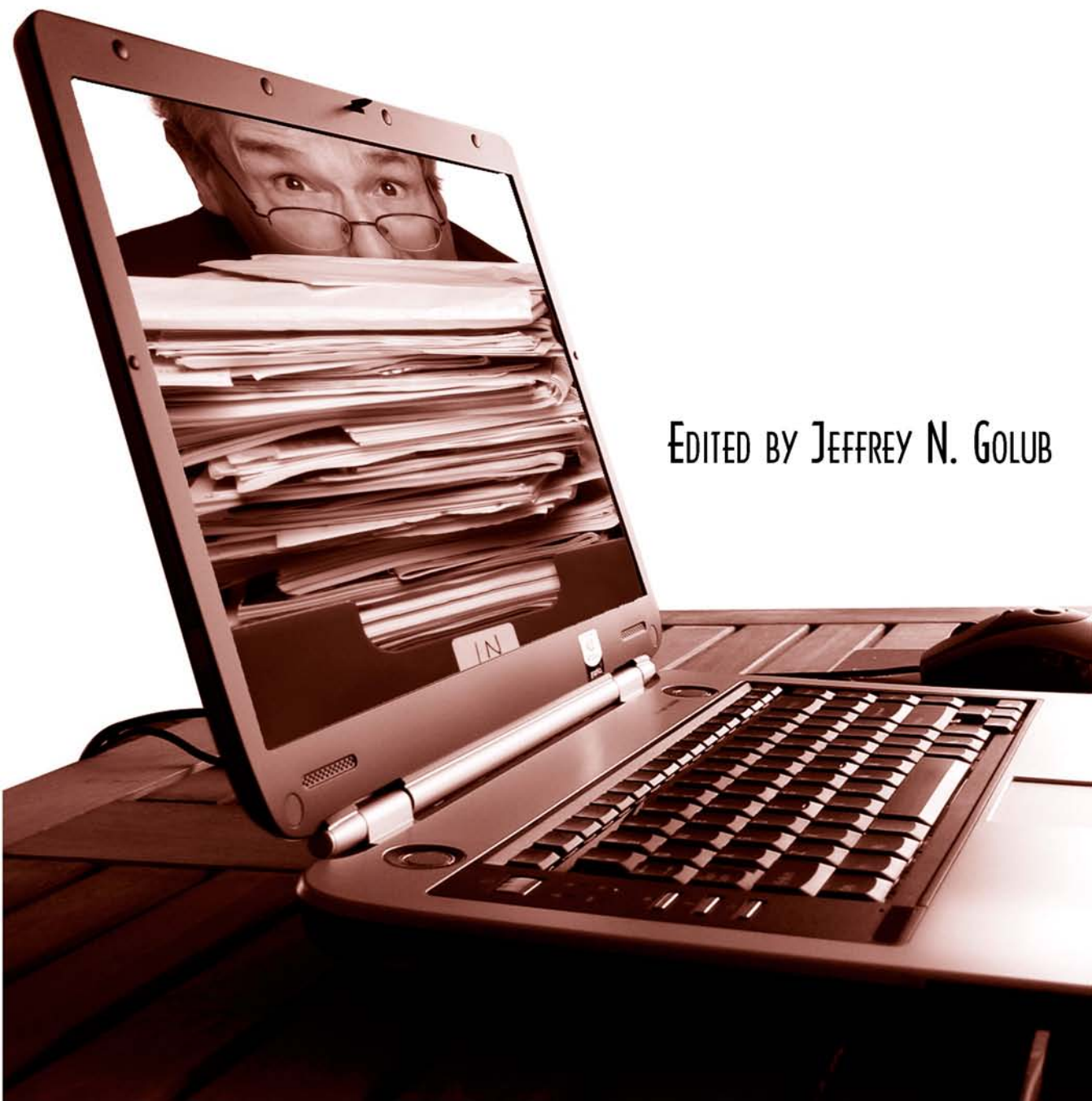


MORE WAYS TO HANDLE THE PAPER LOAD

ON PAPER AND ONLINE

EDITED BY JEFFREY N. GOLUB



Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	ix
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I. Ideas for Classroom Practices, Procedures, and Portfolios

1. Handling the Paper Load: Three Strategies Barbara A. Mezeske	3
2. “Ungrading” Writing to Achieve Freedom for All Jennifer D. Morrison	7
3. Grade Less, Teach More: Overcoming Student Resistance to Collaborative Paper Assignments Allison Berg	13
4. When Will You Stop Correcting Student Writing If You Don’t Stop Now? Ned B. Williams	19
5. Assigning Writing in a Literature Survey Course: Applying WAC to English Linda S. Bergmann	23
6. Enhancing Learning and Lessening the Paper Load with Students’ Portfolios Rita Al-Abdullah, Ebru Erdem, Ellen K. Johnson, Duane Roen, Jennifer M. Santos, and Lauren Yena	30
7. Writing as a Process of Discovery John A. Poole	37

