

ACADEMIC WRITING IN A DIGITAL SETTING

Gulieva Elnara Fakhretdinovna

*senior teacher of English at the chair of Lexicology and Stylistics of English,
Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages, Uzbekistan*

Abstract. Online education of writing encompasses a variety of activities, including email, websites, and synchronous and asynchronous conferencing. Electronic mail can be used to convey student texts to the professor or peer readers, host student journals, and sustain contact between lecturers and students as well as among students on a course. Websites associated with writing centers provide 24/7 access to writing manuals, style manuals, training materials, and occasionally, writing professionals' criticism. Conferencing systems, which let students submit their writings publicly and have public discussions with other students and the course speaker, are the most participatory kind of electronic communication.

Аннотация. Онлайн-обучение письму охватывает целый ряд мероприятий, от электронной почты на веб-сайты для синхронных и асинхронных конференций. Электронная почта может использоваться для ведения общения между преподавателями и студентами, а также между студентами на курсе, как место для студенческих журналов и как средство передачи студенческих текстов лектору или однокурсникам. Веб-сайты, связанные с письмом, предлагают круглосуточный доступ к руководствам по написанию, руководствам по стилю, материалам курса, а в некоторых случаях и отзывы специалистов по написанию. Системы конференцсвязи, которые позволяют студентам публично представлять свои работы и вести публичные обсуждения с другими студентами и докладчиком курса, являются наиболее активным видом электронного общения.

Key words: conferencing software, electronic conferencing, applications of technology, word processing, email, course websites, online writing labs, computer conferences, synchronous and asynchronous learning methods

Ключевые слова: программное обеспечение для конференций, электронные конференции, приложения технологий, обработка текстов, электронная почта, веб-сайты курсов, онлайн-лаборатории письма и компьютерные конференции, синхронные и асинхронные методы обучения

There is no denying that the digital era has had an impact on both schooling and daily life in general. The quick advancement of information and communication technology (ICT), the abundance of Web-based resources available to educational institutions, and the steadily rising technical proficiency of students are all examples of how this is altering how we teach and learn (Arna Peretz, 2005). According to Warschauer (2004), the changes in language teaching are most obvious in written communication, where ICT availability and proliferation have altered both native and

nonnative writers' reasons for writing, the written genres they use, as well as the characteristics of their audiences and authors. In essence, computer-mediated communication (CMC) has changed the genres we write in, how we share and receive information, how we educate and learn, and more (Barker 2002; Warschauer 2002; Warschauer 2004). According to Corich, Kinshuk, and Hunt (2004), the recognition of possible uses of CMC for educational purposes has been facilitated by the adaptability of e-learning and the rise of WEB enabled learning management systems. They concentrate their attention on the educational benefits of CMC technologies in general and of online discussion forums in particular, claiming that the latter foster student cooperation on assignments, increase communication among course participants, and develop higher-order thinking abilities (Corich, Kinshuk, and Hunt 2004).

Technology use as a teaching and learning tool is becoming more and more mandatory. The use of technology to help students take control of their academic writing is discussed in this article. Applications might be straightforward (like text processing) or complicated (such as running an entire course online using conferencing software).

Our goals in this article are to:

- give a general overview of the types of technology that can be used to improve student writing;
- look at how Internet-based resources can improve students' writing;
- look at how electronic conferencing can improve student writing;

The contribution of electronic conferencing to the writing process has a facilitative impact allowing for the quick flow of ideas, information, and resources amongst students as well as interactions between students from other campuses, as well as from various nations and cultures. Most likely, teachers and students are already extremely familiar with several applications of technology, such as word processing and email.

With word processing, you may revise your writing in great detail, and kids could find the grammar, spelling, and word count features helpful. However, students' working styles differ greatly. Some may utilize word processing solely for their final draft after working and revising on paper, while others may write straight on the computer screen. It may be advantageous to require pupils to work on a computer so they do not have to retype their work if you allow or ask them to alter written work in response to comments from you or their peers.

Students can quickly communicate with one another, professors, and exchange materials and ideas using electronic mail. At the moment, email is used for at least four different purposes: private communication, messaging conferencing systems, delivering homework to professors, and sending and receiving messages on the Internet.

