

Workshop 8

Writing in the 21st Century

“Our students are faced with a world where they really need to know how to use technology no matter what they do in school or in business. And I think it is our responsibility to prepare them for that.”

—Lori Mayo, 9th Grade, Far Rockaway High School, Queens, New York

Introduction

The advent of new linguistic technologies has always transformed language and language use. The invention of symbol systems such as Chinese characters or the Greek invention of an alphabet enabled people to write easily and keep accurate records. The invention of moveable type enabled broad access to printed texts and spurred the spread of literacy.

Most recently, computers, software, and the Internet have transformed the way people compose, revise, and communicate. Now information transfer can be electronic, digital, and instantaneous. From remote mountaintops or ships in the middle of the Pacific Ocean to the International Space Laboratory, people are able to speak to global audiences. Laptop computers, digital cameras, and wireless PDAs (personal digital assistants) have become common tools in many jobs, even those not requiring advanced technical training.

When we talk about using technology in the English classroom, typically we mean word processing and Internet access, both of which have transformed—and are transforming—writing and writing instruction. With the development of basic keyboarding skills, students can get ideas into print quickly and then revise and edit their writing with minimal physical effort. As a result, they are free to focus on the expression of their thoughts rather than the mechanics of presentation.

In addition, technology offers students expanded access to a wealth of information. They can take virtual tours of many of the world’s museums. They can access accurate and up-to-date statistical information from local, state, and national governments. They can look up rudimentary translations of foreign words and phrases (or translate from English to other languages if they choose). They can read newspapers and magazines from around the world, check the current conventions of bibliographic citations required of different disciplines and businesses, and research authors’ lives and literary criticism.

Such access presents challenges along with benefits. Where will teachers get the training to learn to use these technologies effectively? Which technologies will be really beneficial, and which will simply complicate a successful and well-established pedagogical routine? Will all schools be able to provide equipment to offer all students equal access to current technological developments? Clearly all students deserve access to the many technologies that have become embedded in 21st century life. How to provide that access is a challenge we all face.

Video Overview

The teachers in this video actively explore some of the many ways they can integrate technology into their writing classrooms. Word processing alone has significantly changed the processes of writing and how writing is taught. Additionally, the effects of email, Instant Messaging, and Internet access are impacting composition teaching and learning.

Although some of the teachers in this video are fluent users of multiple technologies, others admit to their technophobia. Still, whatever their level of expertise, all agree on the importance of helping students develop strong skills in technical research and communication, and all are working to expand their own skill sets in order to support that learning. Realizing that their students are often more conversant with technology than they are,

some of the teachers have counted on that expertise to help them establish class Web sites or chat groups. Others have turned to Internet resources such as Blackboard.com[®] and commercial software programs such as Power-Point[®] and Inspiration Software[®] to enhance instruction.

With this infusion of technology come difficulties. You will hear the teachers discuss limited teacher training, inadequate equipment, and plagiarism. While they all feel that they sometimes have to scramble to keep up, all agree that integrating technology into the writing classroom is a necessary part of helping young writers to grow.

Key Points

- All students need and deserve access to a wide range of information and communication technologies.
- Students will be required to communicate effectively in an increasing array of media. They need practice in analyzing and working within the demands of existing media, acquiring skills that will help them integrate good writing techniques into newly developed media. Teachers need to be able to support them as they acquire these skills.
- Students are often more conversant with technology than their teachers are.
- Many hardware and software tools to ease administrative tasks and enhance instruction are now available for classroom use.
- While technology sometimes changes the expected form for writing in different communities, students need to be aware that providing and shaping cogent content is always an important part of the processes of writing for any media.

Learning Objectives

After participating in this session, you will be able to:

- Consider ways to use electronic bulletin boards, email, and Instant Messaging to enhance communication and instruction,
- Explain the value of new technologies, such as a class Web site, Web folios, and email distribution lists, in providing authentic public audiences for student writers,
- Identify several benefits of integrating word processing into classroom experiences,
- Describe ways in which new technologies can be used by teachers to assist them in interacting with students, and
- List several criteria for evaluating Web sites.