II. Ideas for Engaging Students in Peer Review

8. “Everything Looks Great!” Revitalizing Peer Response by Taking It Out of Class Hillory Oakes	45
9. How I Conquered Peer Review Barbara A. Mezeske	57
10. Conference Class Sessions: Reducing Paper Load While Supporting Student Revision through Effective In-Class Response Karen Nilson D’Agostino	63

11. Mountains into Molehills: Coping with Essay Overload Patricia S. Williams	71
12. Using Peer Review for Improving Writing without Increasing Teachers' Workloads Lauren Yena, Jennifer M. Santos, Duane Roen, Ellen K. Johnson, Ebru Erdem, and Rita Al-Abdullah	74
III. Ideas for Evaluating Students' Writing	
13. How Sharing Evaluation in the Writing Class Can Lighten the Paper Load Allison D. Smith	83
14. Reasons for Writing/Reasons for Grading: Conceptual Approaches for Processing Student Papers William Broz	90
15. Evaluating the Writing of English Language Learners Julie Ann Hagemann	102
IV. Ideas for Handling the Electronic Paper Load	
16. Taming (Not Slaying) the Virtual Dragon: Handling the Electronic Paper Load Lynne S. Viti	111
17. Saving Paper—and Grading—with Electronic Postings Kimberlee Gillis-Bridges	117
18. Internet Grading: Following the Online (Paper) Trail Helene Krauthamer	122
19. Sharing the Fun—and the Paper Load: How E-Mail Can Help Middle Schoolers and Preservice Teachers Alike Lauren G. McClanahan	129
20. Share the Load, Share the Learning: Everyone Benefits from Online Response Claire C. Lamonica and Diane Walker	133
21. "Dear Hamlet . . .": Student Letters the Teacher Never Answers Todd Heyden	139

22. "Itching to Read It": The Online, Ungraded, Single-Paragraph Book Exchange	
Judy Rowe Michaels	142
23. First There Is a Mountain: On Getting out of the Way of My Students' Learning	
Richard Johnson	150
<i>Editor</i>	153
<i>Contributors</i>	155

IV Ideas for Handling the Electronic Paper Load

16 Taming (Not Slaying) the Virtual Dragon: Handling the Electronic Paper Load

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Eighty percent of success is showing up.
Woody Allen

Recently, I spent an hour and a half on the telephone with the customer service representative from my computer's manufacturer, troubleshooting a problem that I couldn't figure out, even with the skillful advice of our college's computer helpdesk staff. The pleasant, disembodied voice on the other end of the phone patiently led me through a complicated series of steps and helped me restore my computer to its functional state on the last day it had hummed along contentedly. From time to time, when one of the steps wouldn't work, the Voice would say, "Let me place you on hold, please, while I do some research on that." A few minutes later, he would return, prefacing his next round of instructions to me with, "I have done some research and have an answer for you." When the computer was fixed, I asked the Voice if I'd be able to replicate the many steps in this repair process should the problem occur again. He thought not, but encouraged me to call customer support again. I thanked him and hung up, knowing that in all likelihood, I would not be speaking again to him, but to another Voice.

This experience was eerily reminiscent of what passes for student-faculty interaction in the twenty-first century, especially now that many of us have successfully reduced the paper load by relying more and more on electronic communication to respond to student writing. With the rise of e-mail and the widespread popularity of software programs like First Class and Blackboard on college and university campuses, the convention of faculty office hours has noticeably declined (Wilson 10). Though we cannot lay all the blame at the feet of computers, it seems

reasonable to conclude that e-mail and electronic bulletins have infiltrated our teaching and eclipsed old teaching practices now in danger of becoming extinct. At some institutions of higher learning, rhetoric or composition instructors required to observe office hours find themselves alone in front of their computers, responding to a barrage of student queries about required readings, paper assignments, and even fine points of grammar. Students who have grown up using Instant Messaging (IM) as a social tool since their middle school years bring their IM habit to college, and all too often enlist it for academic discourse without adequate guidance from faculty on when this is appropriate ("Letters").

This places the instructor in a difficult position, wanting to respond to students' electronically communicated requests for help with writing, but wary of increasing what can be called an electronic paper load and further diluting pedagogical energy. Faculty should stand firm against the onslaught of e-mail and document attachments, and revive the practice of sitting down at the table to talk with students about their writing. Over the past year, I have begun to use technology more judiciously. It does not mean I'm a Luddite if I refuse to read electronically transmitted drafts and return my comments to students by e-mail. It does not mean I am rejecting all academic uses of technology if I ask students to take advantage of my office hours, and to partake of the academic life through conversations about their writing.

