

CHAPTER 7.

#WRITETEACHCHAT: SOCIAL MEDIA FOR WRITING TO LEARN AND LEARNING TO WRITE

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In this chapter, the authors describe #WriteTeachChat, a practice used in both in-person and online learning modalities. Specifically, the authors engage students in social media conversation and enact dialogic theories of language and learning. In describing their “better practice,” this chapter addresses the themes of multimodal learning and practices in motion across teaching and learning modalities.

FRAMEWORKS AND PRINCIPLES IN THIS CHAPTER

- **CCCC Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing, 2:** Considers the needs of real audiences.
- **CCCC Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing, 3:** Recognizes writing as a social act.
- **CCCC Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing, 4:** Enables students to analyze and practice with a variety of genres.
- **CCCC Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing, 7:** Emphasizes relationships between writing and technologies.
- **CCCC Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing, 8:** Supports learning, engagement, and critical thinking in courses across the curriculum.

GUIDING QUESTIONS BEFORE YOU BEGIN READING

- How can writing instructors leverage social media to facilitate multimodal writing?
- What are the ways teachers and students engage in authentic dialogue and inquiry to improve professional writing skills using online communities?

- What are the affordances and limitations of certain online platforms or applications for both writing to learn and learning to write?

INTRODUCTION

The best writing teachers are writers themselves. Why? Because we know the writing process inside out, we can support our students' work in authentic ways . . .

– Cindy O'Donnell-Allen, English Education Professor, Scholar, Writer

The first question appeared on our X (formerly called Twitter) feeds. Attractively designed, the font popped with a reserved floral border: “Do you think attendance and classroom behavior should be included in a student’s final grade?” It asked, prompting students to respond with the hashtag #WriteTeachChat.

We—instructors with breath baited and fingers hovering over the refresh button—waited patiently. The students in our course, undergraduate teacher candidates in a course on teaching writing, were not in front of us. They were, instead, participating in online, real-time learning, waiting to practice their writing to a specific task and audience while demonstrating their thoughtful reflection on the week’s readings. Using X, they would share their knowledge and engage in professional discourse with one another and the authentic audience of their future teaching colleagues.

“No, behavior and attendance should not count as a grade,” the first response noted, citing experiences in their volunteer setting with sixth graders and behavior management.

“I support classroom behavior being part of a student’s final grade within a participation context,” another student shared, questioning how else to motivate students who were more grade focused.

“Will you consider verbalizing a part of the participation grade? In what contexts?” We responded, prompting the second student to reflect and respond, but not before other students typed their responses.

“What qualifies as participation? Not all students are going to want to raise their hand.”

“Classroom behavior is too subjective to grade fairly.”

“Exactly! Measuring behavior can be affected by personal biases, resulting in an unfair grade?”

“This all boils down to the question of ‘How do any of these things reflect academic achievement . . .’”

“Student attendance at this age is beyond their control . . .”

“Even while being a non-academic factor, [attendance] still plays a part in determining students’ academic success.”

Quickly, our students began not only responding to us and the question, but also proactively engaging with each other. Students began to question the relationship between attendance or behavior with learning and growth as well as the nuance of how participation in a discussion should be graded, in theory, and could be graded, in practicality.

The posts (formerly called tweets) came in quickly, peppered not only with references to course readings and their prior experience volunteering in local classrooms, but also with the standardized rhetorical context of X in 2020: additional hashtags, callouts, and emojis punctuated the posts, as did links to multimedia, gifs, and memes that expressed the ethos of the statements. Empty professional X profiles, created and abandoned as one-off activities in previous courses, came alive and became relevant, blossoming with conversations on pedagogy, ethics, and equity.

Over the course of this project, we sought to engage our pre-service teachers’ sense of curiosity and flexibility, to engage them as writers, and to position them as professionals. As we think about all the elements that are part of both writing and professional expression, we are giving our students opportunities to see that writing is a tool for thinking, processing, and connecting. Even though social media is not regarded as a traditional type of discourse valued by schools and institutions, it is a valuable type of talk that permeates at-home, school, and professional knowledge, and it is the center of this chapter’s practice. Both the writing knowledge and the professional dispositions facilitated by this practice grew our pre-service teachers’ understanding of writing, literacy, and professional community in a multimodal, online, social setting.

SCHOLARSHIP, THEORIES, AND PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE OUR APPROACH

The National Council of Teachers of English’s (NCTE) *Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing* (2016) frames our practice in terms of positioning composition as a “suite of activities in varied modalities” facilitated by digital tools. Our students used their phones and computers to participate in nuanced discussions on an online platform; their multimodal responses made use of unique text features to the online space as they incorporated hashtags, hyperlinks, and video clips into their written responses. These thoughts also tie into the Conference on College Composition and Communication’s (CCCC) *Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing* (2015), which guides our expectations of students’ success in developing writing for various audiences, contexts,

and purposes. Specifically, we draw on principles 2, 3, 4, 7, and 8 to view writing practices in terms of authenticity (e.g., real audience), social activities, multi-genre productions, technology contexts, and opportunities to think critically.

Additionally, we recognize that that writing is generative (i.e., an “act of discovery”) and positions our students as authors who compose to explore and negotiate ideas in authentic spaces. What had been dubbed as “Teacher Twitter” (circa 2023) was a wellspring of ideas, both practical and theoretical. Pre-service teachers can connect with others and explore resources while on a platform most already use. Further, X’s emphasis on dialogue and use by the academic community made it an excellent space for the generation of writing. As per the Council of Writing Program Administrators’ (CWPA) *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (2011), we assert that writing is a conduit for students to engage in dialogue regarding assumptions held by different audiences and thus think critically about various ideas, problems, and issues. Furthermore, additional guidelines within this framework support our belief that internet technologies necessitate students’ ability to develop informed criteria to analyze best compositional practices for electronic-mediated contexts. The aim of these “better practices” was also to model and practice multimodal and new literacies while also quite literally writing to learn with a wider audience than just their classmates.

