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Teaching Writing Online. How & Why.

Posted on November 1, 2009 by Editor

Review by Jeffrey Barlow


Scott Warnock’s *Teaching Writing Online* is simply an excellent book and should be read by anyone who teaches writing, whether face-to-face or online. It will be particularly useful to those who are contemplating teaching writing online, whether within a fully electronic environment or in a hybrid or blended classroom incorporating both face-to-face and synchronous or asynchronous environments.

Many teachers might believe that the pedagogical mysteries of learning to write well, and to teach others to write well, simply cannot be performed in an impersonal electronic environment. Warnock argues persuasively that not only is this incorrect, but that writing often can be taught better online than in conventional teaching environments.

The book, while intended for an audience of writing teachers, is also very useful for anyone who works with written materials at all. While a historian, I myself remain a teacher and inescapably work with student writing. While the book is not really intended to improve everybody’s writing, it certainly could improve writing in the unfamiliar environment of the World Wide Web.

Warnock is very well qualified to make these arguments. He has directed Drexel University’s Freshman Writing Program for several years. Drexel has long had one of the most extensive distance learning programs, including degree programs, of any university [1]. Warnock was responsible for taking the residential freshman writing course online and has rich experience in working with a variety of teachers and teaching styles.

This is a very dense book for its size (235 pages) and not meant to be read sequentially, but rather for the reader to select those chapters of particular interest to him or her. There are, of course, some key points, which are repeated throughout. Probably the central one is that the online instructor must deliberately create an online personality, which should be founded in one’s native personality, but should be shaped for the electronic environment. As odd as this advice
might seem, Warnock repeatedly makes its importance relevant to the teaching tasks he discusses.

The work also embodies the author’s key beliefs in that it is written very much as though the audience is one of the teachers with whom he has worked in the past. For those actually desiring interaction with Warnock, he has had an extensive blog on the subject of online writing available since fall, 2005 [2].

In addition to hundreds of very practical tips, Warnock also shows a very strong understanding of the literature of the field of teaching writing, and especially of teaching it online. The bibliography of nearly two hundred entries has familiar canonical works in it such as the very well received *Writing With Power* of Peter Elbow and, in addition, the writings of those who, like Warnock, are heavily engaged in the practice and the theory of teaching electronically. It is hard to imagine the teacher who might find this work inadequately stimulating or too general, but the references could lead such committed souls down any number of highly specialized paths.

The work is also adapted to any conceivable electronic environment. Whether an institution provides (or requires) a full Coursework Management System (CMS) such as “Blackboard”, or the instructor is largely on his or her own with off-the-shelf or on-the-web applications, Warnock has useful advice. His preference seems to be for a relatively lean electronic environment comprised of email and a bulletin board/message board. He believes in using a blended or hybrid classroom when possible. He also provides, however, useful introductions to a variety of CMS and even to emerging technologies such as on-line interactive video.

Many current teachers naturally want to know what all the fuss is about; why should I change my approach, particularly change it so dramatically as to move from my familiar classroom to the unfamiliar, somewhat challenging if not downright eerie electronic environment? How will I keep my students from cheating? How often should I respond to them? Am I going to wind up working 24-7 like many of those who send me email at 2 a.m. seem to? Must I be their “buddy”? I don’t know how to do all that! Or why I should, either!

There are, fortunately, a wide variety of appropriate responses to such questions—one of the reasons why Warnock continually cautions us to purposively adapt our personalities to an on-line teaching environment—and they are all covered in this work.

There has always been something of a false dichotomy between reading and writing in the classic sense—which for centuries has meant that the essential medium would be some form of paper—and in digital environments. The move to digital materials has caused a great deal of anxiety because of that assumed dichotomy: paper or bytes? The reality is, however, that there is much more in common to reading and writing on paper and online than many choose to believe.

This is not to minimize real issues: there is a digital divide; there are issues of authority and
legitimacy in online materials, etc., etc. But at the last, readers and writers have switched media many times over the millennia, and the essential acts of inscribing one’s words—writing—before an audience of readers remains essentially the same. Scott Warnock’s *Teaching Writing Online* is a wonderful introduction to new possibilities and new environments.

