

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS

**Script for Using Technology to Collect Low-Stakes Writing
(for Workshop Leader)****Set-up and general notes**

- Workshop leader should have some examples of low-stakes writing collected on Wikispaces, Qwriting, Google Docs, and Blackboard.
- Workshop leader should have a computer and screen or SmartBoard.
- This workshop will be more informational than hands-on.

Introductions

5 minutes: Ask participants to state their names and whether they use blogs or wikis in their classes.

Rational for Using Technology with Low-Stakes Writing Assignments

Certain technologies make it easier for educators to view informal writing assignments and encourage collaboration among students. Rather than laboriously leafing through journals or hand-written pages, if students post writing to a wiki or a blog, the instructor can view and read the responses quickly. Furthermore, students can easily read each other's writing. It is good practice to build peer reviews of wiki or blog posts into the course expectations since the writing communities students form can be invaluable.

Example 1: Wikispaces

The wiki platform invites collaboration and is easy to use. <http://www.wikispaces.com> just launched a new platform designed specifically for teachers, and their standard platforms offer an automatic free upgrade as long as the wiki will be used for educational purposes. All students need to do is sign up for a free Wikispaces account and, depending on the level of privacy the instructor desires, either sign up to be a member or email a request. Then everyone can begin editing and posting. Instructors can create projects, assign group members to the projects, and create participant pages where students can post. A nice function is the comment/discussion post feature, which allows the instructor or a student to start a discussion of a particular piece of writing that others can then comment on. Another benefit to the Wiki is that it keeps track of revisions. It is a very flexible and user-friendly platform that teaches practical web skills. Students can be assigned weekly groups, either the same throughout the semester or varying each week, and they are responsible for commenting on each group member's low-stakes assignments.

The workshop leader should show some of the functionality of wikispaces to participants. He or she is welcome to use this Wiki as an example (but customizing one may be better):

<http://firstyeardigital.wikispaces.com/>.

Example 2: Qwriting

Qwriting is a Wordpress blog hosted by Queens College. Qwriting allows for more customization and learning of essential web skills than Wikispaces, but also means a bit more leg-work to get students (and faculty) using it. Basically, the instructor sets up a blog, then decides how it should be organized. Some faculty prefer to add students as editors to the course blog and create a page where students can post (much like a Wiki). Others prefer that students create their own blog on Qwriting, and provide the instructor with a domain name to link to on a “Blog Roll” page. The benefit to adding students as editors is that there is one site where everyone posts. One benefit to asking students to create their own is that the work they compose is theirs. They have ownership over it, they can control the theme (how the blog functions and looks), and can expand upon it in the future or use it as part of a writing portfolio for future endeavors. Students will need to actively use their QC Mail accounts to either set-up a blog or join a course blog (Qwriting is limited to QC students, so will only create accounts for QC email addresses). There are a few steps students need to go through, and inevitably some snafus occur. Generally, however, these get ironed out within the first two weeks and blogs proceed smoothly.

The workshop leader should show some of the functionality of Qwriting to participants. He or she is welcome to use this blog as an example (but customizing one may be better, as student work has been removed in the interest of privacy):

<http://english254.qwriting.qc.cuny.edu/>.

Example 3: Google Docs

Wikispaces and Qwriting afford a certain amount of privacy, especially if students write under pseudonyms, but asking students to sign up for a commercial account creates some privacy concerns. However, a Gmail account can certainly be set-up under a pseudonym. To access Google Docs, students will need a Gmail account. The practical website building experience of Wikis and Blogs is not present in Google Docs, but they can be useful for group work and projects that the class will view. Google Docs does allow group editing, and folders can be created that the entire group can access.

The workshop leader should show some of the functionality of Google Docs to participants. He or she is welcome to use this Doc as an example (but customizing one may be better):

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1G7r8yj-X0KUdd7AOAykwVbHbvWIf7HBajH-whK49w-w/edit?usp=sharing>

Example 4: Blackboard

Of all the learning technologies we have discussed today, Blackboard probably has the least amount of practical, real world functionality. It can be clunky to use on tablets or to view on phones and its extreme user-friendliness discourages student customization and experimentation. The layout and functionality do not encourage collaboration among students about their writing. However, it does have some advantages. Assignments can be created and automatically entered into Grade Center, which makes assessment (especially for graded projects) convenient. SafeAssign in Blackboard is an automatic plagiarism database that some instructors find helpful. There is little to no set-up for instructors required, and no legwork for students (they all automatically have access to the course Blackboard site).

The workshop leader should show some of the functionality of Blackboard to participants using a current course site that he or she has access to.

Post-Mortem/Wrap-up

Discussion: In the remaining time, the workshop leader should ask participants for questions or comments on using technology to collect low-stakes writing. It might be good to highlight privacy concerns, technological competency, barriers to student engagement via technology and brainstorm ways to overcome those barriers.