As instructors of Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum, a writing methods course for pre-service English and social studies teachers, we are always invested in ways to help students see the role of writing across contexts, particularly those that they value and use in their day-to-day lives. When questioned about their understandings regarding the role of writing and the writing process in classroom instruction, our students generally imagined instructional end-goals as the end-of-quarter essay or document-based question response. Through this approach, we wanted to shift student understanding of what “counts” as writing in school (e.g., literary analysis essays and research papers) and the types of writing society generally values (e.g., emails, memos, and reports). We wanted students to see writing as relevant to their daily lives and a way to thoughtfully respond to others.

The platforms we chose for these writing better practices involved the two of our students’ favorites: Twitter (now called X¹) and Instagram. We chose these platforms due to their popularity, ease of use, lack of fees, and relative level of information security (though we recognize that individual’s willingness to provide personal data to any company, including a social media company, is a

1 When we began this writing exercise with students, the platform was called “Twitter.” In April 2023, it was renamed “X.” In this transition, some things have changed in terms of the platform’s use and capabilities. As such, we use “Twitter” for most of our discussion to indicate that this is the version of the platform we used within our classes at the time. When we use the new name, “X,” it is to demonstrate how people might currently or in the future use this social media platform.

nuanced decision). Although the nature of our students' posts meant that they were less likely to go "viral" as compared to popular culture posts, we advertised our slow-chat hashtag with persons within our professional networks to invite their participation. By doing so, we increased the odds that our students would have the opportunity to engage with an audience beyond their classmates. For this reason, Twitter and Instagram became authentic conduits for dialogue in contrast to tools more often used for reading reflections such as online learning platform discussion boards. Thus, these practices allow students to think of social media platforms not only as methods for connection and networking, but also as tools for deepening engagement with writing.

Furthermore, effective use of social media requires specific writing abilities, like being both succinct and analytical within a professional context. Social media messages are short, snappy, and concise. At the time of student use, platforms like Twitter had a strict character limit for messages, while more image-focused platforms like Instagram emphasized visual composition to communicate messages neatly. Education professionals are increasingly turning to social media platforms for professional networking and expression. Having preservice teachers practice using these platforms as part of their professional learning thus scaffolded both the skills of effective communication as well as helping them to develop a more mature understanding of how these tools are used professionally. These practices exhibited the authenticity of the works for the pre-service teachers and their future students and may be used within other professional learning contexts and courses for these reasons.

Finally, as teacher-educators, we view our pedagogical charge as one that adheres to instructional "best practices"—those that meet current socially and culturally-driven student needs as well as those that align with relevant organizational guidelines and theoretical constructs put forth by trusted experts in the field of education. The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE, 2021, <https://iste.org/standards/educators>) defines an educator as a professional who helps students become empowered learners. The ISTE standards serve as a useful framework for creating, adapting, and utilizing digital age tools and learning environments. Through the implementation of the semester-long Twitter and Instagram activities, we as educators have modeled several of the ISTE standards for our own pre-service teachers by designing and implementing authentic, learning driven, and technologically influenced assignments. Specifically, these assignments meet the following 2021 ISTE standards:

- "Use collaborative tools to expand students' authentic, real-world learning experiences by engaging virtually with experts, teams and students, locally and globally" (2.4c).

- “Use technology to create, adapt and personalize learning experiences that foster independent learning and accommodate learner differences and needs” (2.5a).
- “Model and nurture creativity and creative expression to communicate ideas, knowledge or connections” (2.6d).

Additionally, the creation and implementation of the assignments were informed by the following frameworks:

- **Dialogic Language Theory:** We use Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of dialogic language to view language as a semiotic system that creates, and is influenced by, social context (1981). Thus, we regard language itself as a social practice and dialogic act amongst the self, idea, text, and audience. As an active and responsive process involving the self and others, communication, and therefore learning, is facilitated through the confluence of past experiences and their present reinterpretations.
- **New Literacies:** We used Brian Street’s the New Literacies theory (2003) as our broader conceptual approach. This theory also views social practice as central to literacy learning, specifically. In this light, we draw upon New Literacies theory to focus on students’ skill acquisition but also to situate writing as a “literacy practice” that takes place within the broader cultural conceptions of the ways people think about and enact writing in technology-based cultural contexts (i.e., social media platforms).
- **Participatory Culture:** Guided by the work of Henry Jenkins (2014), we purport that social media platforms have allowed a new generation of technology to transform and influence the masses. Thus, we view composition via social media as an opportunity for political and civic engagement and thus, collective action.
- **Writing to Learn:** Lastly, we use Kathy Knipper and Timothy Duggan’s (2006) definition of “writing to learn” as students’ exploration of particular information by way of recall, clarification, and questioning processes. Writing to learn allows students to engage in exploration and reflect on disciplinary content, class discussions, and related readings (Knipper & Duggan, 2006).

COURSE CONTEXT AND LESSON

Our classes are in a well-established college of education at a large, research-intensive, public land grant university in the southeastern United States. Our students in both years from which we are documenting this assignment were

undergraduate juniors enrolled in Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum, a course for pre-service middle grades English and social studies teachers to learn practical strategies for teaching writing that instill the power and beauty of words as well as how to utilize writing as a learning tool.

In line with the words of Stephen King, who essentializes the core-being of those who embark on writing in his famous book, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*: “You can, you should, and if you’re brave enough to start, you will” (2002, p. 275). The course is designed to teach new teachers that we can, we should, and we will become writers within the discipline of education, and more broadly as well. In this course, students are taught that teachers can be academic readers and writers who foster critical thinking, reading, writing, and speaking and thus providers of immense pedagogical possibilities for their students. The course was designed to convey the principle that, to teach students to read and write within the discipline, educators must be readers and writers first.

Specifically, our students focus on general writing, writing instruction, and technology. In this class, students are encouraged to examine writing practices from both socio-cultural and critical perspectives, with an emphasis on culturally responsive writing pedagogies. Another key focus is on students developing their own writing identities and self-efficacy so that they, like their future students, can move beyond the conception of all writing as an essay. To these ends, we use a variety of pedagogical strategies such as lectures, group activities, discussion, demonstration, written responses, reflection, conferencing, dialogic communication, online technologies, mock teaching assignments, and virtual field work with middle school students.