The process that led me to this realization began in the mid-nineties, when I found myself spending more time in front of my computer than I had ever spent reading student papers or keeping busy office hours. I became quite familiar with my word processor's "track changes" editing function, oh-so-creatively color-coding my comments as I read and critiqued student drafts and returned these electronically. The more time I spent on the computer, both in my office, and at home—later and later into the night—the less time I spent at my office roundtable, working through writing issues with students. Real-time meetings with students—whether in my academic office, sitting down at the student union over coffee to discuss a piece of student writing, or responding to quick questions before or after class—had evaporated from my teaching life, replaced by e-communication. As well, my actual paper load appeared to decrease, but was supplanted by an even more daunting and ever-replicating e-load. After some soul-searching, I concluded that three essential stages of the writing process had been undermined by my embracing e-mail and electronic conferences in ways that were not pedagogically defensible. To combat and reverse this trend

toward a kind of teaching that felt increasingly disembodied to me, I devised some modest solutions, perhaps more accurately characterized as *resolutions*.

Some Modest Resolutions

1. Brainstorming and Finding a Topic: Under the tyranny of the e-mail dragon, my students came less and less frequently to my office hours to brainstorm a paper. Instead, they would fire off e-mails suggesting the direction they planned to take in my assignment. Instead of asking students to hand in paper copies of thesis statements, or introductory paragraphs, as I had so often in the past, I had begun to let them drop their paragraphs into an electronic folder, and responded to these electronically as well. Dialogue between me and my students took place over e-mail, but the lack of synchronous discussion hampered us. And if we engaged in discussion by means of a computer chat function, I often found myself wishing I could shut down the computer and pick up the telephone, as the speed of IM and similar chat software makes it hard to reflect or pick up the nuances of a student's remark or question. Typical exchanges on Chat lasted a minute or two, no longer, leaving me more time to pore over e-drafts and get back to using those fancy color-coded edit functions in Word's tool menu. This made me wonder whether my students and I should not just admit to ourselves that we were fast becoming part of an online course.

Requiring three-minute conferences for brainstorming and paper planning addressed this problem, and cut down both on the paper load and the e-load. The venue for these varied—the classroom, before and after class, the hallway outside the classroom, the campus coffee bar, and my office.

2. Feedback on First Drafts of Think-Pieces and Longer Essays: By giving students extensive written comments on first drafts via e-mail or color-coded annotations in Word, but not seeing students in conference to talk about my appraisal of early versions of papers, I denied them the opportunity to solve writing and critical thinking issues present in their early drafts. I could no longer use the Socratic method to aid students in locating the solutions to writing questions. And I could certainly not read their spontaneous reactions, interpret their body language, or parse their questions as I was able to do in an office conference.

Consequently, I returned to the practice of first-draft office conferences, particularly for the first two essay assignments, limiting these meetings to fifteen minutes. If a paper had, in the words of my colleague

Winifred Wood, “misfired badly,” I would ask the student how he or she might start over and usually would have her work one-on-one with one of our student tutors in the academic support center. I then would require a second revision conference a day or two later, and in that meeting, would focus on thesis, development of argument, use of evidence, and linking of evidence to claims the student was making in her essay.

3. Paper Post-Mortems: Even during those semesters when I used the computer most heavily to teach writing, I continued to rely on office hours almost exclusively to go over graded essays with students, both to explain my annotation system and to amplify my concluding comments.

Under my revised office-hour system, I ask students to bring—in addition to the graded paper—a list of questions about my comments. Additionally, a few days after I return each set of essays to students, I ask them to bring those graded papers with them to class. They then spend ten to fifteen minutes of class writing what I have them title “Feedback on Your Feedback.” I ask them to address the following questions: Were all my comments clear? If not, which ones would you like me to clarify? What aspect of your writing would you most like to improve in your next paper? What part of this assignment gave you the most trouble? What, if anything, will you do differently when you approach the next essay assignment in this class? The feedback-on-feedback responses are one kind of “low-stakes” writing; they are ungraded, their sole purpose being to promote communication between me and the students. I read through these quickly and ask students to review them before writing their final feedback to me at the course’s conclusion (Elbow 5).

Reviving students’ participation in office hours is more than a practical way to reduce the e-load that we only pretended was reducing our paper load. It has the added benefit of teaching students how to engage in academic discourse. Particularly during their first and second years, students often avoid one-on-one discussion with professors, out of shyness or a belief that asking questions during faculty office hours shows weakness. The writing teacher promotes and models good academic citizenship by requiring students to show up and talk about their writing work.

