TEACHING WRITING ONLINE

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CONTENTS

Introduction........................................................................................................................................... 3
Navigating the Guide.......................................................................................................................... 3
Theory and Pedagogy of teaching Writing Online........................................................................... 4
In Their Own Words: Excerpts from Online Teaching Philosophy Statements ................................. 4
  Keith Boran ......................................................................................................................................... 4
  Sheena Boran .................................................................................................................................... 4
  Thomas Bullington ............................................................................................................................. 5
  Dixon Bynum .................................................................................................................................... 6
  Jane Gardner ..................................................................................................................................... 6
  Jane Meek ......................................................................................................................................... 7
How to “be there” when you aren’t there: establishing presence and ethos in the online writing class ... 7
Teaching Writing Online: An Annotated Bibliography ........................................................................ 8
Best Practices for Teaching Writing Online ....................................................................................... 13
The Syllabus Manual ........................................................................................................................ 13
Creating a Welcome Video for New Students .................................................................................. 13
Office Hours ....................................................................................................................................... 15
How Do I Conference with Online Students ................................................................................... 16
Students who are MIA (Attendance Policy) ....................................................................................... 16
Academic Honesty/Plagiarism .......................................................................................................... 17
Waitlisted Students and Adding Students After the Add Date ............................................................ 20
Course Design and Structure/Student Preview Mode ....................................................................... 21
Accessibility and Universal Design .................................................................................................... 22
Submission File Types ....................................................................................................................... 23
Using In-Line Commenting and Grading ............................................................................................ 23
Using Blackboard Rubrics .................................................................................................................. 25
Self and Peer Assessment: Pros and Cons ......................................................................................... 26
Who to contact: online writing instruction directory ......................................................................... 27
INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our guide to teaching online writing courses through the Department of Rhetoric at the University of Mississippi. We—a group of writing instructors who have taught WRIT 101, 102, and 250 online—have collaborated to bring you all of the best practices we could think of for teaching writing online here at UM. We hope to update this guide on a semester-by-semester basis in order to keep up with curriculum developments in our WRIT courses, as well as the constantly changing terrain of online resources we have gathered for our students.

This guide is designed to help teachers acclimate to the unique challenges of teaching rhetoric and composition online. Designed by instructors currently teaching writing online for the Department for Writing and Rhetoric, this guide includes brief course tours, course policy advice (i.e. how to keep office hours online, how to conference with students, how to construct a welcome video, etc.), links to videos explaining how to effectively use Blackboard, and sample assignments (including prompts, rubrics, lectures, and homework assignments). Although the guide is comprehensive, it also includes contact information to help you solicit further help or advice if necessary.

While online courses afford flexibility that the traditional classroom might not, we also understand the importance of standardizing our courses in order to ensure that students get a consistent experience throughout their time in our writing sequence. Thus, while this guide introduces plenty of optional material for you to choose from, this guide also complies with the curricula standardized by the University of Mississippi Department of Writing and Rhetoric. We have taken every effort to ensure that our guide includes standardized syllabus language, policies, and assignment sequences in accordance with DWR guidelines.

We believe that teaching writing online can offer not only all of the rigor of a face-to-face course, but also new opportunities—new ways of writing—that students in a traditional classroom would never have the opportunity to experience.

NAVIGATING THE GUIDE

This guide is broken into three parts. The first part contains our philosophies for teaching online and an annotated bibliography of critical scholarly sources that have influenced our teaching. All of these sources are available through the UM library’s databases, but you can always contact any of the authors for a copy of a source.

The second part of our guide reviews some of the most important concepts, policies, and processes for teaching writing online. We tried to write this section with the perspective of a new online writing teacher in mind.

The third part of the guide contains contact information for people in the department and throughout the university who can answer questions you have, teaching you how to use a new tool, and anything else that can help you to become a better online teacher.
THEORY AND PEDAGOGY OF TEACHING WRITING ONLINE

This section of the OWI Resource Guide is designed to give you pedagogical and theoretical perspectives from experienced UM online writing teachers. Here you will find a selection of teaching philosophy statements and advice summaries from each teacher. We have also assembled an annotated bibliography of sources related to OWI that have been influential in our own teaching.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: EXCERPTS FROM ONLINE TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENTS

Each of the experienced online teachers who have worked on the OWI Resource Guide shared excerpts from their teaching philosophy statements related to their work online.

KEITH BORAN

At times, I did not feel like I was doing a good job being their teacher, but one email changed that helpless feeling I had been living with. One of my students, one whose writing needed vast improvement for college, emailed me to thank me for my feedback on his essay. He wrote: “[I] have never felt so good about writing my entire life. [T]hank you for helping me understand it better. I wish I knew about rhetoric in high school, it’s so helpful.” This was a student who was struggling, one that I was concerned about because he was in an online course and not doing terribly well, but he was learning. He was not afraid to try, to learn, or to solicit constructive criticism; he was becoming a writer. As his confidence grew, so did mine. I knew that I could still be an effective teacher, even if I never met my students face to face. We were a community.

This is not to say that I’ve figured this online teaching thing out, or that I now have all the answers. I still have a lot to learn about being an effective online instructor, particularly when it comes to such a subjective subject like writing. But just like my student said about his learning last semester, I feel good about my transitioning to teaching online. And this student, along with my other students last semester, helped me understand how to do my job better, how to be a teacher. I am grateful to them for helping me learn to be real in a virtual classroom.

SHEENA BORAN

Be available ... but not too available:

As an instructor who always wants to be available, I’ve had to learn to manage the guilt that accompanies not being “there” when a student needs help. Because online learning (at least the asynchronous kind) allows students some freedom to complete work at their leisure, many of my students, for a variety of reasons, work on their assignments late at night, when they sometimes have questions that would benefit from immediate answers. I’ve accepted that I can’t always be available when students need me, but I still struggle with guilt when I read panicky emails in the morning. I also struggle with the few cases where my availability has created “monsters.” For example, so far this semester, I’ve had 120 separate email exchanges (conversation threads, not individual emails) with one student in WRIT 250. I’m concerned that this particular student has become too reliant on constant email communication with me. Each time I check email (and I check quite frequently), I’ve received an average of two messages from her, often just a few minutes apart. I’m really struggling to convince her that she doesn’t need this constant feedback and that it would be better to produce a product and seek suggestions for revision than to try to use email to address concerns in real time as she’s working. This is not a problem I’ve solved yet; it’s not a problem I’ve ever encountered before. I know there’s a balance here that I need to strike; I’m just not sure where it lies, or even which side of it I’m on right now.
Provide tools for success ... and make sure students can access them:

Last semester a few students expressed frustration that they only had access to what was due during the current week and asked for a full course schedule. The irony, of course, is that there was a full course schedule available to them in the Information tab on Blackboard. But because they didn’t know or remember how to find it, it may as well have not existed. I experienced a similar problem last semester with feedback on student work. I always provide detailed marginal comments on major assignments, and those comments always contain advice to students for future essays. As it turns out, though, a number of my students didn’t know how to return to their attempts in order to view my marginal comments on their essays. So again, because they couldn’t access it, all that individualized instruction may as well have not existed.