The effective use of technology to increase writing efficacy as well as for the process of multimodal composition has always been a significant component of the course but was intensified when the first cohort of students’ in-person classes were moved online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The second cohort met completely online in the semester of 2021, using real-time learning on Zoom with any time learning happening through some assignments. In these online iterations, we used digital platforms like the university’s course management system, Zoom, Google Suite, and the platforms for these writing better practices, Twitter and Instagram.

Our relevant course objectives were:

1. Define, identify, and develop practical and applicable writing skills as teachers as writers and teachers of writers.
2. Analyze, produce, model, and teach different genres of writing.
3. Explore and analyze the use of technology in the teaching of writing.
4. Teach writing as a means for learning, inquiry, and social change.

LESSON

Year One: Twitter Assignment Description

In year one (2020), from January to May, students in the initial face-to-face context reflected on the course's writing methods content using the social media platform Twitter due to its potential for authentic audience participation without prior planning and real-time response. In our assignment, students took turns acting as moderators of "slow Twitter chats" while the rest of the class would participate in the slow Twitter chat discussions the day before our class met face-to-face. This allowed students to simultaneously learn a new genre of writing (tweets/posts) and associated language tools (e.g., @ & #) while also providing us with an inside look at how students construct arguments and personally connect to ideas in course readings prior to our whole class oral discussions.

The chat took place between 5:00 p.m. and 11:59 p.m. the evening before class to allow students to think about the course material and extend their ideas in dialogue with one another. In doing so, students were held accountable for the readings and prepared to engage more fully with the material in the upcoming class. As instructors, we therefore came prepared to only briefly summarize the material and approached the following class with the expectation that students were equipped to engage more deeply with the course content because of their recent engagement via Twitter.

Because Twitter was a free public social media platform, students were able to engage in this work while simultaneously undertaking the opportunity to engage with the public and other teachers and education stakeholders in the field. The assignment served as a supplement and extension for in-class discussion. This helped students understand that the course material holds relevance not only "for class" but for their future careers as writing instructors and educators. During the following in-person class section, we would often mention content our students wrote or writing content that was generated by "outsiders who joined the chat." Our students engaged with several teachers and/or teacher-educators each week. We imagined that, in following iterations of the assignment, former students who had previously engaged in this work could be invited to join the conversation. The activity provided students opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge in a new way for and with their peers using their authentic voice. To see examples of what students created you can check out our course hashtag #WriteTeachChat on both X (formerly Twitter; <https://twitter.com>) and Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com>).

To introduce the assignment, students were presented with a brief overview of the meaning of "slow Twitter chats." Slow chats can be described as a back-and-forth conversation that takes place between two or more participants

without the element of instantaneity. Relevant hashtags are either generated or used to add a sense of cohesiveness and for ease of accessibility. Additionally, these chats often rely on the “Q1/A1” format—the host/moderators will label the discussion questions with “Q1” (Question 1), and participants will respond and chat accordingly by starting with “A1” (Answer 1). For this assignment, our students used these logistics for organization.

For the assignment’s debut during the first week, we began by tweeting/posting invitations and reminders to both our students and outside-participants for the slow chat (see Instructor Advertisement examples in Figures 7.2–7.4).

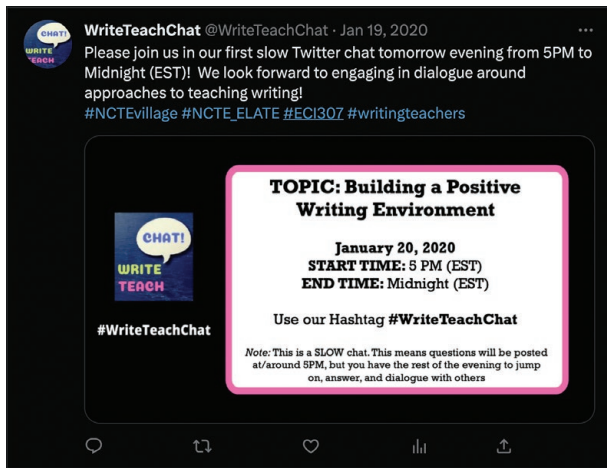


Figure 7.1. Sample promotion for #WriteTeachChat.



Figure 7.2. Sample promotion for #WriteTeachChat.



Figure 7.3. Sample promotion for #WriteTeachChat.



Figure 7.4. Instructor modeling Moderator #WriteTeachChat opening.

We also modeled the process of moderating and responding to one another using that week's course content. We then engaged in a back-and-forth conversation using the constraints of Twitter to model both professional and substantive responses. Our models are presented in Figures 7.5–7.8, and these tweets/posts are also documented under the hashtag #WriteTeachChat via X (formerly Twitter) (<https://bit.ly/TeachWriteChat>).

After the first week of having all students engaging with the instructor-as-moderator posts, two students each week were then tasked with moderating the slow chat as partners. The responsibilities of the weekly moderators included generating three to four relevant and discussion-enriching questions, as well as monitoring

the chat during the hours it was running, while also responding to classmates and other participants. Our assignment tasked moderators with creating and communicating their discussion questions before 5:00 p.m. the evening prior to class. Moderators were told to capture big ideas, address all the readings, and elicit dialogue. Additionally, students who took on the moderator role engaged in the chat in order to further the class's discussion by either posting additional questions, connecting participants' ideas, and/or ensuring the dialogue maintained content integrity. Thus, moderators were required to individually respond with at least three of their own tweets/posts that maintained participants' conversation between 5:00 p.m. and 11:59 p.m. the evening before class, a timeframe that was suitable for our university-aged students but may be shifted earlier for younger learners.

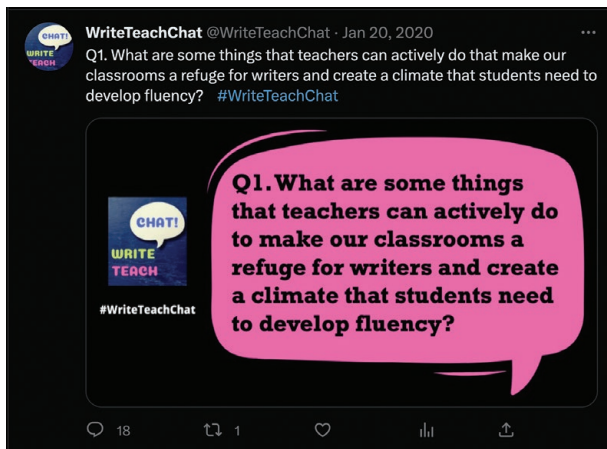


Figure 7.5. Instructor models asking questions for #WriteTeachChat.