The Classrooms in This Video

- Charles Ellenbogen, 11th and 12th grade. Baltimore City College High School, Baltimore, Maryland
- Robyn Jackson, Ph.D. 11th grade. Gaithersburg High School, Gaithersburg, Maryland
- Susie Lebryk-Chao, 12th grade. Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, Alexandria, Virginia
- Lori Mayo, 9th grade. Far Rockaway High School, Queens, New York
- Kelly Quintero, 11th grade. Huntington High School, Long Island, New York
- Integrated Biology, English, and Technology project, 9th grade. Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, Alexandria, Virginia

Featured Voices in the Conversation

- Kylene Beers
- Amy Benjamin
- Kevin Brooks
- Lucy Calkins
- Rafael Jesús González
- Margo Jefferson
- Patrick Jennings
- Maxine Hong Kingston
- Ruthanne Lum McCunn
- Barbara Monroe
- Christopher Myers
- Amy Tan

Background Reading

Gregory Shafer. "Composition for the Twenty-First Century." *English Journal*. 90.1 September, 2000 20-33, available in the Appendix of this guide.

Optional: For additional resources, visit the *Developing Writers Web* site at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/writedevelop. Select Workshop 8 and Additional Resources.

Workshop Session (On-Site)

Getting Ready (30 minutes)

Discuss

Discuss the following questions:

- What kinds of technology do you use in your writing classroom?
- What concerns do you have about integrating technology in your classroom?

Facilitator: Use the questions below to spark discussion before viewing the workshop program. Participants may write answers to the questions in their workshop journals, as time permits. You may use all of the questions or select only a few.

Reflect in Workshop Journals

Respond to the following in your workshop journal:

- What are some technologies that you have heard about and would like to try in your writing classroom?
- Why do you think they would be useful?
- What would you have to learn and/or do in order to include them?

Watch the Workshop Video (60 minutes)

Watch and Discuss

Questions to think about and discuss as you watch the video:

Pause at the title card “The Fear Factor.” This follows a discussion about students using message boards to communicate across geographic boundaries.

- What do your students know about emerging technologies? How has this affected their writing?
- What are some technologies you would like to integrate into your classroom experiences? What are some obstacles that you need to overcome in order to do so?
- What do you think about electronic portfolios? What are some of the advantages and challenges you would face in using them in your classroom?
- Do your students have ready access to computers in school? In their homes? How can you tailor writing assignments to meet a situation where some have access to technology and some do not?
- Talk about the availability of new and extensive audiences available to student writers in sharing their work with others through emerging technology such as the Internet. How can you best tap into this resource?
- What strategies that you saw demonstrated in the video would you like to adopt in your own classroom? Why do you think they would work well with your students?
- What questions or concerns come to mind as you watch the video?

Facilitator: If you are watching on videocassette, you may pause at the segments indicated below to give participants opportunities to discuss, reflect, and interact with the program. If needed, rewind and replay segments of the program so that viewers can thoughtfully examine all pertinent information. If you are watching a real-time broadcast, ask participants to consider the questions as they view the program and discuss them later.

You may select any or all of the questions below to discuss, as time permits and according to the interests of your participants. Encourage participants to respond to the questions they didn't have time to discuss as a group in their journals or on Channel-Talk.

Workshop Session (On-Site), cont'd.

View program until the end.

- How do you learn about new technologies and how to use them?
- Software programs that evaluate student writing are now available. Would you ever use them in your class? Explain your response.
- What is the most important thing you tell your students about using the Internet to research?
- How do you feel about the language young people often use when they IM (instant message) or email their peers? How could you best use this phenomenon to help students understand purpose and audience?
- How does building a PowerPoint® presentation differ from writing an essay on the same topic? What similarities do both tasks share?
- In the video, Ruthanne Lum McCunn notes that it is easy to think that a work is finished because it is printed. Recent research has also shown that teachers often grade printed work much more stringently than they do handwritten work. Talk about these situations from both a teacher and a student perspective. How can such false assumptions be avoided?
- What strategies that you saw demonstrated in the video would you like to adopt in your own classroom? Why do you think they would work well with your students?
- What questions or concerns come to mind as you watch the video?

Going Further (30 minutes)

Divide into two groups. In one group, brainstorm a list of the technologies participants know about that could enhance writing instruction. Briefly describe how each one could be used. In the other group, brainstorm a list of writing activities or instructional strategies that you believe work better without a technology overlay. Briefly describe how technology might complicate them without providing real benefit. Share the results of each discussion with the entire group.

