*Review*

# Online Writing Instruction Principles and Practices: Now Is the Future

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Hewett, Beth L., and Kevin Eric DePew, eds. *Foundational Practices of Online Writing Instruction*. Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse and Parlor P, 2015. Print. 601 pages.

When the CCCC Committee for Effective Practices in Online Writing Instruction (OWI) released *A Position Statement of Principles and Example Effective Practices for Online Writing Instruction*, I was one of many in the CCCC 2013 standing room only session who desperately needed support from the national committee to inform discussions of pedagogical and technological resources; training and preparation for students and online writing instruction teachers; course caps; and relevance of OWI as a part of our research agendas at our institutions.

Formally released at the 2015 CCCC, *Foundational Practices of Online Writing Instruction* is another addition to the Perspectives on Writing Series through the WAC Clearinghouse and Parlor Press under the editorship of Susan H. McLeod. This collection is meant to ground the discussion in the committee's charge and the subsequent research the CCCC Committee for Effective Practices in OWI (referred to in both this collection and this review as the CCCC OWI Committee) to develop a consistent definition of online writing instruction (OWI) and the aforementioned position statement, whose principles drive each chapter. Each contributor to this collection has expertise in OWI and has contributed to or participated in the work of the CCCC OWI Committee. In their introduction, editors Beth L. Hewitt and Kevin Eric DePew note that "members are a diverse group of OWI educators and scholars: those who work for traditional and for-profit two- and four-year postsecondary institutions; specialists

in multilingual writers, disabilities-based OWI, and other learning needs/ preferences; and online tutors and administrators" (5). The diversity of this group lends credibility and applicability for WPAs and faculty to discuss these issues with their varied institutional stakeholders.

This diverse group invites novice and veteran WPAs and OWI teachers into the important discussion by creating a common vocabulary and thorough explanations of the OWI Principles to engage with colleagues, WPAs, and administrators. Even with the breadth of the 600+ pages of this collection, by integrating the OWI principles and the chapters (even providing a cross-referencing chart of the principles to the corresponding chapter in the introduction), the collection shows cohesion and commitment to the mission of the CCCC OWI Committee and OWI Principle 1 that addresses accessibility and inclusivity.

The collection is broken down into five parts. Each section summarizes and provides key words to introduce each chapter. Notably, WPAs, specifically, are interlaced into many, if not all, of the discussions from this collection, which is important because they may be experiencing or will soon be confronted with issues of structuring opportunities to learn and develop new digital literacies, of the unification of efforts, and of understanding new learning structures and digital venues.

Introduction and Part I: An OWI Primer

The Introduction and the OWI Primer section cover much of the background and history of the CCCC OWI Committee and lay out the concerns and considerations for those developing a vision of coursework and programs online. The titles are indicative of the information found within each chapter. If readers are new to the OWI Principles or the CCCC OWI Committee and their work, Beth L. Hewitt (chapter one) fully develops each of the principles with a rational and in-depth discussion. Within the rationale and discussion, the differences and nuances of each principle are provided. Jason Snart (chapter two) covers the idea of hybrid or fully online OWI, while coverage of asynchronous and synchronous modalities is discussed in Connie Snyder Mick and Geoffrey Middlebrook's chapter (chapter three).

While many institutions may decide or implement the types of learning environments, both chapters two and three lend themselves to assisting WPAs or OWI teachers in understanding how to navigate, if not make, appropriate research-based decisions for OWI in terms of instructional goals, outcomes, and delivery for their programs. Specifically, Mick and Middlebrook advise WPAs to have discussions prioritized by OWI teacher

experiences and encouragement of online classrooms spaces that support "online interconnectedness" rather than "simply technological feasibility," which is how an institution may make the decision (136). The authors then present a chart summarizing the strengths and challenges of asynchronous and synchronous modalities against three dimensions (inclusivity and accessibility; technical viability and IT support; and pedagogical rationale permanence, pace, scale, and social impact).