The computer is a blessing in many ways—we no longer have to deal with erasable bond paper, correction fluid, or footnote anxiety. E-mail is a useful way to set up meetings, to answer small housekeeping questions, and to receive final papers from students. Virtual meetings

are acceptable in the event of a snow emergency, or when a student has a family emergency and cannot fulfill all his or her academic obligations in person. Yet to use exclusively virtual communication is a poor substitute for the richness of the give-and-take we all value in our teaching work. In reducing the paper load, we must take great care not to replace it with an even more onerous virtual one, and to extinguish actual interaction with our students into the bargain.

Relying on Technology to Handle the Paper Load without Increasing the E-Load

In any course involving a considerable amount of student writing that an instructor is duty-bound to read and respond to in some fashion, computers and instructional technology can provide effective ways to reduce the paper load. Peer review of drafts and short writings sent by e-mail, closed discussion groups in the form of electronic bulletin boards or conferences, and asynchronous class discussions of readings and student writings—whether voluntary or required—can facilitate the creation of a learning community. All of these activities can take place outside formal class time, leaving precious class hours for lively workshopping of student writing and full-class discussion of assigned readings as well as student work. Asynchronous Q-and-A e-bulletin boards, such as “Ask the Professor” conferences, can be open only to students in a particular class. These provide a convenient place for questions ranging from the menial (“Do we have to include an audience description in Paper 2?”) to the more complicated (“Does an article from the *New England Journal of Medicine* satisfy the assignment’s requirement for a scholarly journal article in the field of bioethics?”). We can harness electronic media to expand each student’s awareness of writing and required course readings, and to address legitimate, brief, and time-sensitive questions about the writing process. The instructor can set aside an e-mail hour every other day in which to read and respond quickly to short questions from students. Over time, this practice will provide a venue for recognizing student concerns and anxieties about writing assignments, yet subtly remind students that instructors are not on call twenty-four hours a day.

Revaluing the Role of Peer Tutors as a Counterbalance to Technology

Training our more experienced student writers to field questions, parse writing assignments, and vet paper drafts with novice writers is another

time-tested way to manage the paper load. Giving these veteran student writers a title—student teaching assistants, writing tutors, or writing coaches—and a library corner in which to work, and paying them (even nominally), lends them authority. Students grappling with writing questions then perceive the tutors as legitimate, learned paraprofessionals in the writing community, and seek their help. In effect, incorporating student tutors into writing instruction provides yet another opportunity for personal communication, this time between tutor and student, about writing. Interposing a tutor between the student and the professor gives instructors more time to provide rich and meaningful written feedback on final drafts and portfolios, and to offer individualized attention and guidance to students during office hours.

Peter Elbow and others have described a range of activities for writing courses wherein students write to learn, but do not submit each assignment to the instructor for a detailed critique and evaluation. We can continue requiring these types of writing activities and harness technology to expedite the process by which students hand in such work, exchange it within editing groups, or post it on electronic class bulletin boards for the whole class to read and respond to—all of this without upping our paper or electronic load (“Letters”).

By balancing the personal and the technological in our teaching, we can avoid paper fatigue as well as technological overload. By using technology selectively and taking care that it does not distance us from our students, we can nurture good writing practices and at the same time bring our students into fuller participation in the academic community.

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17 Saving Paper—and Grading—with Electronic Postings

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As director of English Computer-Integrated Courses at my university, I incorporate technology into all my teaching, including literature, film, and cultural studies classes taught in lecture halls and writing courses held in computer labs. No matter the classroom environment, one technology remains constant: electronic postings.

I moved from paper journals to Web-based electronic postings in 1998. Prior to the shift, I had assigned journals that included responses to questions about course readings, expressive writing on issues related to upcoming essays, and quickwrites completed during class as catalysts for discussion. Although I collected journals only three or four times per term, offering even minimal responses constituted a significant workload. Moreover, my timing always seemed off. I found myself commenting on ideas that could have been fruitfully explored in discussions that had already taken place or essays that had already been submitted. I saw exchanges students didn't know they were having; in their journals, writers puzzled through similar issues or expressed opposite points of view, but solely to me rather than to one another. Since my own writing process depends upon continually engaging in dialogue with others, I wanted a way to bring students' hidden conversations into the open and to provide more opportunities for students to respond to one another as they explored ideas. Enter the electronic posting.