I’m still working through strategies to deal with these access issues, but one major change this semester is that I’ve posted a video tutorial that shows students how to access feedback on their essays. This has helped somewhat, but it’s clear that some students still aren’t accessing their feedback. For example, one student in WRIT 250 emailed to ask if I’d read his whole paper. When I opened his attempt in Blackboard to see what kind of feedback I had given him on the assignment, I scrolled through my marginal comments on his draft. They went all the way to the last paragraph. But because he didn’t see them, he didn’t benefit from them on the next assignment and didn’t understand his grade. I’m still struggling to determine whether issues like this one stem from the actual difficulty of accessing resources on Blackboard or from a lack of investment in the course, but my instinct says that a combination of those factors is at play here.

THOMAS BULLINGTON

Let students choose their goal.

At the beginning of the semester, I ask my students to select one of our course outcomes on the syllabus as their writerly goal for the semester. I ask students to explain what this goal means to them, why they chose it, and what are some of the concrete ways in which they can work on this goal in their own writing. For each of our major assignments, I ask my students to reflect on their progress towards this goal: how far have they come, and whether they need to change from one goal to another. Thus, with the ePortfolio at the end of the semester, I ask my students to take their initial goal and expand it into their reflective introduction.

This technique does more than merely centering the course on the ePortfolio: I’ve found that, when I ask my students to select their own goal as a writer, the course becomes less about fulfilling a requirement and more about their own writing. Small steps like this can make a student take ownership of their own work, and, hopefully, find something to take with them outside of this course—something greater than a mere grade. Small steps like this can also make the online course feel more intimate, more customized to each student’s individual experience.

The principle behind this technique applies to any class regardless of format, but in online classes this technique assumes the special meaning of making a student’s experience feel individual, particularly when I as an instructor take note of each student’s chosen goal, and use that goal as my theme for their feedback. Thus, whenever I begin writing my summative remarks on a student’s paper, I’ll begin with the formula of “You chose _____ for your goal this semester, so I’ll gear all my feedback towards that goal.” Giving students the sense that they have chosen their own feedback helps them take more ownership of their work.
DIXON BYNUM

Years ago, when online teaching and I were younger, I eschewed the opportunity to take an overload course online. Frankly, I had an attitude: the virtual classroom, I rationalized, couldn’t possibly be a viable substitute for the face-to-face experience. I relied heavily on chalk-and-talk and a large presence in the classroom; I often joked that teaching was a contact sport.

Ten years later, an old dog with nearly two decades in the profession, I’m teaching strictly online and after some reflection, I’ve decided that my mantra is, “Keep it simple.” Now that doesn’t infer a refusal to incorporate newer technology into the virtual classroom—I’m always looking for ways to make my courses more productive for my students—but I’ve found that an emphasis on simplicity in course design and presentation is essential. After several different experiments with course construction, I’ve settled on a week-by-week skeleton in which I include repeated and dependable elements. That, I suppose, is the most common translation of my mantra in practice: dependability. As I’m not “there” physically to clear up any confusion for my students every two or three days, I want my students to enter a dependable space each time they encounter a new lesson during the semester. A dependable and simple structure also reassures non-traditional students (especially older, place-bound students) who need to utilize online instruction to continue their education. Finally, an emphasis on clean, dependable course construction helps the old dog teachers like me—those still a little skeptical—go slowly and incorporate only the best of options for our students.

JANE GARDNER

Full disclosure: This Fall 2015 will be my first time to fully teach online. I have used Blackboard for in-class teaching, but teaching online is challenging. I’m not only teaching online for the first time but, I am teaching Writ 250 -- a first timer. So I can only share my teaching philosophy up to this point and that involves creating my class online to Blackboard. My suggestion to future online teachers is to begin early especially if you’ve never before taught the course.

Secondly, ask other online teachers to give you access to their classes online on Blackboard. I have found this latter suggestion to be invaluable. Everyone has his or her own style and I’ve picked up pointers from all of the online teachers.

Thirdly, if you’ve used Blackboard previously for your regular in-class classes and you have a certain way you create your assignments and deliverables then do that also with your online course. You can change it next semester after you are feeling more comfortable with the whole online teaching phenomenon.

Fourthly, be precise and concise with your Blackboard course design. One of our veteran online instructors places everything under “Content” and says the more you add to your Blackboard panels the more confusing it is to the students. I am still learning this concept, and I think with practice and experience, I will improve. Precision I have learned from using Blackboard in my face-to-face classes is important. English is not the first language of many of our students, and every step you articulate on Blackboard is taken at face value. You cannot assume any point or step is obvious.

Lastly, I hope you are reading our W&R Online Best Practices Guide and that it is offering the guidance you need to navigate the online frontier.
JANE MEEK

Engaging students through multiple platforms was a revelation to me ten years ago, and the daily challenge of it has kept my teaching fresh and appealing to students’ different styles of learning. Online learning comes with its own set of obstacles in keeping students engaged, but I strive to teach a variety of texts—from online magazine articles, blogs, video advertisements, and speeches—each one showcasing a different rhetorical form. This practice of presenting information in a variety of formats appeals to students’ diverse learning styles: readings from the textbooks, short videos, still images, narrated PowerPoint lectures, links to online articles, humorous memes, and group activities using LMS tools. Though I cannot replicate my presence in the physical classroom, the online environment creates innovative avenues for interaction with students—almost all requiring some form of writing and thus requiring that students actually write more for an online class. Furthermore, my online course design allows me to offer individual feedback on several steps of the Writing Process—an invaluable practice that I could not do in the face-to-face classroom. Below I break down some of the best practices of Online Writing Instruction and show some examples of how my courses fulfill them.

1. Good practices in course design
2. Innovative use of technologies that transcend traditional classroom instruction and engage students
3. Commitment to providing a quality education to students

HOW TO “BE THERE” WHEN YOU AREN’T THERE: ESTABLISHING PRESENCE AND ETHOS IN THE ONLINE WRITING CLASS

While email does allow for instant communication in an online course, the online environment can provide other means of being “there” for students, means that go beyond the email communication of traditional face-to-face classes. Here are some techniques that we have found useful for reaching our students when they need more than a standard email:

- Apps such as Google Hangouts and Skype tend to work fairly well for conferencing with students, but we’ve had the best experience with Zoom. Zoom allows instructors to start a meeting with a student by sending that student a link to the meeting via email. Students don’t need to set up Zoom accounts; as long as the instructor has the student’s email address and an account of her own, the meeting link will work. Zoom meetings can only last about 40 minutes at a time, so this time limit allows student conferences to be more focused, and to fit more easily into busy schedules. (For more conferencing apps, see “Conferencing with Online Students” and “Office Hours” below.)
- During your office hours, log on to whichever conferencing app you’ve chosen. If you’ve chosen Skype or Google Hangouts, any students logged into these apps will see that you’re available. Even if they choose not to contact you during that time, your visibility sends an important message.
- Offer multiple conferencing apps if you can. Both Skype and Zoom, for instance, or both Google Hangouts and Zoom—and remain logged into these apps during your office hours. Some students might already have accounts with one app or another, so offering a range of meeting platforms makes it easier for students to contact you.
- Regardless of which conferencing app you use, it’s best to turn the camera off after the first few minutes of the meeting and go strictly with audio. This practice respects student privacy better than using both audio and video the whole time. Students often have to squeeze in their conferences with their online instructors at odd places and times: between classes, at food courts, shopping, or often in their own
dorms. If a student is in a private space such as a dorm room, it’s best to respect their privacy by
switching off the video after the first few minutes of the meeting. Let students know why you’re turning
off the video when you do so, and briefly explain that this is your standard policy for online conferences:
“I think it’s best for us just to go with audio for this conference, if that’s alright with you. It’s a bit less
awkward that way.” Many students feel more comfortable with this approach, since it’s a gesture that
shows that you’re aware of the awkwardness online meetings sometimes pose.

