. While we draw on the foundational ideas we have always used, we can also find new ways to instruct students about writing strategies, manage the flow of documents, read and respond to student writing, and engage in dialogue with our students.

Making the transition to teaching writing online can be nerve-wracking. Initially (as when you first started teaching f2f) you

will feel that there is always something more to do. Sure, you will feel your novicehood acutely, and you'll have the sense that you don't know all of the slick, complex tech tools that you should know to teach effectively. But you will become comfortable in this environment. Once you do, you can allow your teaching creativity to be complemented by the various online tools. The results are often fascinating.

Not for Everyone

It's important to be up front: teaching online will not appeal to everyone. I want you, the teacher, to understand that before we proceed. There are ramifications in the move to online writing that we cannot ignore. You may be asked to teach online writing for reasons that have nothing to do with pedagogy. Perhaps convenience is paramount. Maybe for your school, the decision is driven by finances, and freeing up class space saves money. Sarah Carr, in the *Chronicle of Higher Education,* explained that the recent growth of online courses is motivated by both the desire to offer students flexibility and "the sometimes mistaken belief that online courses can be delivered more cheaply when compared to face-to-face (f2f) courses" (A4). Perhaps the move to online education at your school is motivated by a desire to fragment full-time faculty and use less expensive, disempowered part-timers. Those of us interested in this area will be forced to contend with these issues as online instruction becomes more popular and easier to deliver.

For some students and teachers, online instruction is difficult and even exasperating. I don't want you to be discouraged by initial difficulties when you start teaching online, but I do think we need to be cautious about pushing faculty to teach online and about recommending students for fully online instruction, especially traditionally aged students who live near or on campus or very close. Online writing instruction works well for many students—and for some, even better than traditional onsite learning—but not for all. In Chapter 2, I discuss some strategies to help us make good decisions about which modality is best for teachers and students.

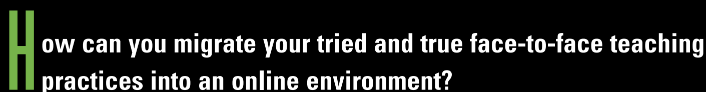
A Word about This Book's Organization

Each chapter of this book takes on a focused area of teaching an OWcourse. Within the structure of the book are several tools to help you navigate your way around:

- *Glossary.* Recurring terms and abbreviations, which appear in bold throughout, can be found in the glossary.
- *Guidelines.* Each chapter has one or more guidelines, which are also listed all together inside the front and back covers. These guidelines are a distillation of the lessons found in each chapter.
- *Pre-term Questions.* At the end of each chapter is a list of questions you can pose before the term starts to help prepare yourself for that first experience teaching online.

The chapters are designed to be short and easily digestible. You'll notice some repetition. For instance, the first appearance of a glossary term is bolded in each chapter because I envision you skipping around, reading the chapters most relevant to your teaching. Several subject areas, such as peer review, are discussed in multiple chapters. Much like the needed redundancy in teaching online, I think this repetition helps to strengthen the message in the book, because I can't be sure where you are going to start and which path you will follow. The material in this book is also complemented with Web resources.

I believe those of us in English departments generally, and writing programs specifically, have a tremendous opportunity before us because of the availability of digital tools to teach writing. This book provides direct, specific answers to your questions about teaching online. I think you will find the move to online instruction worthwhile, and you may well discover that you are helping students write and think in ways previously unimagined.



How can you migrate your tried and true face-to-face teaching practices into an online environment?

This is the core question that Scott Warnock seeks to answer in *Teaching Writing Online: How and Why.* Warnock explores how to teach an online (or hybrid) writing course by emphasizing the importance of using and managing students' written communications.

Grounded in Warnock's years of experience in teaching, teacher preparation, online learning, and composition scholarship, this book is designed with usability in mind. Features include:

- How to manage online conversations
- Responding to students
- Organizing course material
- Core guidelines for teaching online
- Resource chapter and appendix with sample teaching materials

More than just the latest trend, online writing instruction offers a way to teach writing that brings together theoretical approaches and practical applications. Whether you are new to teaching writing online or are looking for a more comprehensive approach, this book will provide the ideas and structure you need.

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