



Introduction: PARS and Online Writing Instruction

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In 2015, we decided that the field of online writing instruction (OWI) needed a “go to” resource where administrators and instructors with varying levels of experience could access the myriad of available OWI resources in a space where everyone could feel a part of something. We had both taught online for a long time and we recognized that sometimes it can feel isolating and oftentimes, universities don’t provide enough training or enough resources.

Having been involved in OWI research and having attended multiple conferences while working with some foundational OWI scholars, we noticed over and over that attendees would ask for resources or a central hub for online writing instructors. Prior to 2015, no such resource existed.

So we decided to do something about it.

Upon returning from a conference in 2015, we created The Online Writing Instruction Community (owicomcommunity.org), a free online space full of resources for online writing instructors and administrators. We figured since no one had done it before, it might as well be us!

In an effort to give our site ethos, we created our own approach to online writing instruction—an approach that covered the main pillars of OWI research and

practice outlined in the CCCC 2013 *A Position Statement of Principles and Example Effective Practices for Online Writing Instruction (OWI)*. Our website included a page on the PARS approach to OWI where we explained that PARS stands for personal, accessible, responsive, strategic. PARS encompasses all of the elements we feel make instructors and administrators successful at designing, instructing, and administering online writing courses. To offer our website visitors a more comprehensive discussion of the PARS approach, we released our first co-authored book, *Personal, Accessible, Responsive, Strategic: Resources and Strategies for Online Writing Instructors* in 2019.

To be clear, the PARS approach is not a checklist—it is a holistic approach to online instruction that acknowledges the complexity of course design and its facilitation in digital spaces. Other, more profit-motivated systems are grounded in checklists, but not PARS. We recognize the value of participatory online writing courses (OWCs) and reiterate the sentiment from Oswal and Melonçon (2017) that “moving away from checklists, which promote an ideology of normalcy, and toward participatory curriculum design affords programs a way to think of OWC design in terms of an ideology of inclusion” (p. 73).

The PARS approach provides a framework to make the complex dynamics of design and instruction and administration more accessible to both novice and experienced online instructors and administrators. Because PARS is grounded in user experience (UX), it allows instructors, designers, and administrators to understand how to create and facilitate online courses, whether they have extensive or minimal experience. The accessibility and inclusion that grounds the PARS approach allows *all* users to participate in the experience of the online course.

In our first book, each of the PARS letters had its own chapter and each of the individual chapters discussed aspects of online course design, instruction, and administration.

We’ve illustrated a few key points of each of the PARS letters here, but for an extended discussion, please see our first book at wac.colostate.edu/books/practice/pars/

P=Personal

- Show your students you are a human! Writing is personal and teaching is personal so make it that way in your OWC.
- Make a connection beyond content delivery and course grades.
- Build community and foster instructor/student & student/student connections.

A=Accessible

- Remove barriers to learning.
- Think beyond ADA compliance (though that is important!).
- Take advantage of the affordances of a digital learning environment. Don’t just put content built for F2F into an online space.

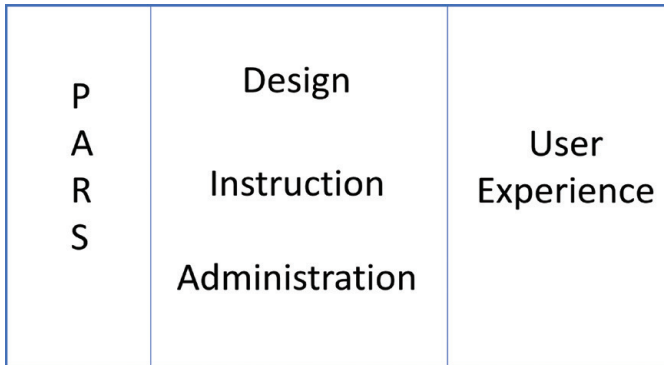
R=Responsive

- Establish guidelines for how you're going to respond to your instructors/students and when you're going to respond to your instructors/students.
- Set real expectations about = turnaround times for responding to students (grading, emailing, etc.).
- Create a routine and set boundaries.