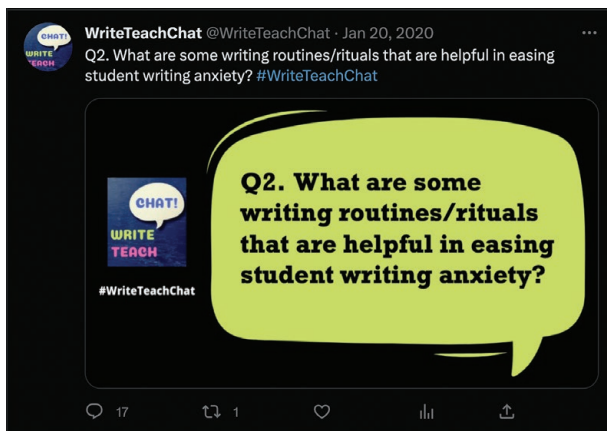


Figure 7.6. Instructor models asking questions for #WriteTeachChat.

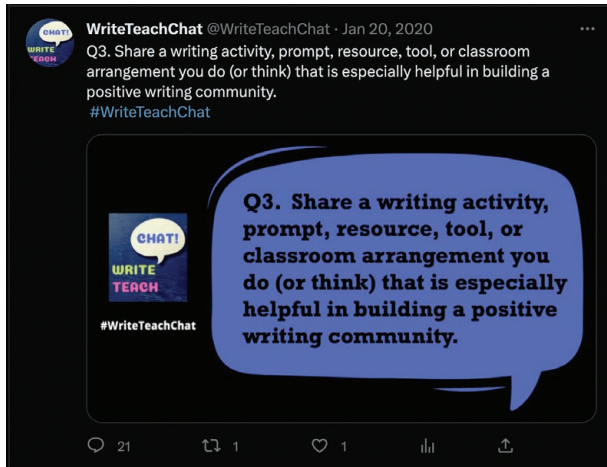


Figure 7.7. Instructor models asking questions for #WriteTeachChat.

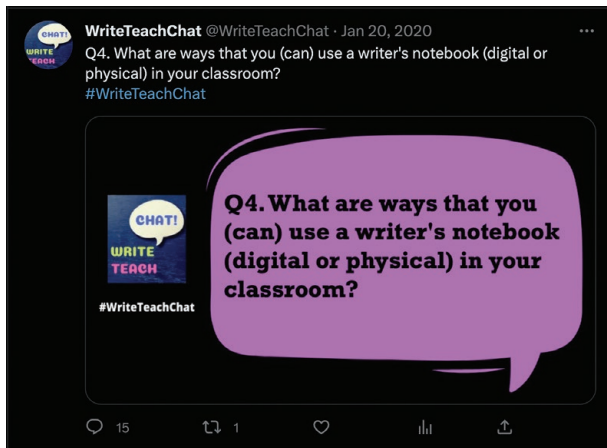


Figure 7.8. Instructor models asking questions for #WriteTeachChat.

Our students who did not take on the role of moderators engaged in the activity as slow-chat participants. Between 5:00 p.m., with the questions already posted, and 11:59 p.m. in the evening prior to class, these students were tasked with responding to the moderator's discussion questions using textual evidence and connections to relevant personal school or field experiences. Although we could have requested students respond using either textual evidence or personal experience, we felt that to achieve the goal of ensuring our students were engaged with the readings, students must be able to cite the readings, in context, accordingly.

Those who were participating were required to respond to at least five other classmates (or other outside participants who joined the discussion) by directly tagging them in the replies. Participant content included the selection and dissemination of memes, links to sources, questions for one another, and writing that expressed agreement and/or disagreement with previous tweets/posts. Our students were pushed to provide nuance to points that were made and to pose questions from an inquiry stance, thus facilitating their engagement in low-stakes argumentation of ideas. Many students used personal anecdotes to exemplify ideas, after drawing evidence from the texts. Moreover, the Twitter platform allowed students to creatively write using genres that best suited the needs of their communication and audience; thus, they produced many distinct types of writing which included persuasive, narrative, and informative all within the chats.

Year Two Instagram Assignment Description

In year two (2021), from January to May, spanning the duration of the Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum course for pre-service middle grades English and social studies teachers, students reflected on the course's writing methods content using the social media platform, Instagram. Rather than students moderating a slow-chat on Instagram, as was protocol for the Twitter assignment, students were asked to make use of Instagram for writing in order to, as Joseph Harris argues, "come to terms" with course materials and to define how readers and writers "strive to represent the work of another, to translate the language and ideas of a text into words of your own . . . to give a text its due and to show what uses you want to make of it" (Harris, 2017, p. 16). In addition to the increased text limit that Instagram posts afford as compared to Twitter at the time, we chose to use Harris' (2017) ideas for academic argument as a framework for the year two assignment to help students better understand what it means to take an in-depth exploration of the course content and produce written content that demonstrates critical reflection of the content.

Due to the University's response to COVID-19, in year two, the course was completely conducted online, with both real-time and any time learning. This caused us to consider how a different social media platform might more successfully facilitate more in-depth student engagement with the course texts and content. We felt that although the utility of Twitter was mainly realized through its facilitation of back-and-forth exchange, the character limits (280 characters) often limited the depth to which our students wrote. We wanted to mitigate this limitation as well as create an assignment that served as a tool for exploring multimodal expression—Instagram is adept at facilitating the sharing of memes, images, and videos. As in year one, students needed to write and respond to others,

but this assignment was structured differently. In lieu of acting as moderators, the Instagram assignment gave every student equal and individualized options for how to “come to terms” with the methods of writing and teaching of writing we were learning about in class. We still used the #WriteTeachChat hashtag as a standardized means of connecting with each other. We also continued to invite others who were not in the course into our conversations, as this platform served as a public engagement forum in this regard.