Students in my courses use a Web-based platform to make their postings. I employ a Web-based forum rather than an e-mail list because I want maximum flexibility in configuring my posting area. Typically, I shape posting boards around topics, with all posts related to a particular topic grouped together (see Figure 17.1). I also prefer Web-based programs because they give students a range of formatting options. Both Web Crossing, the program I used at the Claremont Colleges, and EPost, a tool developed by the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology

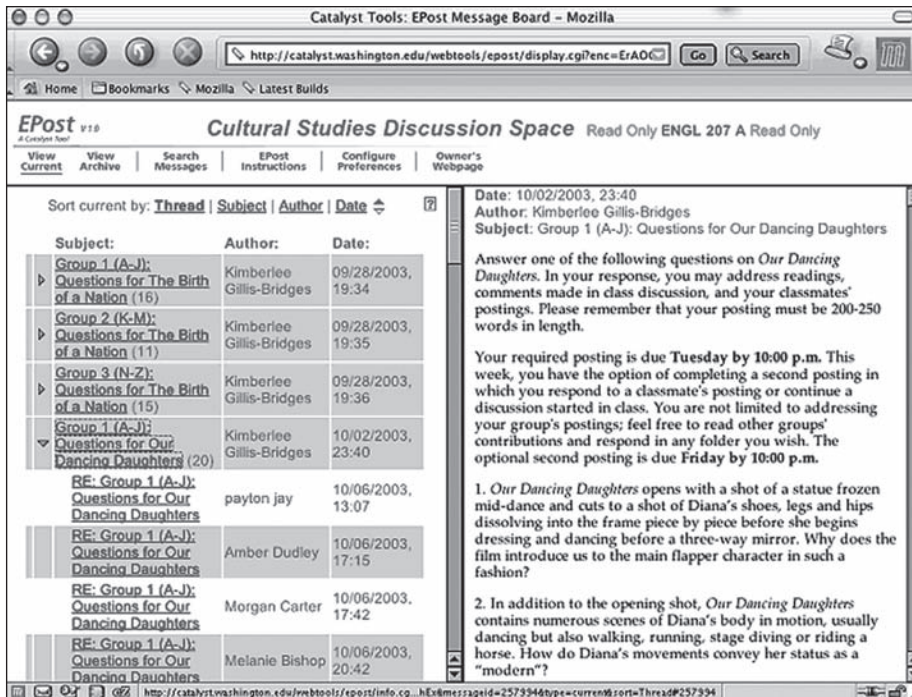


Figure 17.1. Screen shot of EPost posting board for English 207, Introduction to Cultural Studies

at the University of Washington, allow writers to italicize and underline text or to include hyperlinks to relevant resources in their postings. Web Crossing even lets authors upload an image, which appears beside their postings. Of course, Web Crossing and institutionally developed programs like EPost are not a teacher's only options. Many universities have adopted course management systems such as Blackboard and WebCT, both of which include Web-based discussion components.

Instead of having all students post into one topic area, I divide the class into groups of eight to twelve and ask each student to submit to his or her group's area a 200- to 250-word response to a question selected from a list I've posted. Questions require writers to do one of the tasks listed in Table 17.1.

I also give students the option to identify a key issue not addressed by my questions and to explain why the issue is important to the class's understanding of the text. Students may incorporate insights from lecture, class discussion, critical readings, or their peers' postings into their responses. I require students to post to the board once per week, with postings due the evening before class. While I do not assign

a letter grade to the postings, students receive points for their work on a credit/no credit basis, with credit given to posts that meet the length requirement and demonstrate genuine engagement with the question. I have never had a student whose postings failed to meet the criteria for credit.

As I prepare my classes, I quickly read the postings to identify misunderstandings, areas of consensus and dissent, compelling arguments, or interpretations that raise insightful questions about the primary text or critical responses to that text. The postings provide a snapshot of students' current thinking, one I use to shape class activities. For example, I may begin class by calling on students who took different approaches to the same question and inviting them to summarize their postings. I then ask other class members which reading, if any, persuades them and why. If students tended to offer similar responses to a question, I describe the trends and have the class test their analysis by

Table 17.1

Task	Sample Questions
Analyze thematic or stylistic elements of a given novel or film.	Identify one key motif in <i>Dracula</i> and explain how it shapes the film's meanings.
Apply an argument made in lecture, a student presentation, or a critical text to a novel or film.	In class, we've discussed postmodernism as defined by Geyh, Leebron, and Levy and by McHale. Does "The Airborne Toxic Event" section of Don DeLillo's <i>White Noise</i> engage the ontological questions described by McHale? Does it exhibit the aspects of postmodernism defined by Geyh, Leebron, and Levy? In your answer, you may focus either on McHale or on Geyh, Leebron, and Levy.
Compare two or more course texts.	In our discussions of <i>The Birth of a Nation</i> and <i>Our Dancing Daughters</i> , we've analyzed the figures of the New Woman and the flapper. Does Saunders from <i>Mr. Smith Goes to Washington</i> represent a new female type, or do you see connections between her character and earlier "rebellious female" characters?
Examine a primary text through the lens of a question or issue explored over the term.	Is Shelley Jackson's <i>Patchwork Girl</i> a postmodern novel? Why or why not?

doing a close reading of a specific scene or passage. If students did not respond to particular questions, I focus class discussion on those questions, encouraging students to apply arguments made in their postings to unexplored territory.