- If your teaching style involves posting weekly announcements, don’t simply email these announcements
as text (see “Students who are MIA” below for more information on Monday announcements). Instead,
try making a YouTube video of just you narrating the announcements to your students. Often, these
announcements merely reiterate what students can find on their weekly schedule or in the syllabus, but
having this kind of weekly reminder can help students stay on task, and help keep your face and voice in a
very text-heavy environment. You can post links to your YouTube video directly in the course and email it
to students. Pair your link to the YouTube announcements with a bullet-point synopsis, and use
YouTube’s closed captioning feature (see “Accessibility and Universal Design” below). Pairing text with
video helps keep this content accessible.

- If a student emails you with a persistent problem, question, or issue, invite them to set up a conference
with you, and do so repeatedly. Even if students don’t take you up on this offer—and many tend not to--
make it clear that they are welcome to do so. This is the equivalent of keeping your door open during
office hours; it also sends the message that, within the time you’ve set aside to teach the class, students
are welcome to come meet with you. Not extending this welcome repeatedly and actively can make an
online instructor seem aloof and distant.

- And, of course, make it clear when students can’t contact you. If you tell students from the first week
that you won’t be able to respond quickly or at all on weekends, most students will be understanding and
respectful of this boundary. However, you might want to consider setting aside some late afternoon or
evening times during the weekdays, since these times tend to be the most available for online students.
Students are often taking online courses because their schedules are otherwise full. While the boundaries
on your time need to be clearly stated, a little flexibility can go a long way.

While teaching online precludes the possibility of being physically present for most students, techniques such as
those outlined above can help establish the ethos of a face-to-face instructor, while offering a scheduling flexibility
that the traditional classroom might lack.

TEACHING WRITING ONLINE: AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

The authors of this guide have chosen several articles and other sources that we have found useful as we have
worked to be better online teachers. This bibliography is by no means complete, and we expect to add sources to
it in subsequent editions of this guide. However, we think these sources will serve as a great primer for the
scholarship of online writing instruction. If you have any research sources that you think we should include in the
guide, contact one of the authors!

Blair, Kritine and Cheryl Hoy. (2006). Paying Attention to Adult Learners Online: The Pedagogy and Politics of

This study looks specifically at adult learners in online composition class, but makes a number of conclusions that
apply equally well to all online learners. Hoy and Blair write about a fully online course in Bowling Green’s “Prior
Learning Assessment Program,” which assesses what kind of credit students should get for existing experience and
expertise. The study focuses chiefly on the online interactions between adult non-traditional students and the instructors, but also how the students interact with each other. The most useful takeaway from the article is its illustration that instruction in online writing classes often takes place “outside” the course. Private emails, chats, and other types of interaction taking place beyond the “walls” of the LMS often make up the most substantive teaching, in this case of adult distance learners specifically. This can create problems for assessment and administration, as there is no good way to track this interaction (though I’d argue that the same thing happens in f2f writing courses). The specific analyses of interactions between student and instructor are useful and applicable for our classrooms (especially WRIT 250).


This article explores different issues that may affect the learning styles of learners who chose online classes as opposed to face-to-face classes. The “Grasha-Riechmann student learning student style scales” was used in the study to determine the learning styles of students in either online or face-to-face classes. Ultimately, the difference between learning styles vs. online or face-to-face class is becoming less of a concern for students and convenience is the main impetus in the choice of online or in-class instruction.

Early studies suggested online students were more independent learners, but recent studies narrow the gap between the personality of the face-to-face student and the online student. Brown suggests the improved communication tools and instructional strategies that promote social presence in these courses as another reason for the growing population of online students.

The author also notes a familiarity with the online teaching concept as a reason for choosing the online format because of so many hybrid classes being offered at universities and many high school students have some experience with online interfaces such as Blackboard. So as students feel more comfortable with the online course experience they are now demanding it more.

The study suggests the student is making decisions based on convenience for both online and face-to-face. For online students the convenience may concern time-management and on-campus students are concerned about location. Those students taking on-campus classes are more concerned about their learning style when selecting face-to-face classes, but also their desired class may not have been offered online or all online classes were full. “With new technology tools available, professors are going to be able to address learning styles in distance classes in numerous ways” (Brown). The study suggests that learning styles will become less of an issue with less text-based online classes and more multimedia based. In future studies of who is taking online classes: “Understanding of learning styles research could be redirected from who are attending classes to how students with different learning styles use the different types of tools available to interact with instructional materials” (Brown).


DePew and Lettner-Rust examine how the interfaces used for online instruction affect both the pedagogy and the power dynamics between teachers and students. The authors note that online interfaces (and institutional training for online instructors) have traditionally supported a banking model of education - lectures, quizzes, etc. - but argue that such an approach is not effective for writing instruction. Instead, they propose a problem-solving approach, and their case studies, conducted at Old Dominion University, examine how three types of interfaces might support and hinder such an approach. The correspondence course model confines interaction to asynchronous textual exchanges between teacher and student. Students aren’t visible to the instructor, which
DePew and Rust argue can be beneficial, since instructors can’t make the kinds of judgments based on appearance that might negatively affect their perceptions of their students. The simulated classroom (like Blackboard) is the most familiar to us as writing instructors. These interfaces allow for interaction between students as well as between student and instructor. They also enable instructors to monitor exchanges between students, perhaps better than they could in a traditional classroom. The final interface discussed is synchronous video. Primarily used for lecture, the available interfaces for synchronous video communication disrupt the gaze (through camera angles, bad connections, etc.), making it impossible to replicate the kinds of interaction that take place in the traditional classroom. But DePew and Rust argue that these interfaces also empower students to choose how they appear (students can manipulate the angles of their webcams, for instance), altering the power dynamic in the student’s favor. The authors ultimately suggest that a combination of interfaces seems likely to provide the best support for a problem-solving pedagogical approach. They go on to suggest further examination - at the institutional level, of how technological interfaces shape teaching practices.


This blog post examines a lawsuit that Roni Loren, a New York Times bestselling author, went through because she inadvertently posted a copyrighted photograph on her blog. Loren was served with a DMCA (takedown) notice, and although she quickly complied, was sued for compensation by the photographer. In this post, Loren shares her story, and cautions others regarding the use of images not only on blogs, but on social media sites like Tumbler and Pinterest. Loren offers advice on where you can locate safe images to use (i.e. Creative Commons, Wikipedia Commons, etc.) while outlining some little known facts about Fair Use, and why blogs are not usually protected under it. Loren also admits that her ignorance in the matter is no excuse, and that she was clearly in the wrong. This would be an excellent post to share with students as they begin working on their multimodal projects. Although, projects completed for educational purposes due tend to fall under the protection of fair use, it would enable students to better understand why we are so very strict regarding citation; it does have real world applications that are very important.