COMING TO TERMS WITH OUR COURSE CONTENT:

Weekly Posts via Instagram Assignment

Student Directions

1. Create a Professional Instagram Account (a separate one from any personal one you have).
2. Capture how you are “Coming to Terms” with what you have read for the week through either one single image or a series of images that you will post. This image or images can be created, found, or your own photography. Consider: How will you represent your learning for the week through the image(s)?
 - a. Create a caption for your post that meets the following criteria:
 - b. A summation of your personal learning.
 - c. At least one quote (including author last name & page number).
 - d. Evidence of critical assessment either by using one of Harris’ frames: “forwarding, illustrating, authorizing, borrowing, extending, or countering.”
 - e. A word count of ~150–350 words.
3. Use the course hashtag #WriteTeachChat and any other hashtag you deem relevant.
4. After you post, search #WriteTeachChat, read, and comment on at least two of your peers’ posts.
5. Your comments should show evidence of in-depth engagement.
6. Responses such as “I agree.” and “I like that” do not fulfill the assignment requirements.
7. Your initial posts are due by 9:00 AM on the day of class. Your comments to your peers are due by class time: 1:30 PM.

To receive full credit for the points-based assignment, students had to follow the assignment directions and meet the relevant criteria (as shown above). Additionally, in order to ensure that students’ engagement would facilitate critical

synthesis, reflection, and dialogue about the course material, assessment of their work also included the extent to which students demonstrated the following: understanding of the course material and ability to synthesize the readings, thoughtful evaluation of and a “coming to terms” with the reading, creative representation of the material through multimodal presentation, and a clarity of writing in terms of their organization of ideas.

The students’ goal in participating in the assignment was not to “simply *re-present* a text, but incorporate it into your own project as a writer” (Harris, 2017, p. 16). Thus, for this assignment, students were asked to represent, translate, make use of, and synthesize the readings into their own ideas and images. Based on the work of Harris (2017), students were provided with the following three guidelines to help them “come to terms” with the texts written by someone else in their posts:

Define the project of the writer in your own terms. Think about: What is a writer trying to achieve? What position does he or she want to argue? What issues or problems does he or she explore? This week’s readings ask me to think about or to do xyz . . .

Assess the uses and limits of the writer’s ideas. This does not necessarily mean that you are critical (in the negative way). It can mean any of the following:

- **Forwarding the ideas of the writer:** When you “takes terms and concepts from one text and applies them to a reading of other texts or situations” (Harris, 2017, p. 5);
- **Illustrating:** “When you look to other texts for examples of a point you want to make” (Harris, 2017, p. 40);
- **Authorizing:** “When you invoke the expertise or status of another writer to support your thinking” (Harris, 2017, p. 40);
- **Borrowing:** “When you draw on terms or ideas from other writers to use in thinking through your subject” (Harris, 2017, p. 40);
- **Extending:** “When you put your own spin on the terms or concepts that you take from other texts” (Harris, 2017, p. 40);
- **Countering:** When you “aim not to refute what has been said before, to bring the discussion to an end, but to respond to prior views in ways that move the conversation in new directions” (Harris, 2017, p. 57) through arguing the other side, pointing out bias, providing new counter examples.

Note keywords and passages in the text. In deciding what to quote, the question to ask is not: What is the writer of this text trying to say, but what aspects of this text stand out for me as a reader? Quote to illustrate your view of a text, to single out terms or passages that strike you in some way as interesting,

troubling, ambiguous, or suggestive. You can see quotations as flashpoints in a text, moments given a special intensity, made to stand for key concepts or issues.

Our advice was to imagine themselves as rewriting—as drawing from, commenting on, adding to—the work of the authors we were reading in this course. Some students added video clips they found and repurposed to represent their ideas (although they were encouraged to create their own as well); some loved using repurposed memes. Others were more literal in their choice of image as they used direct representations of their content in image form. Students also engaged in dialogic exchange as they were tasked with responding to each other's Instagram posts. See Figures 7.9 and 7.10 for examples of students' work illustrating their engagement with dialogic exchange and remixing of popular memes, repurposed for representing course content.

In sum, like what was offered through Twitter, students made use of Instagram to learn a new genre of writing for social media and the multimedia functionality that the social media platform offered. Student writing for Twitter was shorter, more concise, and revealed tendencies to summarize and pose questions, whereas student-authored text on Instagram focused on explanations of conceptual media representations and offered increased analysis and evaluation. The extended-assignment this year, just as the year before, provided the instructor insights into students' abilities to synthesize and extend the readings through writing before our online classes.

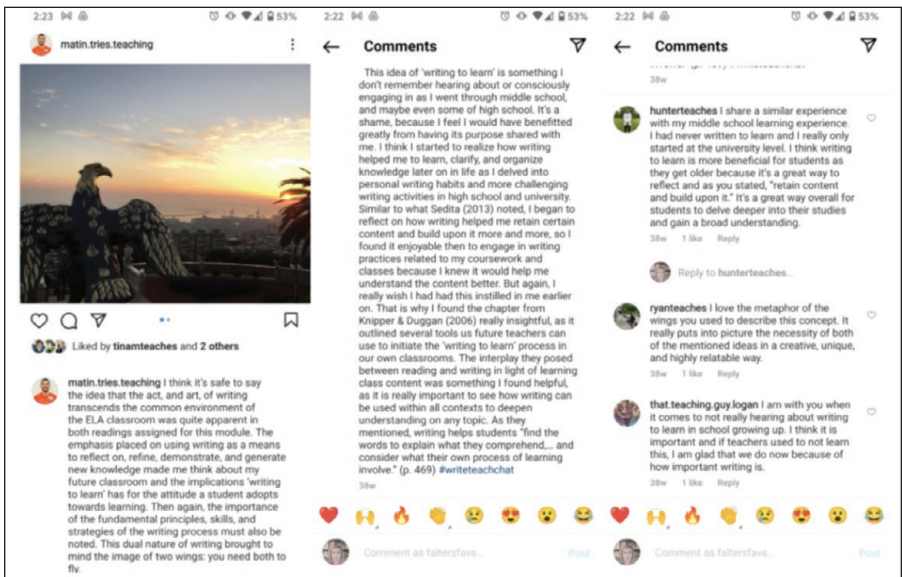


Figure 7.9. An example student post from #WriteTeachChat (Matin Maani, 2021).