S=Strategic

- PARS = it all comes together with Strategy!
- Be strategic! Strategy is the biggest part of being an online instructor and creating and facilitating an online student user experience.
- Focus on the student user experience (UX). After all, students are our primary users!

As noted, PARS spans three layers: *design*, *instruction*, and *administration*. When these layers are combined, they equal the user/student experience. If you attend to all of these layers within each letter, you get a unique user experience where students and instructors can engage in an enriched online space. Essentially, this equation is a simple one: PARS + UX = OWI. This is a visual representation of how we see the PARS framework:



These big picture items of design, instruction, and administration are complex and at times tedious, but PARS makes them feel less so. The flexibility of PARS allows new and experienced online instructors and administrators to focus on one or multiple aspects of their teaching or administration style at a time, but by default, they end up attending to other areas, too.

For example, if an instructor were new to online teaching, they could place focus on being **personal** for the fall semester and keep **personal** at the front of their mind as they design the course or interact with the students. By being more **personal** in their class, this instructor is also by default being more **accessible**, **responsive**, and **strategic**. Or, as another example, if an administrator wanted to focus on being **re-**

sponsive, they could plan out *how* and *when* they will respond to their instructional staff and by doing so, they are also being more **personal, accessible, and strategic**. As you focus on one PARS element, you will see how they are all interconnected!

What PARS does is filter out the complexity and reduce the urge to feel overwhelmed when thinking about all of the moving parts in an online course, or all of the moving parts of running an online writing program. By focusing on one or all element(s) of PARS, instructors and administrators are able to improve their courses and interactions.

Online Writing Instruction and the Game of Golf

As we noted in the first book, the PARS approach was born out of a shared passion for the game of golf. We both play, attend, and watch Professional Golf Association (PGA) events on television. In golf, a par score is the number of strokes a golfer is expected to take on any given hole. Shooting a par score is a goal for many experienced and inexperienced golfers. Golf is a game people play for life. It's a game that takes a lot of practice and people who play golf long enough begin to excel at the game and a PAR on a hole can become a reality. Golf is unique because you are both part of a community of golfers but you are also competing with yourself.

We feel the same can be said for online writing instruction, administration, and course design. When we play (teach, administer or design an OWI course) and get small “wins,” we want to improve. We feel that no one needs to be an expert going into distance education, but everyone can improve their online teaching/administration/course design game with proper support and a great approach, like PARS.

PARS for the win!

Collection Overview

Inspiration

As we noted in the final chapter of our first book (“The 19th Hole”), we see PARS based in, and influenced by, user experience (UX) research, principles and practices (Buley, 2013; Colborne, 2011; Garrett, 2011; Getto & Beecher, 2016; Goodman et al., 2013; Hart-Davidson, 2015; Norman, 1988; Potts & Salvo, 2017; Still, 2011; Still & Crane, 2016). However, we also see a lot of opportunities for OWI and UX in the future. To us, the application of UX principles and practices is a burgeoning opportunity for OWI scholars. This collection illustrates some of the opportunities to apply foundational UX principles and practices to foundational concepts of OWI, which were outlined in the CCC 2013 *A Position Statement of Principles and Example Effective Practices for Online Writing Instruction (OWI)*.

An early attempt at recognizing the complementary nature of these fields was made by Blythe (2001) who argued that online instructors must be both instructors and designers, yet rarely are they trained to be designers (p. 329). Blythe (2001) not-

ed that in order to combat a lack of training, instructors could follow principles of User-Centered Design (UCD). Other scholars picked up on the possibility for examining the user experience in online writing classes (almost two decades later in 2018) with the release of a *Computers and Composition* special issue (edited by Bartolotta & Bourelle), which focused on online writing instruction and UCD. Many of the pieces in the special issue explore how UCD can improve online writing instruction pedagogy or course design (Bjork, 2018; Borgman & Dockter, 2018; Greer & Skurat Harris, 2018; St. Amant, 2018; Vie, 2018). That same year, Warnock, & Gasiewski (2018) co-authored a book that explored their respective user experiences as instructor (Warnock) and student (Gasiewski) in an online writing course. Now, turning to this edited collection, many of the chapters touch on the student, instructor, or administrator's user experience and offer insightful ideas to enrich these experiences. We hope that the chapters in this collection offer readers inspiration to continue to explore connections between UX, UCD, and OWI in future research.