Part II: OWI Pedagogy and Administrative Decisions

This section deals with OWI in the fully online course, in the online writing lab, in considering course logistics, and in the involvement of contingent labor, all issues of particular interest to WPAs. In chapter four, Scott Warnock—known for the *Teaching Writing Online: How and Why*—focuses specifically on OWI Principles 2–6 framed around pedagogy for the online writing course (OWC), like responding to student writing and using audio/visual technologies. Some of the information provided by Warnock supports the themes of Snart, Mick, and Middlebrook from Part 1. Particularly, Warnock addresses the importance yet lack of OWI training for WPAs and teachers (referring to Principle 7 and foreshadowing chapter eleven). He also notes that assessment and teacher evaluation are weak points in OWI, addressing these as potential areas for future research. Following the OWC discussion, Diane Martinez and Leslie Olsen (chapter five) overview the various incarnations of Online Writing Labs (OWLs). They discuss how OWLs have ranged from online PDFs to interactive online components. Martinez and Olsen then discuss strategies, challenges, and recommendations for both synchronous and asynchronous tutoring and training that incorporate accessibility and inclusivity.

In chapter six "Administrative Decisions for OWI," Deborah Minter discusses how the WPA in an OWI capacity needs to consider how class size, student preparation, and advocating for resources affect access and inclusivity. WPAs who are toggling responsibilities in face-to-face (f2f) writing instruction and OWI will also need to pay attention to what Griffin and Minter (2013) term the *literacy load*, which is the amount of reading and writing required of students in a course for OWC, as a concern when structuring these opportunities to learn and develop OWC outcomes (153).

Finishing out the section, Mahli Mechenbier (chapter seven) addresses the needs of contingent faculty in OWI. Acknowledging the low pay and lack of training for OWC, Mechenbier makes a few recommendations, like making sure that OWI teachers are receiving the appropriate technological and pedagogical training *prior* (emphasis added) to receiving on OWC

assignment, perhaps instituting a mentoring program to encourage professional development in OWI and hiring the best fit for the OWC. These are issues that also materialize within the f2f sections but are complicated by the OWC with the addition of new learning and digital structures as well as pedagogical differences that are involved with OWI.

Part III: Practicing Inclusivity in OWI

While accessibility and inclusivity are incorporated into each chapter throughout the collection, this particular section introduces three underrepresented groups of OWI: students with physical and learning disabilities, multilingual students, and nontraditional students (which includes working class students; older adult students; remotely rural students; urban students; military learners, including both veteran and active duty; and incarcerated students).

Sushil K. Oswal (chapter eight), Susan K. Miller-Cochran (chapter nine), and Michael W. Gos (chapter ten) all admit that the foci of their three chapters require more OWI research. In his chapter, Sushil K. Oswal argues that understanding the Position Statement of Principles "will [alone] not make our OWCs accessible" (259). Upon reading part three, I agree with Oswal's statement. Making our OWCs accessible will certainly necessitate more scholarly research into the needs of these various student populations. It will also require WPAs and OWI teachers advocating at the institutional level on behalf of students and other OWI teachers to acquire the needed resources (which was a theme common among many chapters in this collection) for providing effective learning spaces, often a daunting task for f2f writing courses.

As a reader, I was struck by how each of these chapters about these individual student/writer populations could have been, and should have been, a collection on its own to really do the students/writers' and authors' ideas justice. Unlike other chapters within the collection, this particular section presents discussions that OWI teachers and institutions grapple with the most due to the lack of discipline-specific research, lack of resources, and institutional stigmatization. Even though I may not have as many answers or successful examples and evidence of initiatives after reading these three chapters, I was provided with recommendations and the beginnings of discussions that will certainly foster further investigation and exploration at my institution in terms of need and resources. This section demonstrates the large gap in research for us to have deeper conversations for the "fundamental attitudinal shift" that Oswal calls for in his chapter (259).

## Part IV: Faculty and Student Preparation in OWI

For those who have already been in the trenches of OWI, this section provides readers, particular WPAs, with some concrete examples of activities to implement in their OWI training programs. In "Faculty Preparation for OWI," Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch (chapter eleven), offers a 4-M Training Approach: migration, model, modality and media, and morale, along with several examples of practical activities to use during training to facilitate 4-M. To continue on the preparedness of faculty in OWI, in chapter twelve, Rich Rice argues that current models of professional development have not met the expectations of the "newness of OWI as a disciplinary approach" (389); therefore, he offers a few different software development models of professionalization (code and fix, predictive updating and assessment, agile design) to the OWI effective principles. He asserts that professional development needed to adapt is time intensive and focuses on the individual (407–08).