Figure 7.10. An example student post from #WriteTeachChat. (Timothy Sellers, 2021).

REFLECTION ON PRACTICE

We will now discuss how each of the assignments functioned as a support for twenty-first century learning and communication (i.e., technologically-driven), the affordances and challenges we experienced throughout the implementation process, and some of the benefits our students gained through their experiences engaging with the assignments as developing professional teachers of writing. We will later conclude the chapter with brief remarks concerning how we imagine the assignments may be implemented and adapted to meet needs that differ from those within our course context.

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

Because technological advances have permeated our lives, the ways in which we view and engage with literacy and literacy practices (e.g., writing) have shifted. New media and social media platforms have shifted the production, communication, and interpretation of information and provide a wide range of opportunities for reading, writing, and communication. Schools across the US are also gradually requiring the use of social media as part of daily disciplinary instruction. Moreover, modern technology and global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic have played a large role in shifting communication from offline to on-the-screen, so teachers are called to explore the transformative implications for their instruction and learning environments.

Developing comfort and self-efficacy utilizing various technological tools and platforms is of the utmost importance for teachers as students' college and career readiness is increasingly established through technological proficiency. According to the Framework for 21st Century Learning (Battelle for Kids, 2019):

People in the 21st century live in a technology and media-driven environment, marked by various characteristics, including 1) access to an abundance of information, 2) rapid changes in technology tools, and 3) the ability to collaborate and make individual contributions on an unprecedented scale. Effective citizens and workers of the 21st century must be able to exhibit a range of functional and critical thinking skills related to information, media, and technology. (p. 5)

Along these lines, the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS) (National Governors Association, 2010), positions modern students as learners who are proficient users of digital environments (though critics of the standards would likely suggest that they are not agentive at all). Furthermore, social-media discussion-based assignments provided opportunities to practice good digital citizenship and to record their work so that they could later model the process of scholarly discussion and inquiry for their students in the future. For these reasons, it was important to us that we challenged our students, as pre-service teachers, to make use of popular technologies to reflect on their writing course content, develop their own skills as writers within the constraints that the platforms held, and prepare them to help their future students accomplish the same goals as part of their pedagogical actions.

While our chapter takes up the multimodal expression that is possible on social media, Syndee Wood and Mary Stewart share a TedTalk and Cajita video practice that asks students to remix the findings of their research in Chapter 11 of this collection. In both instances, challenging students to critically think about the types of communication that becomes possible in digital environments and helping them leverage those affordances leads to a richer understanding of writing.

ASSIGNMENT AFFORDANCES

Both sustained assignments provide quite a few affordances in terms of student engagement with learning the course content as well as creating opportunities for these pre-service teachers to generate authentic writing. Each of the assignments were introduced on the first day of class to generate a sense of community and routine that would unfurl over the entire semester while also opening an opportunity for students to document both their growth as writers and the

evidence of their comfort with the technology platforms over time. In each of the years, we anticipated and noticed that the quality (writing technique and criticality of content) and amount of writing within their posts both increased.

Moreover, in both years, as instructors, we were able to ensure that our students were attuned to both local features (e.g., spelling, punctuation) and global features (e.g., content, organization) of the writing task. Because of the everyday nature of social-media in our society, each of the platforms offered a more relaxed atmosphere in which to produce writing for real-audience as opposed to traditional eLearning platforms (e.g., Moodle or Canvas) discussion boards or essay-based reflection papers. This has implications for English language learners, too. As social media environments reflect the everydayness of communication outside of school, they thus provide ELL students opportunities in academic contexts for “genuine, meaningful communication” in the target language (Brown, 2018, p. 54). Social media platforms do not necessarily require communication that adheres to the traditional and more formal demands of language usage as required by other writing genres. Thus, these types of assignments for ELLs may support increased confidence with their command of the target language and allow them to experience a transfer of this confidence to the disciplinary literacy practices within other academic content-areas (Yuan et al., 2019). Despite social media’s support for common language use, both platforms also offer all students the opportunity to make considerations for how and what ends language manipulations and contextual rhetorical moves (e.g., strategic hashtag use or turn of phrase) can inspire dialogue. Furthermore, we noted that all students enjoyed the “quick-write” nature of the assignments as they were less lengthy than more traditional discussion-board type reflection posts in academic settings. Nevertheless, being succinct, yet analytical, is important for these multimodal communications.

Each platform’s support for multimodal communication opened the possibility for our students to affirm their writing for different purposes, audiences, and genres. Although some may be justly concerned with the use of social media in school contexts (due to increased risks of cyberbullying and communication of inappropriate content), the parameters of the two assignments were bounded by our course content and the higher education context. For a middle or high school classroom, we maintain the importance of allowing students to use digital technologies to function as consumers of available information and producers of their own writing. Readers may keep in mind that by structuring the assignments as a supplement to in-class discussion around instructor-selected readings, we decreased the likelihood that our students would produce and share content unacceptable for the course context. Other benefits of using social media to write about and discuss course content included our ability to confirm that students were prepared for class by not only having read the assigned texts

