

# Writing the Wrongs in an Online First-Year Composition Course

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## Abstract

In preparation for the 2020 fall semester, the Morris College administration mandated all faculty to redesign their on-ground courses, make the courses be completely online, and increase student engagement. Although students faced many inequities, I have gleaned some positive things while teaching online classes. The information that I have learned in the High-Impact Online Teaching and Learning Practices (HIOTLP) course taught during the summer of 2020 has made me reflect on best practices in course redesign, all the wrongs I have made in my online writing courses during the 2020 fall semester, and the ways in which I have transformed my teaching to address emerging new modalities.

## Course Information: ENG 103 Fundamentals of Composition

### Narrative

Despite the speculation that an online program was occurring in the foreseeable future at Morris College, there were no online courses taught at this institution before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, students at the college were acclimated to being enrolled in only on-ground courses with a great deal of interaction with their instructors during the class sessions, but I speculate that there was not as much interaction with their instructors in the Learning Management System (LMS) called, Jenzabar. For several years, I had prided myself on engaging my students in the LMS by posting a welcome letter on the Landing Page, adding the course syllabus and other handouts, posting tips on succeeding in the course on the Landing Page, administering a couple of online quizzes, and keeping an up-to-date gradebook. This was the extent of what I featured on my LMS when I taught on-ground courses. Admittedly, what I had previously thought was excellent preparation, I now realize was sorely lacking when there became a mandate to teach synchronous online courses.

In preparation for the fall 2020 semester, all faculty were mandated by the Morris College administration to redesign their on-ground courses and make the courses be completely online in efforts to address the needs of students remotely. Although there were many inequities in my online classes, I have gleaned some positive things while teaching online classes such as I am more aware of my students' struggles and I relate to them by placing

myself in their positions (Fox et al., 2020). I have a greater appreciation for all that my students bring with them when they register for my courses. Darby (2020) argued that instructors should look for things that they have in common with their students. My students and I have many things in common such as many of my students are first-generation college students and I am a first-generation college graduate. I am improving my problem-solving skills because so many mishaps occurred with technology during the 2020 fall semester (several days of inclement weather, several missing and/or broken laptops, and two moments where Zoom crashed) that I had to be on guard and be ready at a moment's notice and expect the unexpected. I am grateful that the information that I have learned in the High-Impact Online Teaching and Learning Practices (HIOTLP) course taught during the summer of 2020 has made me reflect on best practices, all the wrongs I have made in my online writing course this past fall, and the ways in which I have transformed my teaching to address emerging new modalities.

### **Student Engagement Using Collaboration Forums**

I have used the Collaboration Forums to connect with my students each week in different ways and make the learning student centered (Baker, 2011; Shipp, 2020). I devised insightful questions using quotes from famous writers and allowed students to talk about themselves using different modalities such as posting paragraphs, audio, or video recordings in the Forums. Each week, I asked questions to utilize the Backward Design Model due to time restrictions (O'Keefe et al., 2020). But I did not stop there; each week, I posted my own response in writing or in video or audio recordings so that students could see my vulnerable side and so that they could view me modeling making a response to the Quote of the Week.

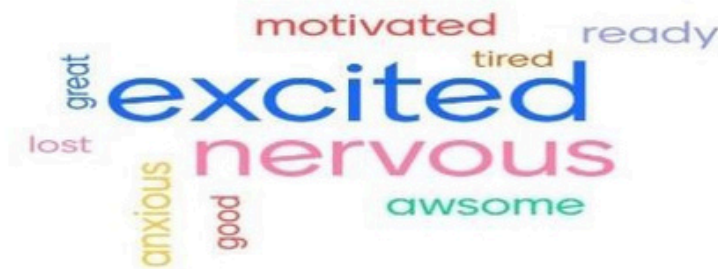
During the middle of the semester, I polled students by asking for their opinions about the best things about the course. Students overwhelmingly stated that the Collaboration Forums was therapeutic for them. Students looked forward to the Quote of the Week as well as questions that I would pose each week in the Collaboration Forums.

### **Student Engagement Using Mentimeter**

During the first week of school in my ENG 103 Fundamentals of Composition course, I used an online engagement tool called, Mentimeter to gauge how students were feeling during the first day of class. Using Mentimeter allowed me to engage with students in a unique way, and I inquired further about what my students were expressing. I admitted to students that I, too, felt some of these same feelings during the first day of school and their feelings were validated.

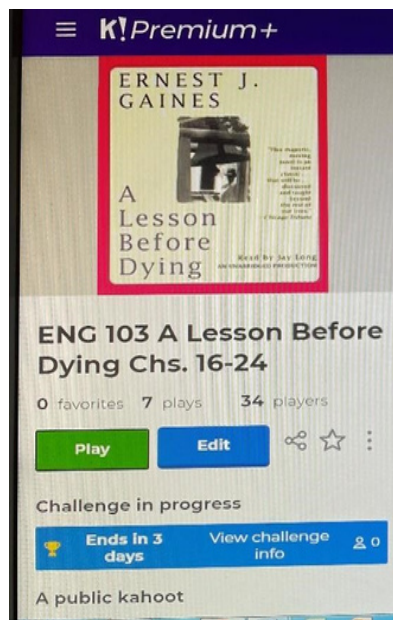
List three words that describe how you feel on the first day of school.

Mentimeter



## Student Engagement Using Kahoot

Although I have had much success with using Kahoot in my Developmental English courses, I had never used Kahoot in ENG 103 Fundamentals of Composition. To make Kahoot more engaging, I paid for an upgrade so that I could use pictures and have a variety of music to make my multiple choice and true/false questions more interesting and intriguing. I utilize Kahoot as a study guide and review game when introducing and teaching the class novel, *A Lesson Before Dying* by Ernest J. Gaines. Students can earn extra credit when they participate and earn points in the review game. Students love the challenge, which increases cooperation in the class and helps prepare them for upcoming quizzes and examinations. Although he did not specifically mention Kahoot, Markowitz (2020) asserts that administering practice tests a week before the assessment will allow students to see what the assessment will be like prior to that time. I noticed that after students participated in the Kahoot practice quizzes, a week later, their scores on quizzes increased nearly 20 percent.



## Student Engagement Using Online Examinations and Quizzes

According to Markowitz (2020), giving exams or quizzes during the class session can cut down on cheating. Although I attempted several times to administer my exams and quizzes during our online class meeting times, some of my students' work schedules prohibited them from being engaged in the online exams and quizzes during the online class sessions. I devised questions and then I pooled those questions in an algorithm on the LMS so that it would be more difficult for students to cheat during the administration of online quizzes and examinations (Markowitz, 2020).

The information that I have learned in the High-Impact Online Teaching and Learning Practices (HIOTLP) course taught during the summer of 2020 has made me reflect on best practices, all the wrongs I have made in my online writing course during the 2020 fall semester and the ways in which I have transformed my teaching to address emerging new modalities. I vow to "write" my wrongs by reflecting in my journal each semester, utilizing my reflections to improve my online courses, and increasing my engagement with my students so that they can continue to excel. After reflecting on my experiences teaching several online writing courses during the Covid-19 pandemic, I am convinced that all students can learn when they have equity, encouragement, and engagement in their online courses.



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