The study discusses the legislative push for more productivity in postsecondary education at the same time the economy is struggling; therefore, online learning is offered as a cost-effective method to save money, while also enabling students to receive a quality education. Meyer claims (through research) that online learning is the perfect balance between efficiency and productivity; it's a win-win for administration, faculty, and students. Meyer also mentions the growth in online learning.

Meyer’s study included 11 full-time instructors who have taught more than 10 online courses. Five southern states, and three western states were represented. Nine subjects were also included. The researcher's aim was to locate themes or consistencies in productive practices in online education. Basically, what helped students learn? Interviews with the 11 participants provided three themes: increasing student engagement, providing structure, and assessing learning.

What we can use from this study is that the participating instructors referenced the importance of the first week of the course, and mentioned that being available to help students understand how the course works during that time is crucial. Also, one instructor leads a discussion board that discusses student fears regarding learning online
during the first week; I found this to be a most interesting idea. Another idea worth noting was put forth by a writing instructor who claimed that their use of making peer review worth up to 20% of the course grade improved students reading and editing abilities. The study also mentioned the idea of learning from other experienced instructors, as well as learning and adapting through continued experience with teaching online courses.


This article is a literature review of 12 published journal articles from 1994-1999 that Miller splits into two categories—ones that discuss theoretical writing issues in distance education and ones that discuss practical applications of writing instruction online. However, her review of each is too brief to offer much detailed information and thus functions more like an annotated bibliography. Her short summary of each article only prompts the reader to know which articles might be worth reading. So, for instance, we learn that “Royer (1994) introduced critical questioning of the nature of online writing classes, and Quigley (1994) expanded that inquiry to question the nature of online syllabi for writing courses . . . Buckley (1997) introduced critical theorizing of the subject position of the online writing teacher, and Lang (1998) raised questions of intellectual property” (425). All the articles in the practice section focus on how to use online technology to facilitate collaboration between separate parties—as between a college and a high school writing class or between a mentor and mentee at the college level. These pieces are of interest but may be too outdated now. It’s a short piece that is could act as a good jumping off point for someone looking for a quick literature review when conducting their own research.

**Patterson, Patricia. (2001). The Debate about Online Learning: Key Issues for Writing Teachers. Computers and Composition, 18. 359-70**

Patricia Webb Patterson joins the call to critically examine methods for online instruction, but she frames this project in terms of concerns about the corporatization of the academy. Addressing the resistance faculty members often feel about online courses, Patterson reminds us that, because of the advent of email, and because online courses are heavily textual in nature, “the primary interface of a distance-learning course is the written word,” making “writing teachers’ expertise” crucial in developing the very heart of online instruction (359). Thus, even for writing instructors reluctant to teach online, it is crucial for all writing faculty not only to pay attention to the development of online teaching but to participate in this development as one of its leading voices. Acknowledging that resistance to online instruction often fears the corporatization of the academy, Patterson points out that simply ignoring the spread of online instruction doesn’t solve this perceived problem. Instructors who refuse to participate in online instruction are merely “abdicat[ing] their responsibility to actively participate in the shaping of new roles for instructors” (362), a posture that Patterson critiques as counterproductive. Pinpointing the false dichotomy such resistance creates between “either choosing distance learning and selling out on our belief systems or holding true to our belief systems and resisting distance learning” (363), Patterson believes that developing online instruction does not relegate scholars to the role of mere corporate trainers. Participating in the development of online courses allows any and all writing instructors to benefit, since debates about course design ultimately revolve around reaching newer, more diverse students in newer, more diverse ways. Through online courses, the academy can explore new ways to teach what to many writing instructors is an old and traditional skill. This article would be useful for anyone researching the history of academic resistance to writing instruction, particularly because of the ways Patterson addresses and debunks such counterarguments.

While a bit dated, Cynthia Selfe’s article (“Technology and Literacy”) highlights the fact that technology hasn’t always been central to writing instruction, and in fact met much of the same resistance in 1999 it still meets today. Ascribing this resistance to an insistence on humanism—centering writing instruction on the human instead of the machine—Selfe issues a call for writing instructors not only to use technology more, but also to examine their use of this technology critically. Thus, while championing the use of technology in writing instruction, Selfe cautions against the technology-for-technology’s-sake argument: novelty doesn’t always translate to utility. Focusing on the Clinton-Gore administration’s *Getting Children Ready for the Twenty-First Century* initiative (1996), Selfe asks us to pay attention to the fact that technological literacy doesn’t always lead to automatic success, either. Citing socioeconomic barriers that prevent Black and Hispanic people from having equal access to technology, Selfe asks us to be mindful in our use of technology, acknowledging that, even if we take this resource for granted, this resource isn’t guaranteed for all. Because of these factors, “we have little evidence that any large-scale project focusing on a narrowly defined set of officially sanctioned literacy skills will result in fundamental changes in the ratio of people labeled as literate or illiterate” (423). So the burden rests on us as writing instructors to increase technological literacy, which, Selfe argues, must play a central role in any robust writing program. This article would prove useful for anyone researching the history of writing instruction since 2000, particularly for highlighting the political implications of technology literacy in a writing course.


This entire book--available for free download at the above link--is an essential primer for Online Writing Instruction (OWI). Warnock’s chapter is of particular interest due to its introduction to and discussion of five of the fifteen “OWI Principles” as established by the Conference on College Composition and Communication’s OWI Committee, who in 2013 wrote “A Position Statement of Principles and Example Effective Practices for OWI.” These principles set up a foundation for establishing a successful university OWI program, and in this chapter Warnock focuses on the five principles that outline OWI pedagogical principles.


Wilhelmina C. Savenye, Zane Olina, and Mary Niemczy compile a series of guidelines for designing online writing courses, grounding these guidelines both in their own experience and in research. The article reads as something of an extended literature review. Their recommendations form a backbone behind our own Department of Rhetoric’s rationale for standardizing online courses: they speak of analyzing student outcomes, tailoring one’s course to the needs of distance learners, accommodating different levels of access to technology, organizing one’s course as modules or units, providing audio and visual as a supplement to screens of text, and so forth. By providing an accessible outline of all these recommendations, this article would prove useful to any writing instructor who is new to online teaching.
BEST PRACTICES FOR TEACHING WRITING ONLINE

This section of our guide covers all of the “nuts and bolts” of teaching writing online. As a new online teacher, you’ve probably already gone through the training course from the Office of Online Design and eLearning. This part of our guide is designed to supplement that training with information you need to know specifically about teaching WRITING online.

THE SYLLABUS MANUAL

Create a Student Manual in addition to the traditional Syllabus. The Manual covers things like technological requirements and resources, communication and work expectations, tips for succeeding in an online environment, etc. Contact Jane Meek if you have any questions about the sample syllabus manual or how to create one for your course.

To view and download a sample syllabus manual, visit the online version of this guide at http://rhetoric.olemiss.edu/teachers/online/guide

CREATING A WELCOME VIDEO FOR NEW STUDENTS

Create a welcome page for the first week and a half with introductory video: this helps students who add the class after the first week.

Below are points to make in your welcome video:

- Introduction (Your name, course and areas of expertise)
- Educational background
- Teaching background
- What is it that you enjoy about what you do/what is the most rewarding
- How you hope the students will benefit from your classes/what you hope to leave with them
- Any other interesting things you would like to share with the students

The ideal length for your video 3.00 – 4.00 minutes.