Due to the fact that more and more students use email for both personal and academic communication, they may write more extensively and freely while utilizing electronic media. When lecturers start email correspondence with students, they may need to establish certain ground rules since some will send many emails and want a prompt response. Computing departments must be informed if students require unique typefaces or mathematical characters for their writing in order to determine how this might be handled.

So, what writing tools may be found online or set up there?

There are several methods to employ Internet-based materials, and there is a wide range of assistance available for students' authors online, such as course websites, online writing labs, and computer conferences.

Today, a lot of schools post information about their study plans and specific course details online. Due to their simplicity of updating, this reduces time and photocopying expenses. In addition to a writing style guide, advice on suitable academic writing for a course or topic area, sample model essays, and connections to online study resources or journals, some lecturers also include bibliographies, reading lists, and assignment summaries. Additionally, course websites can be designed to enable students to publish versions of their work for others to view and comment on being aware in advance whether the teacher and students have expertise in building and utilizing academic websites.

A conference is a collection of interconnected discussion forums, or "rooms" open to a specific audience and mediated via a computer conferencing system. Any higher educational establishment should have a core conferencing system with sub-conferences for each faculty or academic program, and each of those sub-conferences has further sub-conferences for specific courses. Other places on the system may be designated for people who are interested in a particular academic subject or for more casual conversation amongst students (with little professor participation).

Electronic conferencing can be utilized in many academic fields to replicate the in-person setting of the conventional organized tutorial or seminar. To help students productively exchange, analyze, and synthesize ideas, theories, and research results, the electronic conference is employed as a virtual setting. Either academic writing itself or the transmission of discipline information might be the goal of an electronic conference.

Computer conferencing may be used in one of two ways: synchronous communication, in which all of the students are online at once for a lesson, or asynchronous communication, in which they log on whenever it's convenient and read and answer to messages that have already been posted. As an example, many classes combine synchronous and asynchronous learning methods, conferences are always open for discussion, and some assignments may be spread out over a certain period of

time. An organized tutorial may be held on specific days, or an academic authority from another university may be asked to deliver a presentation and take questions online.

A conference's success depends on its layout and how it is presented to students. Salmon (2000) created a five-stage methodology for organizing student conferences and considering pertinent problems. If the student group is geographically distant, it may be necessary to introduce internet conferencing to students in a delicate manner.

Online writing laboratories provide a variety of services for writers and lecturers, including the ability for students to email writing specialists, the presence of conferencing systems in the majority, and access to writing resources on either the institution's website or through links to other websites. These writing materials may frequently be downloaded (moved on your personal computer) and utilized with students directly, or they can be customized for your unique needs. OWLs also offer in-depth instructions on how to write, as well as examples of academic and other writing styles as well as instructions on grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

On the internet, there are instructions for drafting emails and acceptable conduct (netiquette). These examples are helpful for authors who lack confidence or experience, as well as for students who are learning English as a second language and may need to get familiar with new academic practices. Students and instructors who are enrolled at the host university are only permitted access to certain portions of an OWL (C. Coffin et al. (2003))

Figure 1 explains the distinction between passive and active voice usage to students covering everything from essay format to grammar in relation to student writing.

<p>Using the active voice</p> <p>The bulk of your sentences should be written in active voice rather than passive in the majority of non-scientific writing settings. Even in scientific writing, using the passive voice excessively or in lengthy, complex phrases might make readers uninterested or confused. The active voice tends to be crisper and more direct than the passive voice, however, this isn't always the case.</p>	
<p>Passive Voice Sentences</p> <p>This historical ensemble <i>is visited</i> by millions of tourists every year.</p> <p>That room <i>was not slept in</i>.</p>	<p>Active Voice Sentences</p> <p>Millions of tourists <i>visit</i> this historical ensemble every year.</p> <p>Nobody <i>slept</i> in that room.</p>

Students have been instructed by the teacher to complete their home assignment.	Teacher <i>has instructed</i> her students to complete their home assignment.
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Assessing online information

Search engines on the internet may be used to find subject-specific resources like online journal articles on academic subjects and a multitude of other resources helpful to instructors and students looking for essay ideas (like encyclopedias and discussion forums).

The useful guides on utilizing the Internet for research can be found at <http://www.erin.utoronto.ca/w3lib/pub/evaluate/webevalu.htm>. Online tutorials may be used by Internet newbies to learn how to discover information efficiently. For an example, see the University of California at Berkeley's Teaching Library at <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/Guides/Internet/FindInfo.html>.