My students and I also use the postings to work toward formal essays. I project excerpts from the class's postings and direct students to identify the claims writers have made and discuss how they might extend and support the arguments. Because the essays I assign often have a comparative focus, I ask students to analyze selected postings to determine whether the writer's interpretation of one text might apply to another. In a lecture hall, I make such inquiry a small-group project, giving each group a different posting to discuss and report on to the rest of the class. In a computer lab, I create new posting areas featuring excerpts from previous postings. Students then respond to three of the excerpts and attempt to extend the writer's arguments to another text. Toward the end of class, I give students time to print or save to disk postings they plan to reexamine as they develop their essays.

Electronic postings have reduced my grading time—I give points each week and ask students to respond to one another in class rather than writing brief comments on a weeks' worth of individual journal entries. However, the postings have also had other effects. Although I require students to post and read postings only within their groups, many students read other group's postings and include references to these postings in their own electronic responses or comment on them during class. Because all students must share their analyses via the posting space, they prove more willing to contribute to in-person discussions. The postings have thus allowed more voices to enter the class dialogue. Indeed, students have requested additional posting opportunities because of their desire to continue conversations with peers beyond class time. I now let students complete extra-credit postings in which they respond to their peers' ideas or expand upon discussions initiated in class. The postings have also had an impact on students' essays. As they post, students think in writing and produce texts that others can see, respond to, and incorporate into their own thinking and writing. Consequently, their paper drafts tend to have more clearly articulated ideas than those in the essays I received in courses that did not include the posting assignment. Moreover, students in my classes not only draw on their own postings in essays, but they also quote one another's postings. The act of engaging in frequent public writing has led my students to view their peers as authorities and audience. For this reason alone, I will continue to use electronic postings in my classes.

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18 Internet Grading: Following the Online (Paper) Trail

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At the beginning of every semester teaching composition, I was one of those souls who enjoyed gathering my red pens, tan folders, and green grade book. I kept a folder for class handouts and another for student essays, which I carefully marked up with my red pens, recording all their grades in my grade book. Although I would encourage students to keep all the essays I returned to them, only a handful actually did or could find them when we held conferences. We would hold peer-review workshops by reading aloud essays to each other; we would hold grammar workshops by writing sentences on the board and then referring to grammar books and worksheets. When students submitted revisions, I had to cajole them to submit the originals as well, so I often had no idea whether or not they had paid any attention to my comments. At the end of each semester, I would print and photocopy a collection of the “best” student essays, which I would hurry to distribute to the students before the semester was over and the students scattered. Those, of course, were the old days, B.C. (before computers).

Now that computers have finally reached universities such as mine, where resources are tight, faculty are overworked, and students are stressed simply from daily life, we can all save a lot of ink, paper, and time, and perhaps do the job of teaching writing more effectively, with Internet grading. Internet grading can be defined as the use of the Internet to create and post assignments, submit and collect papers, grade and return papers, and keep records, all on the Internet. Those of us using course-delivery systems such as Blackboard find this to be a simple process, once the procedures are learned and practiced many times. The initial investment in learning this process is more than made up in the time saved while grading, and the convenience and learning outcomes are, as they say, priceless. When done well, this means no papers to collect, carry, copy, grade, or grieve over. For me, this means

no more lost papers, no more wondering whether or not the comments written on earlier essays had any effect on later essays, no more guessing whether a student has progressed from Essay 1 to Essay 6. Internet grading can allow teachers to fully track student progress as well as the efficacy of their own instruction. Plus, it's fast, simple, and more efficient than traditional grading.

Background

Our university is fortunate to have a license to use Blackboard, Version 5.5, an online course-delivery portal, which provides the means to conduct virtually all class activities online. The classes I teach are mostly hybrid or Web-enhanced courses, meeting face to face for all class sessions but taking place in a computer lab at least once each week. The courses I teach are typically English Composition I or II, and the students are often first-generation college students attending this open-admissions, urban HBCU for the first time. Their ages and backgrounds may vary, but they are increasingly entering with more advanced technical skills, meaning that they are now more able to use word processing, e-mail, and attachment features than they were several years ago. I do not advertise my course in any particular way, and the classes typically have from twenty to thirty students each. Most students have access to computers, though these are often public computers in university labs or in their workplaces. Although some are scared at first, most are willing to learn, and at the beginning of each semester I hold a Blackboard orientation and provide them with a flyer containing detailed instructions on how to access Blackboard for course activities.