Sample script:

Welcome to Writing 101

I’m pleased that you have enrolled in Writing 101. This course will be completely online. Please watch the video below for additional information and read the section below the video for information on getting started.

After you have watched the video, proceed to Step 1.

Step 1: Read the Syllabus. Be sure to read the section on Expectations carefully. Then complete Steps 2-5 below.

If you have questions about the course, please feel free to contact me. My contact information is located in the syllabus.
If you have questions about Blackboard, please contact IT Helpdesk at (662) 915-5222, helpdesk@olemiss.edu, or 100 Weir Hall, University, MS 38677.

Creating a video to welcome students

There are a number of ways you can go about creating a welcome video. Some instructors like a “talking head” intro video, while others prefer a screen recording of the Blackboard course, or even a PowerPoint. Some things to keep in mind for your welcome video:

- Keep your video short. Anything longer than 4-5 minutes won’t get watched. 3 minutes is the sweet spot for video content.
- If you want to show your face, make sure your background is clear of any distractions. If you’re using your laptop webcam, move to a room where you can have a blank wall as your background.
- If you don’t have access to a higher-quality microphone, it is best to record your video in an extremely quiet room or office without much echo.
- If you want to create your welcome video as a screencast, make sure you are in Student Preview mode, and that your browser is running in In-Private/Incognito mode, and that all other tabs or otherwise distracting things are minimized.

Tools:

- Screencast-o-matic (http://www.screencast-o-matic.com/) is the best screen recording tool available for free. Be sure to export your video to YouTube and caption it.
- You can record your webcam from Windows Movie Maker or iMovie, then export to YouTube.
- PowerPoints can be exported as videos, and uploaded to Youtube.

Instructions on embedding a video in Blackboard:

Though Blackboard does include a YouTube “mashup” for embedding YouTube content, in our experience this is not the best way of getting your videos into your course. The mashup feature does not work for unlisted videos, and if the title of your video uses generic language, it may be impossible to find.

The embed code generated by YouTube itself is your best bet. When you select “embed” from the share options under a YouTube video, you can “Show More” to see customization options. Generally, 640x360 is a good size for videos in a Blackboard course. We recommend showing player controls and enabling privacy-enhanced mode. Once the settings match what you want to embed in your course, copy the embed code to your clipboard.
Then, go to the content area in your Blackboard course where you want to put the video. Click “Build Content” and select “Item.” In the content editor, click the “HTML” button and paste the embed code from YouTube. When you submit the item, you should see your YouTube video in the content area.

OFFICE HOURS

Holding office hours virtually can be tricky. How do you provide the accessibility your students’ need, especially if you live in a different town or city? What’s the best way to help your students with assignments from afar? What do students find most comfortable and convenient for them? There are several options to make your office hours convenient for both you and your students.

Here is the Department of Writing & Rhetoric’s policy regarding office hours:

*Teachers in the W&R are expected to hold regular office hours for the purpose of supporting the teaching mission through student conferencing. All teachers in the W&R are asked to hold a minimum of one weekly office hour per section taught, but no less than two hours per week. Please submit your office hours, posted on your syllabus, electronically to Glenn Schove no later than three working days prior to the first day of classes each semester.*

In order to fulfill the Department’s policy, you will need to maintain between two to four office hours per week (depending on the number of sections you teach). These are times that your students should be able to contact you to discuss their writing. Here are several options that online students tend to favor:

- Continually check email during your posted office hours (remain logged into email account). We have found that most students tend to prefer to communicate through email rather than video conferencing or by phone.
- You can provide students with a phone number to call to discuss their writing during office hours.
- You can leave a video conferencing meeting open in a specified platform, letting students know they can access it at any time during your office hours to conference.
- You can also combine several of these, or offer all of them, depending on your and your students’ preferences. For example, you can leave your email running during your office hours, and let students know they can email to ask questions, or email to request a video conference. At which time, you can send them a link to meet.

The most important thing is to let your students know that you are available to assist them with the various writing and multimodal assignments they will compose during the semester. It is also vital that you provide clear
instruction as to how your office hours will work, and how students can take advantage of that time if they so choose. The best way to do this is to create an “Office Hours” tab in Blackboard. When students click that tab, they should be able to read when you are available, and how they can access whatever platform you choose to use during office hours.

We have also noticed that online students tend to have very demanding schedules, where they balance work, school, and families. For this reason, we highly recommend that you remain available to meet with students by appointment. That way, if your office hours are not convenient for some students, they will know they can still meet with you at a mutually convenient time.

Office Hour Scheduling Tool: https://gb.youcanbook.me/


HOW DO I CONFERENCE WITH ONLINE STUDENTS

Face-to-face: If you are currently residing in Oxford, you may elect to schedule face-to-face conferences with your online students. Many traditional students seem to like this option because they get to “see” their instructor. That said, be sure to remain flexible. In our experience, many students enroll in an online class because their schedules are hectic; therefore, you may want to offer students options for conferencing. Here are several other options for conferencing with students:

Zoom: Some of us currently use Zoom to conference with our students; it is a free online service that enables you to meet for forty minutes (do note that one way around this hurdle is to exit out between student meetings, and then quickly reenter your chat room). You can talk using webcams, or you can simply instigate an audio conference (an option that enables you to use your computer speakers). You can also screen share and use a chat feature with students; it provides an array of options that making conferencing easy. One such feature is that students can attend the conferences using their smartphones. To learn more about Zoom, visit this link: https://zoom.us

Email: Scheduling a time for a conference can sometimes be difficult for students enrolled in many courses, or are working full time (one example would be a student one of us taught who worked the third shift at a casino in Tunica). For these students, we tend to allow them the opportunity to email a draft with questions. You can return their draft with comments and feedback to those questions, as well as other suggestions you may have for revision. We have found that many students enrolled in an online course prefer the convenience and flexibility that this option provides. Although at first you may be apprehensive of whether this constituted a “conference,” we have found that if you encourage students to reply with further questions or concerns, that this does become a “conference.” Do note that this option does tend to be more time-consuming for the instructor.

STUDENTS WHO ARE MIA (ATTENDANCE POLICY)

What to do with students that do not complete work, but refuse to drop the course:

In an online class, you will have students who completely disappear. They will not log in to Blackboard for weeks, and will stop completing work. Here are a few tips to help keep your students engaged in an online platform:

- Email your students on the first day of class to introduce yourself and the course. Be sure to give them specific instructions on how to begin their work for that week and navigate the course’s Blackboard shell.
• After the first week of class, check for students who failed to complete their work. Send them an email that gently reminds them that they are in an online class, that assignments are due, give them a new deadline for the missed assignments, and then ask if there is anything you can do to help them better navigate the online course.

• Another possible approach to the drop-add problem might be to make the move the first deadline for any coursework after the drop-add deadline. It’s possible to check the Registrar’s website (http://registrar.olemiss.edu/academic-calendar-menu/) to verify the drop-add deadline for each semester, and schedule the first 1-2 weeks’ worth of work to accommodate this deadline.

• As a general practice, I have found it helpful to email students on Mondays to remind them of upcoming assignments that will be due that week. I always end these emails by reassuring students that I would love to answer any questions they might have. This email not only reminds them of upcoming assignments, but also lets them know that you are available to help. This makes the class feel less “virtual,” and more “real” for students.