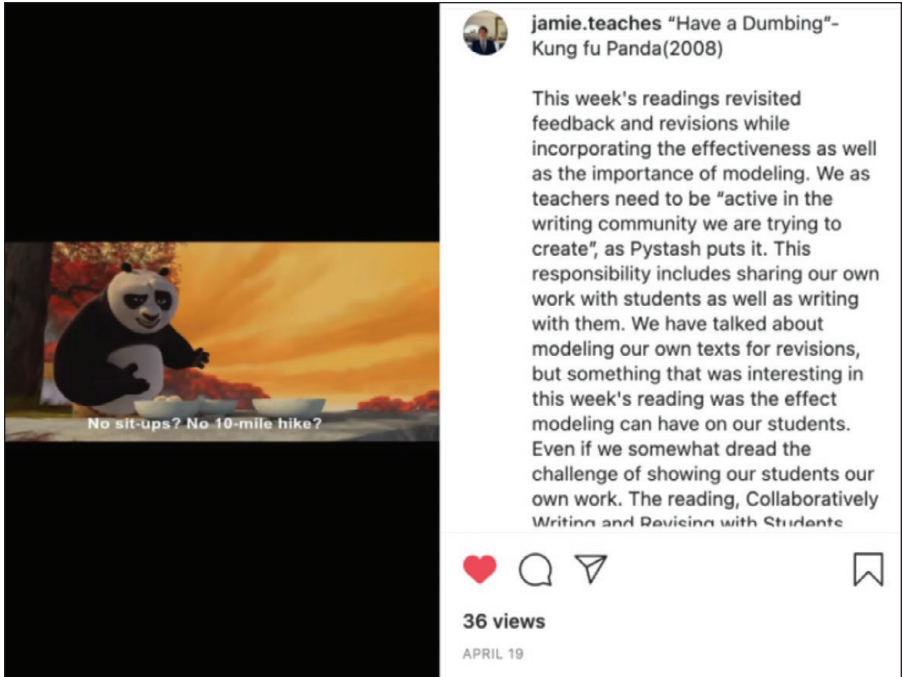
but also equipped with reflective thoughts based on the texts and the dialogic conversations they held with their peers.

The assignments also created circumstances favorable for instantaneous instructor-student communication (we participated by posting comments on students' posts to further discussion) and feedback outside of the class. Social-media notifications reached students' devices directly and thus increased our students' awareness of feedback and likelihood of reactive engagement on an individual or group basis. Learning management systems, on the other hand, typically notify students of instructor feedback via email, and those notifications are often only sent to students who are considered authors on initial posts.

For the Twitter assignment, we chose to provide additional feedback in-class by presenting to the class each week one student post that stood out as reflective and thought-provoking. The author of the outstanding post was given a "Sweet Tweet" award certificate during class. Figures 7.11–7.14 provide examples of our students' work using Instagram in which they made use of multimodal text as a support for their discussion. To illustrate their reflective points on the course readings, the student posted a video-clip from a popular movie scene in the first example. In the first example, the student included a metaphorical image, and in the last two-examples, the students incorporated popular teacher-memes. Each of the examples illustrates the creativity involved in the assignment and demonstrates one of the "real-world" aspects that writing via social media elicits. These posts are also documented under the hashtag #WriteTeachChat via Instagram.



Figure 7.12. Example student post. (Rachel Dureaux Clark, 2021).



jamie.teaches "Have a Dumbing"-Kung fu Panda(2008)

This week's readings revisited feedback and revisions while incorporating the effectiveness as well as the importance of modeling. We as teachers need to be "active in the writing community we are trying to create", as Pystash puts it. This responsibility includes sharing our own work with students as well as writing with them. We have talked about modeling our own texts for revisions, but something that was interesting in this week's reading was the effect modeling can have on our students. Even if we somewhat dread the challenge of showing our students our own work. The reading, Collaboratively Writing and Revising with Students

36 views
APRIL 19

Figure 7.11. Example student post.

mares.in.the.middle · Following ...

mares.in.the.middle This week's readings were really interesting and helpful. Of the two readings, I tended to gravitate towards Bunn's "How to Read Like a Writer" article. This piece helped me reflect on my own practices and how I can take Bunn's message and use it in my future practices. Bunn emphasized the importance of thinking about different techniques the writer was using while crafting his/her work. A quote that stood out to me was, "I realized writing is a word-by-word, sentence-by-sentence process... writing consists of a series of choices" (72).

Personally, I love to write and really enjoy reading high-quality pieces of writing/literature. When I read strong

Liked by tinamteaches and 3 others
FEBRUARY 15

Add a comment... Post

Figure 7.13. Example student post. (Kristin Mares, 2021).

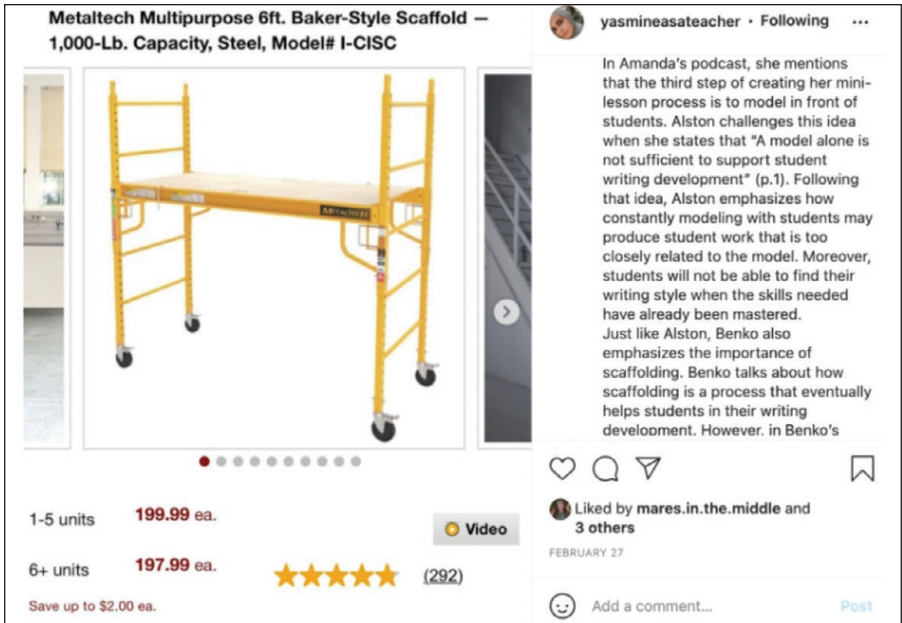


Figure 7.14. Example student post (Yasmine Jallal, 2021).

ASSIGNMENT CHALLENGES

There were few challenges associated with this assignment, although we do feel that there are several key points in this regard that are worth mentioning for readers who wish to implement and/or adapt this assignment for their own pedagogical purposes.

