

# Using TECHNOLOGY *to Enhance* Writing

Innovative Approaches *to* LITERACY INSTRUCTION

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## Introduction

We work in a variety of educational settings with a range of teachers and students. Despite the differences in focus, we have all been asked, “Why is writing relevant, and why, in the era of tweeting, texting, and video blogging, should we bother to teach it?”

Writing is important for several reasons. Writing allows us to communicate information, feelings, and ideas with others. Poetry, song lyrics, speeches, and novels express our emotions, beliefs, and values. Business reports, legal briefs, research articles, and editorials enable people to fully participate in economic and civic life. Written expression allows people to be self-reflective. Writing is a vital tool for learning and processing information.

Yet, teaching writing has often been overshadowed in school. Many educational programs have focused on reading rather than writing instruction. Even though evidence, such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores, highlights students’ continued struggles with writing, the emphasis on reading prevails (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012). The adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), however, have led policymakers, school representatives, and teachers to concentrate efforts on writing instruction across all K–12 classrooms (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGA] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010).

Coupled with this increased focus on writing instruction is teachers’ and students’ increased access to new technologies. Many districts are implementing one-on-one programs and blended and online courses. Teachers are examining their current writing instruction and considering how to integrate it with digital and technological tools. School districts, curriculum directors, principals, and teachers are learning

how certain technologies can meaningfully and effectively contribute to writing instruction. They are asking how technology can strengthen and further develop what they already know about effective best practices.

This book is meant to be a handbook for educators interested in using technology to teach writing. While examining and answering questions that the integration of technology with writing poses, it also provides practitioners with research-based approaches effective for K–12 classrooms.

## How This Book Is Organized

We group the chapters in this book into the following eight parts.

- I. Prewriting and Introduction to Writing
- II. The Reading and Writing Connection
- III. The Process Approach
- IV. Awareness of Audience and Purpose
- V. Collaborative Writing
- VI. Grammar Instruction
- VII. Editing and Revising
- VIII. Assessment

We created these parts to highlight how technology can support specific approaches throughout the writing cycle. Each focuses on effective, research-based pedagogical practices. In creating each part, we consulted three resources: (1) research documents, such as *Writing Next* (Graham & Perin, 2007c), a large-scale meta-analysis that identifies instructional approaches effective for teaching adolescent writers; (2) the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) practice guides (for example, Graham et al., 2012); and (3) academic journals from leading professional organizations, such as the International Reading Association (IRA), the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the Literacy Research Association, and the Association of Literacy Educators and Researchers. Each part begins with an introduction that provides background information about its theoretical perspectives and research base, indicating evidence-based practices. Each part consists of three chapters, which are in turn divided into three sections, as follows:

1. **How Do I Do It?**—A description of the specific pedagogical practice associated with this approach
2. **Classroom Example**—Specific examples highlighting how the instructional approach advances students' knowledge, writing instruction, and the use of technology

3. **Your Turn**—An exploration of how readers can adapt this pedagogical practice for their own classrooms

Because the authors use these instructional approaches in their own classrooms, the chapters provide firsthand accounts of how particular instructional approaches work and include suggestions for how to adapt them to other settings. Exemplary educators, many of whom have conducted their own research, have penned all the chapters. Many have also published work in leading journals, such as *English Journal*, *The Reading Teacher*, *Voices from the Middle*, and *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*.

We have collected the references for all chapters at the end in one section.

## Important Considerations

Writing is a recursive and ongoing process. The continual cycle of brainstorming, drafting, and revising is critical to students' development as writers. For example, revision might compel writers to begin a new draft or make significant changes to a previous draft. Additionally, genre studies must happen throughout the writing process, not only at the beginning. As you read this book, we encourage you to consider how these instructional practices might inform your instruction before, during, and after writing. We recognize that we could have divided the book by grade bands, but despite the fact that writers in first grade will have different instructional needs than writers in a tenth-grade English course, we felt it was important to show how teachers can implement certain approaches across grade levels. It is also important to note that the approaches and tools of some chapters could fit into other parts or span multiple parts.

## Conclusion

In order to effectively teach writing with technology, teachers must have conceptual knowledge of the writing process, pedagogical knowledge about the teaching of writing, and knowledge about how technology can facilitate growth and development. There is thus much for them to know and consider. As students engage in creating multimodal compositions with video, images, and audio, teachers must continue to explore what these new forms and formats mean for the teaching of writing. Additionally, as the tools students use continue to change and advance, teachers must have extensive knowledge of why certain tools promote particular instructional approaches. We hope this book can provide a deeper understanding of the theoretical perspectives and research base as well as a practical exploration of how teachers can implement instructional approaches in the writing classroom.



## CHAPTER 1

# Driving Without a License: Digital Writing Without Digital Citizenship

By Gail Desler and Natalie Bernasconi

Through the lens of our combined forty-five-plus years of teaching experience and in our respective teaching capacities, we have come to see the critical role that digital citizenship plays in developing strong, confident, and ethical writers, a position the National Writing Project ([www.nwp.org](http://www.nwp.org)) firmly supports. In addition, the U.S. Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) has added a legal mandate for any districts utilizing federal funding for technology to teach principles of digital citizenship. Clearly, any book with the title *Using Technology to Enhance Writing* must include the fundamental concept of digital citizenship as an integral part of its exploration.