Audience

The audience for this collection is threefold: scholar, instructor, and administrator. Due to the wide range of topics in this collection, we see these chapters being used for a variety of purposes. If you're a scholar, we see the possibility for you to use part or all of this collection to further your work in OWI or UX. The collection offers many ideas that scholars like you could expand on in order to generate new scholarship in the field. If you are an instructor, you might be inspired by the various options for expanding your pedagogy, and with the practical application focus, you may use some of the concepts in these chapters in your own online writing courses. If you are an administrator, you will likely find this collection useful in thinking through some of the bigger questions surrounding your own writing program as several of the chapters offer useful and applicable moves you could implement such as professional development, training, and supporting instructors. We've outlined target audiences in each of the section introductions.

Structure

As we noted above, the last chapter of our first book drew connections between user experience (UX) and PARS, and working on this collection we noticed some great connections that allowed us to continue exploring the PARS layers (design/instruction/administration) and resulting user experiences through the various chapters. This collection picks up where our first book left off but brings forward new and existing scholarly voices who wanted to share their experiences with the PARS approach to OWI.

This collection contains 20 chapters across four sections based on the layers of PARS and the end goal, UX. The sections are: Design, Instruction, Administration, and User Experience (UX). The chapters apply PARS in various ways with

some emphasizing one PARS element like **strategic**, while other chapters look at the entire application of PARS. Within the chapters you will find examples and suggestions for using various approaches, skills, and ideas in your online classrooms and in your administrative philosophy.

As noted above, the PARS approach is interconnected so topics within each of these four sections may overlap with other layers (for example how chapters in the UX section talk about design and instruction too), but that is because PARS is fluid. While elements of PARS can be isolated and explored individually, the whole approach is bound by usability and user experience (as St.Amant eloquently notes in the Afterword to this collection).

Author Style

While reading this collection, keep in mind that all golfers have different approaches to the game and have different playing styles. Players in golf admire other golfers and their unique approaches, just as scholars admire other scholars. This collection recognizes different styles and approaches to sharing ideas in academia. Golf swings are like voices—no two are ever the same.

Now while our CFP made it clear this was a practice-based book, we purposefully didn't give our authors a lot of direction in how they were to shape their chapters. We told them to write as if they were having a conversation with the reader and to feel free to use a more informal tone in their writing in order to be accessible to readers. Essentially, we asked them to be **personal** in their writing!

We also suggested the authors to take a “citation lite” approach to their chapters because we didn't want readers to be bogged down by long literature reviews. Instead, we wanted readers to be inspired by the ideas, practices, and explorations each of the authors discuss in their chapters. This book is for practicing instructors, administrators, and scholars. It's a book you read and feel like you are chatting with a friend who has been doing some amazing things in their online classroom and they really want to share everything with you!

Lastly, as you read and take in this collection, you will see that some of the authors picked up on our golf metaphor. We also did not require them to do this, but some chose to have fun and try something new—echoing the risks they took in the classroom. And as a result, and just in case, we've included a glossary of common golf terms at the end of this introduction.

Usability/Usefulness

This collection provides practical application where authors share what they do in their own OWCs, their own professional development, their own administrative roles, and reflect on what they learned from these experiences. This book is important to your practice because it operationalizes the foundational principles and practices of OWI research.

Respecting the Game

No golf course is immune to redesign and change. The game of golf evolves, and while the goal of the game is the same, how we play it echoes the agile nature of human ingenuity. New golfers bring new approaches with new swings, which are supported by new technologies that allow them to play courses differently than they were played by previous generations. This does not imply how the game used to be played was wrong. In fact, it affords us the opportunity to appreciate prior skills as we develop new ones. We apply this golf concept to OWI as well. OWI is not immune to redesign and change. In fact, its very nature (technology!) makes it susceptible to continual redesign and change.