In "Preparing Students for OWI," Lisa Meloncon and Heidi Harris (chapter thirteen) utilize CCCC OWI Committee survey data to recommend institutional level initiatives (that also hark back to the need for teacher training and resources) and instructor level actions (that also address the concerns of the underrepresented student populations acknowledged in Part 3). As is the case with Breuch, Meloncon and Harris also provide specific, effective, and reasonable activities that can be considered and implemented by the reader. Bringing together preparation for teachers and students, Kevin Eric DePew (chapter fourteen) calls for teachers to become "digital rhetoricians" (457) and for students to become "practitioners of digital rhetoric" (459), compos[ers] of "linguistic and multimodal texts," and aware of how "the technology [used in OWI] influences the text they want to compose" (461).

Taken alone, DePew's chapter may seem overwhelming; however, when considering the NCTE Definition of 21st Century Literacies, the NCTE Position Statement on Multimodal Literacies, digital rhetoric and pedagogy scholarship by Cynthia L. Selfe, among many others, or even chapters fifteen and sixteen in this collection, DePew is drawing a deeper connection between OWI and existing research in the field of Composition and Rhetoric.

## Part V: New Directions in OWI

Expanding DePew's call for the OWC to become of place for rhetorical preparation, the reader is provided with Kristine L. Blair's chapter (chapter fifteen) about multimodality and Rochelle Rodrigo's chapter (chapter sixteen) on mobile devices. In "Teaching Multimodal Assignments

in OWI Contexts," Blair acknowledges the challenges and obstacles (i.e., faculty engagement, training, LMS limitations) and offers possibilities of how the combination of OWI and multimodality can facilitate 21st century students' critical thinking skills and promote navigation through the various reading and composing processes required of them now. Blair then offers and recommends various assignments, approaches, and assessments that can be implemented in the multimodal OWC. In "OWI on the Go," Rochelle Rodrigo explores the importance of mobile devices to our students and lack of discipline-specific research into how students are completing work and interacting in OWCs using their mobile devices. She notes several problems currently that WPAs should be aware of and consider, all of which I have placed in question form below:

- How, or do, LMS apps/course design equal workable spaces with use of mobile devices?
- How are students who are using primarily mobile devices completing high stakes assignments, such as research essays?
- How can LMS apps and course design provide user friendly work spaces with use of mobile devices?

Rodrigo discusses each of the aforementioned situations and makes recommendations for the inclusion of mobile pedagogy, professional development, and institutional support as considerations to OWI preparation and OWC outcomes, making an argument for these as literacy opportunities and new learning spaces.

Following the two chapters by Blair and Rodrigo, Christa Ehmann and Beth L. Hewett's chapter (chapter seventeen), "OWI Research Considerations," continues in the "new directions" vein, posing concerns and needs from the earlier chapters and presenting additional questions and gaps in the scholarship by suggesting OWI avenues for further research. Concluding the collection, Beth L. Hewett and Scott Warnock in their chapter (chapter eighteen) entitled, "The Future of OWI," state that "The future of OWI is not down the road. It is *now*" (549; emphasis original). This sense of immediacy is due to the nature of the publication process and that technology continues to evolve at a rate that supersedes the rate it enters the academe. They conclude the chapter, and the collection, with a discussion of what "good OWI" means (providing seven points and discussion) and argue how OWI ultimately assists the field of composition "to a new place," (561) within the field's history, scholarship, and alignment with digital scholarship. By grounding the entire collection in access and inclusivity, the authors and editors are showing the potential of these digital venues and

genres to increase students' literacies, thereby opening up opportunities for critical investigation.

This collection offers what the Peterson and Savenye's special issue of *Computers and Composition Distance Education: Promises and Perils of Teaching and Learning Online* did for me over a decade ago, but stronger and more entrenched in discipline-specific research: a presence of an online community of support, thoughtful research, and validation of issues that are ongoing at my institution. The authors and editors of this collection recognize "that developing an increasingly critical perspective on technological literacy and technology issues is a responsibility of our profession," especially in online learning (Selfe 151).

Yet, as celebrated by many of the authors, OWI teachers are first teachers of writing, and as Warnock notes in his chapter, OWI principles do not represent an out-of-the-box recipe for teaching composition online (177), which is appropriate because the content of this collection does not provide a specific how-to but offers suggestions, considerations, and examples. *Foundational* is an appropriate word in this collection's title because of the breadth of topics covered and the range of effective principles in action. By providing questions throughout and by highlighting some of the potentials of OWI—i.e., more access/inclusiveness, training, assessment, MOOCs/MOOEEs, literacy development, multimodality, mobile learning—the authors provide an underpinning for future research and encourage further implementation the CCCC OWI principles.

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