What exactly *is* digital citizenship? We drew from Ribble and Bailey (2007) and Jason Ohler (2010) to collaboratively develop the framework for our not-for-profit Digital ID Project (<http://digital-id.wikispaces.com>) and arrived at our own working definition of what it means to be a digital citizen.

As upstanding “Citizens,” we need to participate positively in our physical communities—our schools, neighborhoods, cities, states, countries and the world. Likewise, as exemplary “Digital Citizens,” we must learn how to participate positively in a variety of digital/cyber/online communities. It is only by developing a clear sense of both our rights and our responsibilities that we can become fully engaged, contributing “Citizens” of all the communities in which we find ourselves. (Bernasconi & Desler, n.d.)

We've identified four specific foci that together comprise the quintessential digital citizen.

1. **Stepping up:** Saying “I do” to respecting all people and “I don’t” to cyberbullying and risky online behaviors
2. **Building identities:** Saying “I do” to maintaining a responsible digital footprint and “I don’t” to inappropriate online behavior
3. **Respecting boundaries:** Saying “I do” to respecting others’ intellectual property and “I don’t” to pirating and plagiarism
4. **Protecting online security:** Saying “I do” to taking precautions to protect my computer and personal information and “I don’t” to jeopardizing privacy

As can be seen from these four foci, we've come a long way from the olden days of the 20th century, when teachers only needed to focus on teaching students proper “netiquette,” which included such helpful communication rules such as, “Don't type in all CAPS or people will think you are shouting.” While still useful and important, we consider netiquette to be just one small component—akin to learning how to use the blinkers when learning how to drive a car—among the many skills required of a digital citizen. These four foci and the overall concept of 21st century citizenship can be introduced to students in a Prezi (a cloud-based presentation using software of that name) we created, *Digital ID: Citizenship in the 21st Century* (Desler, 2013b). We urge all teachers, but especially those who actively engage their students in digital writing, to integrate these four foci into their pedagogy and daily instructional practices.

## How Do I Do It?

The first and most essential step for the digital writing teacher is to recognize that despite your excellent preparation and anticipation of potential issues, one of your students will inevitably make a bad decision that will challenge your commitment to fostering a digital writing community. Students can and will test the boundaries. It's what they do. It might be something as benign as using Google Docs to chat instead of for collaborative commentary, or it could be perhaps a more egregious violation, like deleting another student's work and just leaving the word *sucka* in its place (true story). Regardless, every teacher needs to know that just as transgressions occur in the pencil-and-paper world, they will also arise in the digital world. Just as you wouldn't permanently forbid the student who writes a bad word on a piece of paper to ever have paper again, you wouldn't permanently banish a student who posts something inappropriate from ever using a digital device again, nor would you ban digital devices for the whole class because of one student's transgression. Kids grow up riding around in cars, but that doesn't mean they have the maturity and judgment to get behind the wheel without adult guidance and training. Similarly, in

the digital world, students need our modeling and guidance in order to put the rules of the road into practice on their journey to becoming full-fledged digital citizens.

We have developed our Digital ID Project's policy resources page (<http://digital-id.wikispaces.com/Policy+Resources>) as a repository for a variety of documents to help policymakers and teachers cover all the bases, including district-level acceptable-use agreements; parent letters explaining rules, safeguards, and expectations; netiquette guidelines; and student guidelines for respectful online academic discourse. These are elements every teacher will want to go over with his or her students well before venturing into the online writing space. Having those conversations in class helps set the tone and the expectations for students while providing them with safe limits.

However, the reality is that no matter how meticulously we seek to prepare our students for respectful online community participation, teachers are unable to police the digital world 24-7. While there are tech tools to help minimize risks (such as online community spaces that teachers control strictly), part of our job is to prepare students for life beyond the walled garden. Since the teacher can't be omnipresent or omniscient, we must teach students the importance of stepping up on behalf of themselves and others against the negative actions of their fellow students. It takes courage for students to cross those lines and not an insignificant amount of integrity to counter cultural norms ("I'm not a snitch"; "He was just joking") that promote silence instead of speaking out. That is why we consider stepping up to be the heart and soul of any digital citizenship effort. We seek to help students make connections—however remote they may seem at first—between the devastating silences that have enabled oppression and injustice throughout history and the silences that allow cyberbullying and the resulting loss of a sense of safety and community it engenders. We seek to use literature, history, contemporary world events, and powerful personal student narratives to provide students with effective models of speaking out, whether it is through poetry, in the court of law, or on the playground. Our Stepping Up page (<http://digital-id.wikispaces.com/Focus+1+-+Stepping+Up>) is a collection of voices—young, old, contemporary, and historic—that teachers can use to exemplify the personal responsibilities we all must accept as citizens if we are to reach our full potential as individuals and as a learning community.

If educators fail to step up to this challenge and neglect their responsibility, and if our students don't learn these vital qualities, students' digital writing communities will look more like *Grand Theft Auto* venues, where drivers carjack (and writers plagiarize) at will and muggings abound (in the form of derogatory posts, such as those found in just about any YouTube comment section), and our digital writing spaces will never be safe enough for the kinds of authentic student writing we aspire to and that led us to move to digital writing in our classrooms in the first place.