Methodology

First, I post the assignment in that area of Blackboard. It has been a very long time since I've made a trip to the copy center to duplicate worksheets for my students, and students never ask me any more what they are supposed to do. They know that everything is up on Blackboard. Using Blackboard, I have the option of posting all the assignments for the semester at once, or posting them as they are due. Typically, I post them as they are due so that students may focus on the newest task, often highlighting it in red, and then I leave everything up. I format the due date in bold, although I do allow late submissions. Clarifications or expansions of aspects of the assignment are easy to add when needed, and as the semester progresses students can easily see what the assignments have been and what needs to be done, since all

are posted in one central area of the course. Having the assignment posted also allows me to copy and paste sections of the detailed instructions I provide directly into the student papers when I want to let students know they've omitted significant aspects. Also, I end each assignment with the grading rubric so that students will know specifically what they are to do. My rubrics for a course in English Composition I, for example, although they vary slightly for each assignment, generally consist of five parts, spelling out an easy acronym, TODUM: the existence and depth of the *thesis*, the appropriateness and coherence of the *organization*, the extent and relevance of the *development*, the accuracy of the *usage* (grammar), and the suitability of the *mechanics* (format), adding up to ten points (two for each category) for each essay. I can easily copy and paste the TODUM rubric from the assignment onto each essay that I grade.

I also add useful Web sites to each assignment, although I prefer to have students find Web sites for themselves. Web sites to help them with MLA style, for example, or those related to the theme of the assignment, or links to sites about writing are starting points and a useful list that I can often transfer to other courses or refer to myself. However, students can typically find even better Web resources when given the task, and I request that they post their findings in a discussion board area set up for the assignment.

Once students are working on their papers, I next set up the discussion board forum so that students can post their working drafts and get feedback from their peers, prior to actual submission. Students usually welcome the opportunity to read other papers and ask questions of one another. They can use the grading rubrics to provide one another with sample grades, and they can suggest useful Web sites to help one another do the assignments. Mostly, they can use the discussion board area to simply chat about the assignment and any problems they may have, allowing me insight into what may be causing them problems and giving me an opportunity to clarify murky points.

Using the Blackboard student drop box, students can quickly send me their assignments, when ready. If something is obviously wrong, such as a student's misunderstanding an assignment or omitting a significant portion, I can immediately e-mail him or her with more specific instructions. All the essays are stored in my drop box, where I can peruse them later to see whether students have made any progress over the semester. The essays are also stored in the students' drop boxes, creating quasi-portfolios for them. A submitted essay is never lost (although there has been no reduction in excuses for nonsubmission!), and it is

particularly helpful to have essays this available when I hold conferences with students, which I do face to face, but in front of the computer.

Grading the essay becomes a simple matter of downloading the essay from my drop box in Blackboard onto my computer (left click, "save target as"), where I generally store it into the folder for the class under a file name consisting of the student's last name followed by the number of the assignment, e.g. smith1. However, if I am working on a public computer, I temporarily save the file onto the desktop and delete it when I leave. I generally never delete files from the Blackboard drop box, so there is no danger of losing the essays. Needless to add, I can access these papers wherever I go that has access to the Internet.

Using Microsoft Word, I then click on the "tools" option and select "track changes," then "highlight changes," and then check the box to track changes while editing. As I read the student's paper, I typically insert comments using brackets {} to set off my comments from the paper. Although the "track changes" feature also underlines the comments and places a vertical line in the margin to note the change, I use the brackets so that students cannot simply select "accept changes" for their revisions (one allowed for each essay) and will have to pay attention to the comments. Between the brackets, I identify the usage and mechanical errors I spot, not correcting them, just labeling them, e.g., {subject-verb error}. I can also easily copy and paste lengthy comments (e.g., "Please underline titles of books.") for each error as it occurs. I use the color highlight button to color sections of the text, the subject and the verb, for example, if I think the student may have problems identifying these, or a pronoun and its antecedent. It is possible to consistently color-code corrections—e.g., purple highlight for wordy sections, or green highlight for awkwardness—if this would be more eye-catching for the students. At the end of the paper, I insert the TODUM grading rubric with a summary of the reasons for the values and the grade. I then write detailed comments, sometimes copying and pasting problematic sections of the essay, and including hyperlinks for Web sites that would expand on my comments. A particularly useful tool is the Purdue Online Writing Lab (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu>) where there is a search box that allows the user to insert a topic (e.g., "commas") and find numerous links to pages of information and exercises on the topic.

After grading a set of essays, I create a list of the top ten errors the students have been making, with Web sites (often pages from the Purdue OWL) that could help them to improve. I post this list in a special "grammar workshop" discussion board area, inviting students to comment on whether or not these Web sites are helpful and to search

for other useful sites. This is often an active computer workshop for students who enjoy surfing the Net, and they frequently find sites that I can use for other classes. Another computer activity is to ask students to post problematic sentences on the discussion board area and invite other students to revise them in a grammar-workshop approach. This allows students to see the many options they have when revising and to get feedback on their own suggestions.