Students must learn to evaluate the material they obtain online, asking questions like: where did it come from, what status does it have, who is the author, and why did he/she write it?

C. Coffin et al. (2003) suggest the following figure for evaluating websites.

Figure 2. Evaluating websites

Checklist for evaluating websites

Authority

- *Who/what organisation* is responsible for this site?

Look for a header or footer that indicates organizational affiliation.

Look for a link to the home page of the website where the document lives.

- Can you find *author’s qualifications on the subject*?

Look for ‘About the author/About us’ links on the page.

- Can you *verify information* (another source, address, phone number in addition to email address)?

Look at domain of the URL.⁷ Example: .gov in the URL means it’s a government site.

Look for name, address, phone number in addition to email address.

Look in another source, e.g. phone book, encyclopedia, or reference book.

Purpose

- What is the *purpose* of the page? *To inform? Persuade? Sell? Entertain?*

Look for ‘About us/Mission/Purpose’ links on the page itself.

Go to the home page of the site (use a link if possible, or back up in the URL) and look for ‘About us/Mission/Purpose’ links there.

- Any potential for *bias, especially if site is trying to provide information as well as sell something*?

Look at content to see if it is just an ‘infomercial’.

Are ads *distinct from informational content*?

Students may master the art of incorporating material from the Internet into their writing by being provided with some instruction and practice utilizing them to improve their comprehension and management of academic writing.

According to C. Coffin et al. (2003), electronic conferencing necessitates instructors and students using the written word as the primary means of communication rather than speaking, unlike face-to-face tutorials and seminars. This type of written discussion may not be as formal as other academic writing styles, but it is still an essential tool for learning to communicate abstract concepts and share opinions on subject-specific information. Due to this fact, it is important to think about the nature of these interactions, their purpose, and how they compare to more conventional, independently created academic text kinds.

In electronic conferencing, writing is employed differently than in face-to-face settings depending on the goal, subject, and relationship of the parties involved. For instance, discussions in virtual cafés, coffee shops, and other informal sub-conferences, where the relationship between peers is typically equal, are more likely than more formal organized conferences to replicate the spoken styles of face-to-face communication. There are frequently fewer complete sentences, less emphasis on punctuation, and a high tolerance for typographical and spelling errors as a result of this informality.

The levels of formality and informality in writing also change depending on where in the teaching and learning process you are. For instance, professors usually spend time educating students on the nature of electronic conferencing during the introduction phases of organized electronic conferencing. At this time, creating a feeling of community inside a virtual environment is another typical goal.

Figure 3 (C. Coffin, M. J. Curry, et al. (2003)) presents some typical methods for creating a feeling of community, following remarks on the implications for writing style.

Figure 3. Strategies for creating an online community

Strategies for creating an online community

- Lecturers and students write a short introductory message covering work, leisure activities, or academic interests.

- Students are divided into pairs or small groups and interview each other (using email or sub-conferences) to find out each other’s hopes and fears about the course and/or the role of electronic conferencing.

- Lecturers send a message suggesting a set of simple ground rules for developing and maintaining manageable and effective online communication.

Each student has to agree or disagree with the message and suggest any additional ground rules that they think would contribute to constructive interaction, e.g. acknowledging previous contributions before adding their own messages or using threads to develop a particular line of thought.

- Lecturers solicit ground rules from students rather than proposing them.

- Lecturers use ground rules to make explicit protocols and conventions of electronic conferencing as a means of highlighting the rather different purposes and styles of online writing compared to more formal writing tasks.
- Lecturers provide models of more and less formal writing from electronic conferencing and ask students to compare the register of these forms of writing with target text types (such as a case study or argument essay) in their discipline area.

The guidelines in Figure 3 might be distributed to students as a handout or by email, and they could be asked which ones would promote more fruitful interaction and learning in their unique situation starting their conversations using the ICR program and making their involvement in online discussion more meaningful and pertinent to them. Finally, a talkative, approachable tone at the beginning of a conference is more likely to persuade students to feel like they are a member of a social group rather than merely an academic one. Students are, therefore, more inclined to offer spontaneous comments not requiring much time and analysis and thinking than do knowledge exchanges that are more closely tied to academics.

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