First, this assignment is labor intensive on behalf of the instructor. Specifically, we were tasked with reviewing both types of posts (Twitter and Instagram) before class. For Twitter, this was particularly necessary to select a winner for the “Sweet Tweet” award which we also considered as a basis for jumpstarting in-class discussion on the weekly readings and course material. We reviewed student posts on both platforms to make determinations about students’ understandings and thus how we would structure the subsequent class conversation to address confusion and/or include our students’ voices.

Additional instructor labor included grading. We strived to provide students rubric/point-based feedback in a timely manner each week. This meant that we had to review and assess hundreds of posts and replies per week as part of the requirements were that students had to respond to other participants multiple times. Although locating initial posts is relatively straightforward (made possible by searching for the hashtag and/or specific user accounts), locating and keeping

track of individual student comments required us to be more strategic with our recordkeeping. We overcame this challenge, in part, by asking our students to use “A1/A2” denotation with Twitter then later realized this format would work on Instagram replies with “C1/C2” to denote first and second comments. Submissions of individual written reading reflections or learning platform discussion posts do not require the same labor of searching for user activity amidst a collection of posts. And more generally, between the two years, assessing the Instagram assignment was less intensive as students did not have the specific, one-night constraints that the slow chat held, thus not requiring us to be logged-in and responding during a particular time frame. Nevertheless, we consider both assignments as time consuming on behalf of the instructor.

Other challenges to this work readers may face include issues of accessibility given that not every student in other learning contexts may have access to the necessary technology resources. Students’ familiarity with online digital technologies and social media platforms may also influence their initial success with the assignments. One way we addressed privacy issues by some of our students was that we allowed them to create a private Twitter and/or Instagram account, but then had to follow and allow friend requests from each of the members of the course. This allowed for their participation with cohort members, but did not allow for wider participation beyond our class. Sometimes compromises like this must be made. Additionally, we required that our students make professional accounts separate from their personal social media accounts. Challenges may arise in this regard when students are less than willing to create and keep track of multiple accounts and for those who—of their own accord or, for younger students, might have a parent who may on their behalf—reject the idea of creating social media accounts altogether. In these instances, individual students may need special support or be provided with individualized conditions that promote participation. We therefore suggest that these assignment types will be more easily used with high school and university students as compared to younger writers.

POTENTIAL IMPLEMENTATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

These two assignments were implemented in a teacher-education context; however, we feel that the benefits of the assignments may lend themselves to their use in other content-area domains and writing classrooms. Some of the ways we see that these assignments may be adapted include the use of current events circulated on X feeds or Instagram from trustworthy news sources to facilitate open student-led discussion or the implementation of a “closed section” for either platform by having students create private accounts that only follow each other.

This places limitations on engaging with others outside of the classroom but decreases the likelihood of undesirable interactions (if this is a concern). Teachers may also consider contacting and enlisting specific and relevant professionals as agreed-upon participants in the discussions to ensure students are writing for authentic audiences beyond the classroom.

CONCLUSION

Much of the discussion surrounding teaching writing online emphasizes the struggle of making in-person methods work via technological tools, but digital and hybrid spaces foster the potential for engaging writing curriculum that utilizes the benefits of online platforms to their true potential. Using Twitter (in 2020) and Instagram (in 2021), our students reflected on and crafted content while simultaneously connecting with their peers online in a relevant way. Based on the frameworks of dialogic language theories and new literacies, these social media moves illustrate how participatory culture can be used as an effective tool for writing to learn (Jenkins, 2014). Leveraging the participatory elements of an authentic audience inherent in social media allows instructors and students to practice writing in a new way, proving its power as a better writing practice in hybrid and online spaces.

With the ever-increasing push towards digital, hybrid, and online learning there is a large learning curve for the teachers and professors implementing lesson plans and creating engaging online and digital spaces for students. Not only are teachers and professors adapting to this new model of teaching, but many students are as well, especially those who are not current users of social-media platforms such as X and Instagram. These platforms have a wide range of content presented through them that branches out to many different fields including information that may be explored for science, history, and English language arts learning. With a plethora of content constantly streaming, students could use these platforms to engage in many written discussions surrounding instructor- or student-selected topics to garner a strong interest for the class subject matter while simultaneously branching out with the generation and communication of new ideas. In a traditional classroom setting, some students may be afraid to share or voice their knowledge and opinions. But, the distance involved in digital communication tends to encourage students' feelings of safety, greater inclusion, and encourages vocalicity while reducing the fear of being ostracized, which may more widely occur in the oral-based traditional classroom atmosphere. As in our experience, we note that social-media platforms also foster an online any time learning atmosphere given that students can use these tools to access and relay information simply and quickly.

In line with Harris (2017), we believe that the job of an intellectual is to push at and question what has been said before, to rethink and reinterpret the

texts he or she is dealing with. Having student moderators for discussion in the year one study of Twitter certainly helped engage students in fostering inquiry for themselves and their peers, thus promoting their experience in taking on a leadership role. By putting students in the role of moderators, we as teachers create the space to remove ourselves from directing class conversations, thus providing students the opportunity to have open and honest discussions through the creation of thoughtful and meaningful questions surrounding the subject matter. While the year two use of Instagram was not based on a back-and-forth exchange, it still allowed students to post more in-depth responses to the readings and share a variety of other exchanges of ideas through multimodal texts.

Altogether, our two assignments represent an acknowledgement of the advancement and potential for digital learning. The use of these assignments lend to a future in which students and teachers alike can engage in a creative and inclusive space to facilitate writing practices that consider socio-cultural and critical practices of digital text. The implementation of the two assignments have shown foresight into the possibilities and limitations that social media platforms hold for the future of education. We thus assert that teachers of writers can develop both their and their students' writing capabilities through applying the #WriteTeachChat philosophy to their courses.

MOVING BETTER PRACTICES ACROSS MODALITIES

- **In-Person, Real-Time Learning:** One way to adapt these practices to an in-person, real-time learning experience is having a silent written discussion in class using a social media platform of the students' choosing. Students can notice with whom they communicate and to return to their points at the end of the semester by looking back at their posts to note any changes or patterns.
- **Hybrid Learning:** Adapting these practices to a hybrid space facilitates students engaging in professional dialogue with members of the community not involved in the course, for example, professionals from another country or in another time zone.

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