A critical next step is to allow the students to revise their papers. The grade is then the average of the original submission and the revision, so that if a student earns a 7 on the original and then revises the paper so that it earns a 9 the grade would become an 8. Grading revisions is particularly easy, especially since it is no longer necessary to remind students to submit the original version along with the revised version, and comparing the two is an easy process by keeping both files open. When students have ignored comments made on the original, these may be copied and pasted, or highlighted, and brought again to their attention, saving me lots of time. I have often copied and pasted the entire rubric complete with my comments from the original to the revision, making only minor modifications where necessary. Generally, although the revised version may not be error-free, there are always fewer errors, and the subsequent new essays that the students write typically also show fewer errors.

I then conclude my comments section with my initials and the date. I rename and save the file adding "gr" to designate "graded" to the end, e.g., smith1gr. Next, I upload it into the drop box, send it to the student, and enter the grade in the grade book. If I want to see how the student has progressed from the previous assignments, I look in my drop box, or in my course folder, where all the papers, graded and ungraded, have been saved. Generally, the process goes quickly, averaging about twenty minutes per paper at the beginning of the semester and ten minutes by the end, which includes the return of the paper to the student. Traditional (paper) grading used to take me about thirty to forty-five minutes per paper at the beginning and twenty minutes by the end, not including the return of the paper, and then once I returned the papers to the students I had no records of my comments or their papers at all.

The final stage is to ask the authors of the "best" papers to post their essays in a special discussion board forum entitled "Best Essays" so that the other students in the class may read them and comment on them, thus giving more incentive for students to revise their papers and more models for them to follow. In the past, this form of "publication"

took many days to prepare, and the students never had the opportunity to comment on one another's work as they do on the discussion board.

Discussion

The advantages of Internet grading are that I have continual access to all the student papers and if I have second thoughts about comments or grades I can make changes without messing them up. Knowing that I can revise my comments makes me more expressive, and I am actually less likely to provide the "cookie-cutter" comments that, I hate to admit, used to afflict me after lengthy hours of grading. Students, of course, appreciate the immediate feedback, and frequently the entire process of submission, feedback, revision, and resubmission takes place in a single afternoon. On a survey I e-mailed to them approximately two weeks after the conclusion of the class, the students reported being highly satisfied with this mode of grading, stating that they did check the Web sites, finding the Purdue OWL particularly helpful, when writing and revising their papers. They also appreciated the opportunity to revise their papers, and noted that they liked the speed with which their papers were graded.

Some of the drawbacks are that I never really know how many papers I have to grade until I go online and enter my drop box, and I must confess that I often go there dreading a big "stack" waiting for me to download. To overcome this, I try to grade papers at the same times each week, usually the night before class, and do a whole load at once, rather than peeking in every so often to see what I'll find. The process moves quickly *en masse*, and the comments I use for one paper are frequently applicable for others, although I try to resist the temptation to copy and paste comments from one paper to another. I do often, however, copy and paste useful Web sites, ultimately adding them to the list kept in the discussion board so that all may benefit. Sometimes the process of posting grades electronically is frustrating, particularly when the Internet connection is slow, and I think that it would be so much easier to simply write a grade in a paper grade book rather than to wait until the spreadsheet screen comes up. I also worry that the Internet connection may be unavailable just when I need it most, or that something may cause it to vanish altogether. As a form of insurance, however, I do print out the electronic grade book at significant points in the semester, notably the midterm and the final, and I keep student files on my hard drive, as well as in the drop box, although, really, the drop box

may be safer. Perhaps the biggest disadvantage, if it is one, is that I find it harder to associate the paper with the person. Although the process of returning papers to students used to give me more opportunities to learn names, which are much harder for me to remember these days (would this be happening anyway?), this longer period of anonymity may perhaps keep my judgments about their writing more objective. The interpersonal connections are now created more through writing than through conversing, providing even more opportunities and incentive to write.

Conclusion

I can't imagine going back to paper, although I do keep a few red pens and folders handy, just in case. At the beginning of the semester there are still a few students who submit papers the traditional way, but they are the ones most eager to catch up with the others. I always schedule at least one class session per week in a computer lab to allow everyone, even those most intimidated by the computer, to learn the necessary skills: word processing, e-mail, and attachments. I give a computer-skills assessment survey at the beginning and end of each semester, and by the end there is always a big rise in self-rated skill level. The class retention level is also high.

Internet grading has become an essential part of teaching for me. Both the students and I have greater access to the assignments, their working drafts, resources to help them, their grades, and one another. Peer review has become far simpler than in the traditional classroom, as has access to supplemental instruction. Revision is easier than ever, and the students have more contact with me, as well as with their peers, than before. Publication is almost instantaneous, and students have student-generated models of good writing with feedback to refer to. Perhaps the biggest advantage for the writing class is that the writing opportunities are richer and more authentic.

My red pens, folders, and grade book are in great condition in their unused state, but I think my students are in even better shape with Internet grading!

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