Between Sessions (On Your Own)

Homework Assignment

Journal

Respond to the following in your workshop journal:

- On a scale of 1–5, respond to the following: I would rate my knowledge and use of technology in my writing classroom a ____ because _____.
- Is your personal use of technology more advanced than your classroom use? Why or why not?

In your journal, you may want to include answers to any remaining questions from this session that you did not have time to discuss, as well as thoughts, questions, and discoveries from the workshop itself and learning experiences that take place in your own classroom.

Optional: For additional resources on topics discussed in this session, visit the *Developing Writers* Web site at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/writedevelop. Select Workshop 8 and Additional Resources.

Teacher Tools

The following Teacher Tools are included in this guide for your use in planning classroom activities:

- Creating a Class Web Site
- Learning To Evaluate Web Sites

Ongoing Activities

Channel-Talk

Send comments and questions regarding the workshop to other participants around the country with Channel-Talk. Consider sharing ideas that came up as you wrote in your journal, questions you did not have time to discuss in this session, and experiences from your classroom.

The Web Site

Go online for materials and resources to deepen your understanding and implementation of the practices shown in the workshop.

Between Sessions (On Your Own), cont'd.

The Classroom Connection

Student Activities

Try these activities with your students.

- Virtual Reference Libraries: Identify three Web sites that you would like students to become familiar with. These might be sites such as The Reference Desk (<http://www.refdesk.com/>), the Librarians' Index to the Internet (<http://lii.org>), or the Internet Public Library (<http://ipl.sils.umich.edu/>). You may also direct students to sites that they will return to for specific projects at a later date. In groups, ask them to review the sites, evaluating them against the criteria identified in "Learning To Evaluate Web Sites" (found in this guide's Appendix).
- Internet Research: After students have finished reading works by a particular author, have them search the Internet for sites telling about, or responding to, work by that author. Ask them to find at least three sites, print out the home page for each site, and then write an evaluation of all three. They should indicate what kinds of information are provided by each site, the usefulness of the information, and the effectiveness of the way it was presented.
- The Medium Is the Message: Ask students to take the same thesis statement and outline the way it would be presented in several media, including the following:
 - An Internet site
 - A PowerPoint® presentation
 - A published essay
 - A scene from a movie
 - A narrative story or poem
 - An email
 - A song

Some sample thesis statements you may want to consider using include:

- Weather affects the way some people feel.
- Today, there is no one standard way to define *family*.
- If I were in charge . . .

Conclude the activity by asking student teams to present the same message in a variety of media.

Teacher as a Reflective Practitioner

Choose a technology that you think might be useful for you to learn and use, either personally or with your students. You might want to become conversant with a grade book program or with one of the instructional programs discussed in this workshop such as Power Point®, Inspiration Software®, or Blackboard.com®. Perhaps you'd like to learn to use a desktop publishing program such as Adobe PageMaker® or learn FrontPage® or Dreamweaver® to build a Web site. Maybe you've wondered about using a PDA to keep track of contacts and appointments. If you already use a PDA, you may wish to explore how to use it to download and read electronic books. Digital cameras (both still and video), scanners, and wireless cards can all be useful tools in the writing classroom.

Next, make a plan. If you want to know more about hardware, think about going to an electronics store and talking to a salesclerk. If you are interested in software, search the Web for information and tutorials (if you already own the software, check to see if a tutorial is included). Pick up one of the many specialized technology magazines available at the supermarket or office supply store. Once you have some general background, talk to an expert or find some training. Temporary agencies can provide you access to people with expertise in particular software packages. A one-hour training session often provides enough introduction to get you started.

Between Sessions (On Your Own), cont'd.

Much software is learn-as-you-go: you learn new features and techniques as you have a need for them. So the best way to develop your expertise is to assign yourself a project. Set up a personalized page in your Web browser. Develop a simple Web site. Create a format for a newsletter that you can send parents. Take digital photos of your students and use them for a writing assignment. Videotape students working in groups and use the video to discuss ways to improve the group experience.

You may wish to use your journal to record what you are learning, and to explore your successes and your challenges.