• After each major assignment, compile a list of students that failed to submit the assignment, and then email them to remind them of the course’s late policy (if you have one). I tend to put smiley faces in my emails (a strange practice, I know) so that students know that I am not angry with them; it tends to help them understand that you are approachable for questions and concerns regarding the late policy and the assignment.

Also, please know that it is very NORMAL for some students to fail to respond to your repeated requests to complete and submit work. As long as you notify them about missed assignments, you have done your job as a supportive but challenging teacher. Ultimately, you cannot make each student submit their work for your course, but you can take comfort in knowing that you tried everything to help them succeed.

ACADEMIC HONESTY/PLAGIARISM

Reporting Plagiarism to the Academic Discipline Committee

There seems to be a myth that reporting a student who commits blatant plagiarism (not careless citations) to the Academic Discipline Committee somehow “ruins a student’s educational career.” This is false. The reality is that if the Committee finds the student guilty and it is the first offence, then the sanctions recommended by the Instructor are the only ones enforced—failure of the assignment and of the course. The student’s name then goes into a private database so that if the student is reported a second time, the sanctions will become more stringent. For first-time plagiarists (and contrary to the popular myth), there is nothing printed on the student’s transcript, nor sent to their parents, nor reported to future professors, nor risk of academic probation or suspension. The only consequence is the instructor’s sanction of failing the class. If the instructor fails to report a case of plagiarism to the Committee, however, and the student plagiarizes again, there is no record that the student is a serial plagiarist.

Therefore, all Instructors who determine this type of serious plagiarism, should follow the DWR policy on plagiarism here: http://rhetoric.olemiss.edu/teachers/resources/policies/ and to help initiate the case, below is a step-by-step guide. Initiating the plagiarism case is done through myOleMiss:
1. Under “Student Services,” select “Academic Discipline”

2. Then, select the semester and year of the student.

3. Find the section that the student is enrolled in, and choose “Academic Discipline—Initiate” from the menu.

4. Choose the student’s name and click “Initiate Case.”
5. Select the sanctions based on the DWR policy and your discussion with the department chair. Then, scroll down to complete this page.

6. Complete this page by writing a detailed summary of the case that includes the fact that you had a conference with the student to discuss their plagiarism. Also, you should almost always mark Yes to “provide relevant supporting materials” for the case, and include appropriate materials such as the following:
   - a PDF of the SafeAssign report (if it shows passages plagiarized),
   - a screenshot of online resources plagiarized,
   - a screenshot of passages from the student’s essay that are plagiarized,
   - your course Syllabus showing your Plagiarism policy,
   - the essay assignment sheet

Once you have completed this page, you will receive an automated email saying the case has been initiated and giving you a Case number. The student will then receive an email explaining that the case has been filed, will be reviewed, and that s/he has 14 days to file an appeal. If the student appeals, the Instructor may not even know, as usually the plagiarism is too obvious/blatant to be adequately appealed. Therefore, in most cases the Committee does not involve the Instructor any more after initiating the case. The Instructor will simply receive an email in 2-4 weeks time stating the Committee’s decision—which is almost always to uphold the sanctions suggested by the Instructor. If any more information is needed to help the Committee better understand the case, the Committee would email the Instructor, but again, usually these cases are decided quite quickly and with very little demand on the Instructor’s time.

Below are some generic content to use when emailing a student whose plagiarism is worthy of being reported:
Email content when initiating a plagiarism case with the Academic Discipline Committee:

Dear Student,

I have consulted with my department’s chair about your case of plagiarism in Essay ____, and he agrees with my assessment that parts of your ______ essay contain instances of plagiarism. As you can see from my Plagiarism Policy in the Syllabus, my department has set the penalties for such writing as failure the paper and the course, and I am required to make a report of this to the university’s Academic Discipline Committee. Do not fear that this report will damage your academic career too terribly: it will not—as long as you learn how to properly integrate research and never commit this type of plagiarism again in other classes at UM. The Committee will likely only uphold the penalties (or sanctions) that I recommend, which are failure of the paper and the course. I will not recommend anything more severe than this—not academic probation nor suspension—so do not fear the worst. The Committee keeps a private database of the names of students it finds guilty of plagiarism, but the purpose of this temporary database is only in case you plagiarize a second time. This database information is not shared anywhere else. Your parents/guardians are not informed since it will not be reported on any public record in any way.

You will be contacted in a few days by this Committee asking if you accept the sanctions or if you want to try and appeal them. Please understand that if you accept these sanctions, your work in this course will now be complete, and you will need to retake the course next semester. If you choose to appeal, you will have to present a full case to the Committee including evidence that all the ideas/writing in the paper were either your original ideas or properly cited research.

Information if the student emails asking about options regarding appealing the case and whether s/he should continue completing the course work while the Committee considers the case:

Dear Student,

You are now able to start an appeal process if you so choose, and you have 14 days for this appeal process before the Committee makes a ruling. You should have seen that Appeal option via the e-mail from the Committee. You can simply follow the instructions in that email.

As for continuing to complete course work, any student reported for plagiarism is always welcome to continue participating in the course under the theory that you have paid for the experience, even if you potentially may no longer pass the course. And you should definitely keep doing course work until the case process is completed, which is about two weeks if you appeal, or whenever you receive the Committee’s decision via e-mail. You are welcome to discuss your case with my department chair Dr. Robert Cummings whose email is cummings@olemiss.edu or 662-915-1989.

WAITLISTED STUDENTS AND ADDING STUDENTS AFTER THE ADD DATE

The waitlist policy for online courses is the same as traditional W&R courses. The 23-student course cap is firm, and students can only be enrolled in a course from the wait list if a spot opens up in the course. The main difference is that allowing a waitlisted student to attend your class unofficially until a spot opens up, as you might do in a f2f class, is more complicated online. Though an instructor can add students manually to a Blackboard course, if they are not on the official roll, they will be dropped from the course when Blackboard syncs with SAP overnight.
So, what is the best practice for dealing with these waitlisted students? Generally, we recommend that students seek out another section. There is usually at least one open spot in an online section of each of the three courses. It’s a good idea to remind students that our courses follow standardized curricula, and that their experience in each section of a given course is likely to be similar. If there are no open sections, explain to the student the policy and share with them the syllabus and any documents, readings, or materials that you can email to them for the current week. We do not recommend enrolled waitlisted students into your Blackboard section until they are officially on the roll.

Adding students to an online course after the official Last Day to Add can be risky and should be done in consultation with the department chair. Adding students even as late as the second week comes with risks, as their orientation to the online format and organization can take several days. I find that students need the first two weeks to adapt to the course organization in Blackboard, and if they miss these, they risk feeling overwhelmed and discouraged from engaging at a high level. I contact all students who fail to post any assignment during the first or second week, and I let them know that they need to invest time not only in completing the orientation assignments but in navigating the course and getting comfortable with the format. Taking each late add request on a case-by-case basis—with advice from the department chair—is important, and I also base my decisions on the quality of communications I receive from the student, any previous writing work completed (either in previous semesters or in current), and how the students responds to the several assignments that I pick for them to make up.

COURSE DESIGN AND STRUCTURE/STUDENT PREVIEW MODE

Effective course design follows the principles of Universal Design and User-Centered Design. That means that your course design should specifically address the needs and challenges of student users. In most cases, these design principles emphasize a simple, minimalist layout and an organization for a course that is intuitive.