So, when we look at the extensive body of research in OWI that comes before this work, it gives us the good fortune to situate this collection as a space for some new and experienced voices to showcase their skills while sharing the same goal of helping and educating students in online classes. This collection, and subsequent collections, are perfect examples of peer-to-peer learning and they represent the redesign and change that can occur in an academic field of study through building on foundational scholarship and embracing technological advances.

Thus, this collection recognizes and respects the contributions of the foundational texts of OWI and encourages readers who are unfamiliar to read them. Some of these texts that have impacted our work and the work of the authors in this collection are early books on OWI and the work contributed by the CCCC Committee for Effective Practices for Online Writing Instruction (2007-2016).

Early texts specific to OWI:

- The Online Writing Classroom, Susanmarie Harrington, Michael Day, and Rebecca Rickly (2000)
- Preparing Educators for Online Writing Instruction: Principles and Processes, Beth Hewett and Christa Ehmann (2004)
- Online Education Global Questions, Local Answers, Kelli Cargile Cook and Keith Grant-Davie (2005)
- Teaching Writing Online: How and Why, Scott Warnock (2009)
- The Online Writing Conference: A Guide for Teachers and Tutors, Beth Hewett (2010)
- Hybrid Learning: The Perils and Promise of Blending Online and Face-to-Face Instruction in Higher Education, Jason Snart (2010)
- Online Education 2.0 Evolving, Adapting, and Reinventing Online Technical Communication, Kelli Cargile Cook and Keith Grant-Davie (2013)

And the CCCC OWI Committee work:

- Report of the State of the Art of OWI, CCCC Committee for Effective Practices for Online Writing Instruction (2011)
- A Position Statement of Principles and Example Effective Practices for

Online Writing Instruction (OWI), CCCC Committee for Effective Practices for Online Writing Instruction (2013)

- Foundational Practices of Online Writing Instruction, Beth Hewett and Kevin DePew (2015)

In addition to the foundational texts mentioned above, we also acknowledge all of the authors and texts not mentioned and encourage readers to review the vast amount of OWI scholarship available on *The Bedford Bibliography of Research in Online Writing Instruction*. This resource compiled and edited by Heidi Skurat Harris, Mahli Mechenbier, Sushil Oswal, and Natalie Stillman-Webb was updated in 2019. We also encourage readers to access The Global Society of Online Literacy Educators adapted version of the 2013 CCCC OWI *Position Statement*, which is called *Online Literacy Instruction Principles and Tenets* and was released in 2019.

Taking into account all of these texts, we want to point out that we have moved beyond validating OWI as a field. This collection is about the future of OWI and the new voices and new ideas that can contribute to, and build upon, this foundational research. With this collection, we are hoping to usher in a new approach to OWI scholarship and while our authors may or may not heavily cite these texts in their chapters, it does not mean they don't recognize their contributions.

You are Now on the Tee!

After the first book was released, we received multiple notes from people across the country indicating how much our book had helped them. The simplicity of the PARS approach was accessible to readers and aided them in thinking about some of the more sophisticated aspects of designing and facilitating their online courses. We began receiving invitations to speak at professional development events and to hold OWI workshops centered on PARS. We were humbled. We are still humbled. But we were/are also overjoyed because helping people who have very little OWI training or access to OWI resources has always been our goal.

Neither of us had any training when we began teaching online and so we know first-hand how lonely and challenging it can be to self-instruct and be a good online instructor at the same time. We've been very excited about the energy and inspiration we've given people, especially experienced online writing instructors and administrators who have embraced PARS as an opportunity to continue to work on their pedagogy and management skills.

As this collection illustrates (and as Skurat Harris eloquently writes in her Foreword to this book), we've assembled quite a community of online writing instructors, administrators, and scholars. One of our goals for this collection was to expand the community of OWI by inviting new and existing voices to contribute to the research on OWI and we feel we've accomplished that goal. We invited scholars at all levels to be considered for this collection and we are very pleased with the variety of voices we are able to share with you.

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