You may have an inclination to overwork the interface of your course by adding redundant links, putting information in multiple places, and essentially trying to anticipate every possible student path through your content. We think you should resist that temptation: minimalist interfaces that do not overwhelm users with information are key to student success in an online course.

Here are some basic recommendations you can follow to keep your course simple:

- Put all of learning content in one place, and organize it by week or unit
- Use an "About the Course" content area for syllabus content
- Put all external resources and links in one content area
- Use a numbering or naming system for your discussion forums, journals, and blogs that aligns to weeks, units, or lessons
- Don’t over-explain: For example, don’t use a video recording to explain something that easily fits into a paragraph of text
- Use basic formatting and styling for your text. Use CSS-styles when editing text (Heading 1, Heading 2, Subtitle, Quotation, etc) instead of hard-coded styling (bold, italic, underline). This not only makes your text more accessible, but it is cleaner and more consistent across different parts of your course.
You can audit your design by putting yourself in a student’s shoes. Blackboard’s Student Preview function makes this easier than before.

ACCESSIBILITY AND UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Accessibility is a core value for the Department of Writing and Rhetoric and for the university, and it’s something that we as online writing teachers think is an essential part of our mission. We rely on the principles of universal design to govern how we make our courses accessible.

Universal design is really best demonstrated by the automatic door: an automatic door is better than a standard door because people with mobility limitations can access it. However, it is also better than a standard door for everyone else: if you’re carrying boxes, for example, you would prefer an automatic door. The same principle can be applied to curb cuts, typography on signs, and the design of an online course.

There are a few things you should do to ensure that your course is accessible to everyone who may be a participant in it.

- Caption video content. Any video that you use in an online course must be closed captioned (at the very least, you must provide a transcript). Captions are a great example of universal design. Obviously they are essential for deaf or hard of hearing students, but are also useful for students who are visual learners or who may be watching your videos in a library or otherwise-quiet space. Closed captioning of videos is much less of a headache than it was just a few years ago:
  - YouTube captioning is easy and fast. You can upload a transcript and convert it to closed captions or you can transcribe the video yourself using the built-in tools. YouTube’s automatic captions are unreliable unless you have a crisp, Midwestern NPR accent. For instructions, visit the Google help pages for YouTube: https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2734796?hl=en
  - The University provides a captioning service free of charge to online instructors. For more information, contact the Office of Online Design and eLearning, or fill out this form: http://elearning.olemiss.edu/resources-tutorials/accessibility/captioning-request-form/. Keep in mind that if your videos are short (as we think they should be), it would probably be faster and easier for you to caption the videos yourself.
- Try to make your video instructions as universal as possible. Basically, instead of saying “Click here” and pointing to something with the cursor, say exactly what students should click on. Even if a video is properly transcribed, “click here” does not mean anything to a student who can’t see where “here” is. Also, if a non-visually impaired student is reading the transcript because that is his/her learning style, more specific instructions would help immensely.
• Any PDFs you include in your course should be processed for screen reader accessibility. This is usually only an issue for scanned PDFs. For more information about making PDFs more accessible, visit the WebAIM guide on PDFs: http://webaim.org/techniques/acrobat/acrobat

• Be conscious of color and other style elements that may cause problems for people who may see things differently than you do. A good rule of thumb: boring, monochromatic color choices and typography are a safe bet. Don’t make your design an obstacle. For help with colors, a great tool is: http://www.colorhexa.com/

• Remember that plain text is the most accessible mode of content delivery. Always ask yourself if your use of other modes is necessary or appropriate for your rhetorical purpose. For example: if you have an announcement to make, ask yourself if it makes sense to record it as a video as opposed to sending it as an email. Sometimes the answer will be “yes,” but often the simpler approach to communication is the better approach.

SUBMISSION FILE TYPES

Because Blackboard only accepts certain types of files, it’s important to make students aware of these limitations and set clear guidelines for acceptable submission formats. You’ll want to include language in your syllabus about this, and it’s also a good idea to cover this issue in the syllabus quiz to reinforce this knowledge. You might also include reminders about this in your instructions when students submit major assignments. Lastly, you might consider penalizing inappropriate file submissions as late work, since they often won’t open.

SAMPLE SYLLABUS LANGUAGE REGARDING FILE TYPES

All work for this course should be submitted in .doc, .docx, or .pdf format, as only these formats are compatible with Blackboard’s grading interface. If you use a Mac and compose files in Pages, please note that you must convert those files to one of the acceptable file formats before submitting. Work submitted with an inappropriate file extension may be penalized as late if the instructor is unable to access it.

USING IN-LINE COMMENTING AND GRADING

The in-line commenting and grading feature in the current version of Blackboard is an essential tool for online teachers. Instead of downloading student essays, marking them up in Word, and reuploading them to Blackboard, instructors can now leave comments directly on student papers inside of Blackboard, post comments, and enter grades, all from one screen. You can find Blackboard's tutorial video for online grading below. Here are some things we have learned about the in-line grading feature and how well it works in writing courses:

• Be conscious of the time-out feature. The inline editor times out after 60 minutes, so if you are in the middle of marking up a paper and you get up to do something else, make sure you click "Save Draft" and exit the in-line editor. You can come back to it later and pick up where you left off. If you leave the editor up and come back to it after an hour, any markup you attempt to add will not "stick." This can also become an issue if you have a sketchy internet connection. Your best bet: Click "Save as draft" often just to be safe.
• If you want to leave styled comments, or use video/audio comments, click the "A" underneath "Feedback to Learner." You'll have the full Blackboard content editor in a popup window.

• If you're using a laptop, you might find the work area very small. Click the expand full screen button to give yourself more room.

• Use "Grading Notes" to leave notes to yourself about the paper. These aren't visible to the student, and can be really useful if you're going to conference with a student later.

• The grade center column for the assignment must be visible to students in order for them to see your feedback. If you want to release all your feedback at once, hide the column from student view, complete your feedback, then unhide the column.

• Students can access your feedback from two places:
  - Go back to the original assignment link where the essay was submitted. Once the feedback is released, the comments and grade will show up. Until then, the paper the student actually submitted will show up (so they can always check to make sure that their submission "went through" correctly.
  - Go to My Grades and click on the actual graded item (the drawback to this method is that they can see the grade here without actually reading the comments.

• You must leave some kind of grade in order for feedback to be visible to students. This can be tricky when you're leaving feedback on drafts. The best rule of thumb here is to be consistent. If points for drafts aren't a part of your grading scheme, make sure that students know that if they see "100/100" as the grade for their draft, it just means that they submitted it and you commented on it, not that they actually received an A+.

• "Point Comments" work most consistently. Some of the other markup tools are more frustrating.
The in-line editor accepts most common file types (PDF, Doc, Docx, RTF), but not .pages files. See the section on file type naming for more tips about this.

**USING BLACKBOARD RUBRICS**

Blackboard Rubrics can be a great tool for online teachers, and can making the grading process much more efficient. Though they are very easy to use for grading, they are challenging to create, especially if you want them to work the same way as the standard W&R rubrics. In addition to the Blackboard tutorial video below, we have a few suggestions for you if you want to use Blackboard rubrics, and we have provided templates for several rubrics that you can import directly into Blackboard if you want to use them.

- There are five different types of rubrics: No points, Points, Point Range, Percent, and Percent Range. Obviously, the easiest to use is "No Points," but obviously that option doesn't calculate anything for you. In our experience "Point Range" and "Percent Range" are the best options, as they allow for more flexibility in terms of exact calculations. Otherwise, you may find it frustrating that the rubric's calculation of a grade doesn't align with the grade you had in mind.

- Make sure your students know you use rubrics, and that you are making them visible. When you apply a rubric to an assignment, you have four different display options. By default, rubrics are not visible to students. "After Grading" means that students cannot view the rubric until you have released grades. "Yes (Without Rubric Scores" may be the best option if you find that the rubric calculations don't always line up with what you want. That way, students can see rubric feedback, but not the exact point distribution. They see the score you enter manually only.

- Don't leave end-comments inside the rubric. Students are less likely to look at the rubric because it's an extra click. The best place to leave feedback is in the "Feedback to Learner" box on the main in-line grading page. The "Feedback to Learner" box inside the rubric is only visible to students under certain conditions.
We have created several rubrics that you can import into Blackboard directly. Feel free to use these as they are or edit them to match what you'd like to see in a rubric. These rubrics are available in the online version of this guide (http://rhetoric.olemiss.edu/teachers/online/guide/). To import a rubric, just go to the Rubrics area under "Course Tools" and click "Import." You can upload the ZIP file directly (don't decompress it).

SELF AND PEER ASSESSMENT: PROS AND CONS

After using Blackboard’s Self & Peer Assessment tool for three semesters, we have discovered the following pros and cons for using it to conduct Peer Reviews. PROS: If you have a class where 90% of the students are participating consistently, then this is an effective and time-efficient tool. We heard from Exit Surveys that many students felt their Peer Reviews were quite helpful. Also, the instructor does not have to read and score the Evaluations manually, as they are all submitted through Blackboard which then tallies and reports the final scores to the corresponding Grade Center column. Finally, instructors can elect to compose each evaluation question to include a Feedback Model so that students see what type of feedback is legitimate. Students also seem to take these evaluations more seriously when they must assign points to each question and when they have a total score their draft can earn.

CONS: If you have more than ten students who are not posting work on time, then this tool causes the following problems:

1. The Blackboard system has total control over the random pairing of students, so some participating students will be paired with non-participating students. You have to resolve this issue by Viewing Submissions of drafts and then emailing participating students who are paired with non-participating students to try and re-match them with others in their same situation. One instructor had to create a Word doc with all the Evaluation questions, email it to the participating students who were matched with non-participating students, and then re-match students and have them fill out the Eval form outside of Blackboard and send it to their new partners via email--basically, recreating the whole process via email. This extra work was necessary because Blackboard does not allow the instructor any control over the matching of students within the tool, so if you want these students to be able to receive and give feedback, you must take all these extra steps--many of which rely on the students checking their email regularly within a small window of time. There is a small chance that those non-participating students who failed to post/submit a draft would still participate in filling out the Evaluation form, which is still possible within the tool, and I email them to say that I would give them partial credit for the assignment if they do. However, most just give up on the entire process.

2. This leads to the second problem: making sure those participating students who do not contact you about being paired with non-participating students. In the directions, you should specify that students must email you if their draft receives no Evaluations, but some wait until the deadline to do so, which means you cannot re-match them with another student in their same situation before the Evaluation window closes. Therefore, you may end up filling out the Evaluation form yourself for their draft, just to insure that they get some form of feedback.

3. Also, some participating students would not give adequate feedback. Since you do not have to go through and read all the Evaluations in order to enter the scores, you would be unaware of this unless a student emailed you to complain. Then you would have to go into the system, read the feedback, and change their score accordingly.
In this part of the guide, we list contact information for important people and offices across campus, and describe what they can do for you. If you are teaching writing from a distance, you might find it frustrating to try to figure out who to contact for different things: this directory should save you some time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Contact Name</th>
<th>Office</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Combining courses in Blackboard into one section</td>
<td>Penny Rice</td>
<td>Faculty Technology Development Center</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ftdc@olemiss.edu">ftdc@olemiss.edu</a></td>
<td>915-7918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a welcome video</td>
<td>Andrew Davis</td>
<td>Writing &amp; Rhetoric</td>
<td><a href="mailto:addavis@olemiss.edu">addavis@olemiss.edu</a></td>
<td>915-8819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeSoto Campus Writing Center</td>
<td>Jeanine Rauch</td>
<td>Writing &amp; Rhetoric</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mjrach@olemiss.edu">mjrach@olemiss.edu</a></td>
<td>393-1660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ePortfolio/Google Site support</td>
<td>Andrew Davis</td>
<td>Writing &amp; Rhetoric</td>
<td><a href="mailto:addavis@olemiss.edu">addavis@olemiss.edu</a></td>
<td>915-8819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODeL Distance Education Testing Center/ Proctoring Services</td>
<td>Catherine Holtman</td>
<td>Office of Online Design and eLearning</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cmhultma@olemiss.edu">cmhultma@olemiss.edu</a></td>
<td>915-1267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODeL/OMO Instructional Designer for DWR</td>
<td>Wan Latartara</td>
<td>Office of Online Design and eLearning</td>
<td><a href="mailto:wlatarta@olemiss.edu">wlatarta@olemiss.edu</a></td>
<td>915-1264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Writing Center Services</td>
<td>Brad Campbell</td>
<td>Writing &amp; Rhetoric</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mbcampbe@olemiss.edu">mbcampbe@olemiss.edu</a></td>
<td>915-7686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxford Campus Writing Center</td>
<td>Brad Campbell</td>
<td>Writing &amp; Rhetoric</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mbcampbe@olemiss.edu">mbcampbe@olemiss.edu</a></td>
<td>915-7686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration, staffing, payroll</td>
<td>Glenn Schove</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:gschove@olemiss.edu">gschove@olemiss.edu</a></td>
<td>915-3434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student access and disability accommodation concerns</td>
<td>Stacey Reycraft</td>
<td>Student Disability Services</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sds@olemiss.edu">sds@olemiss.edu</a></td>
<td>915-7128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student technical issues</td>
<td>IT Helpdesk</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td><a href="mailto:helpdesk@olemiss.edu">helpdesk@olemiss.edu</a></td>
<td>915-5222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical issues with Blackboard</td>
<td>Penny Rice</td>
<td>Faculty Technology Development Center</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ftdc@olemiss.edu">ftdc@olemiss.edu</a></td>
<td>915-7918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tupelo Campus Writing Center</td>
<td>Rachel Johnson</td>
<td>Writing &amp; Rhetoric</td>
<td><a href="mailto:rejohns3@olemiss.edu">rejohns3@olemiss.edu</a></td>
<td>690-6264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Self and Peer Assessment in Blackboard</td>
<td>Penny Rice</td>
<td>Faculty Technology Development Center</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ftdc@olemiss.edu">ftdc@olemiss.edu</a></td>
<td>915-7918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Zoom, Hangouts, or other technologies for conferencing and office hours</td>
<td>Andrew Davis</td>
<td>Writing &amp; Rhetoric</td>
<td><a href="mailto:addavis@olemiss.edu">addavis@olemiss.edu</a></td>
<td>915-8819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>915-8819</td>
</tr>
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