**Endnotes**


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16 THOUGHTS ON “TEACHING WRITING ONLINE. HOW & WHY.”

**best carry on luggage**

on February 3, 2014 at 4:54 AM said:

Hello There. I discovered your weblog the use of msn.

This is an extremely well written article. I will make sure to bookmark it and return to learn more of your helpful information. Thank you for the post. I’ll certainly comeback.

**best vacuum for hardwood floors**

on February 3, 2014 at 9:52 PM said:

Greetings I am so excited I found your site, I really found you by mistake, while I was looking on Aol for something else, Regardless I am here now and would just like to say many thanks for a remarkable post and a all round thrilling blog (I also love the theme/design), I don’t have time to read through it all at the minute but I have bookmarked it and also added your RSS feeds, so when I have time I will be back to read more, Please do keep up the excellent b.
garbage disposal reviews
on February 3, 2014 at 10:02 PM said:

Hello, i believe that i noticed you visited my web site thus i got here to go back the want?. I'm trying to find issues to improve my web site!! assume its good enough to use some of your concepts!!

clothes steamer reviews
on February 4, 2014 at 12:41 AM said:

Greetings! Very useful advice within this post! It is the little changes that will make the largest changes.
Many thanks for sharing!

best recumbent exercise bike
on February 4, 2014 at 1:57 AM said:

Heya i am for the first time here. I found this board and I find it truly useful & it helped me out a lot. I hope to give something back and aid others like you helped me.

folding bike reviews
on February 4, 2014 at 3:08 AM said:

excellent points altogether, you simply won a new reader.
What may you recommend in regards to your post that you simply made a few days ago? Any positive?

scroll saw reviews
on February 4, 2014 at 4:17 AM said:
Hurrah, that’s what I was searching for, what a data! present here at this weblog, thanks admin of this web site.

**dating**  
on February 4, 2014 at 10:15 AM said:

One additional system in favor of advertising your internet site is posting comments on numerous directories inside your blog link.

**nigeria entertainment news**  
on February 4, 2014 at 10:26 AM said:

Hmm it seems like your web site ate my first comment (it was quite long) so I guess I am going to just sum it up what I had written and say, I’m thoroughly enjoying your blog. I too am an aspiring blog writer but I’m nonetheless new to everything. Do you have any recommendations for novice blog writers? I’d surely enjoy it.|Woah! I’m very loving the template/theme of this blog. It’s simple, yet effective. Plenty of times it’s hard to get that “perfect balance” between user friendliness and visual appearance. I need to say you have done a superb employment with this. Also, the blog loads extremely fast for me on Safari. Outstanding Blog!|Do you mind if I quote 2 your content as lengthy as I provide credit rating and sources back to your site? My blog web site is from the same area of interest as yours and my site visitors would genuinely benefit from a lot of the data you produce here. Please permit me know if this alright with you. Thank you!|Hi would you mind letting me know which webhost you’re using? I’ve loaded your blog in Three various net browsers and I need to say this blog loads a lot faster then most. Can you recommend a excellent internet hosting provider at a trustworthy price? Thanks, I enjoy it.|Fantastic internet site you’ve the following but I was wanting to know if you knew of any discussion boards that cover the same topics talked about here? I’d quite love being a part of community in which I can get guidance from other experienced people that share the exact same interest. In case you have any suggestions, please enable me know. Numerous thanks!|Hey! This really is my first comment right here so I just wanted to give a quick shout out and say I definitely appreciate reading your blog posts. Can you recommend any other blogs/websites/forums that go over the exact same topics? Appreciate it!|Do you’ve a spam problem on this website; I also am a blogger, and I was curious about your situation; we have made some nice practices and we are searching to exchange means with other folks, please shoot me an email if interested.
nigeria entertainment news
on February 4, 2014 at 10:35 AM said:

Thanks significantly for providing individuals with this sort of a remarkable opportunity to read significant reviews from here. It is usually so superb plus packed with a good deal of fun for me personally and my office peers to visit your site minimum 3 times each week to discover the new points you have. And indeed, I’m also truly satisfied as part of your astonishing tips served by you. Some A couple of information in this posting are entirely the simplest we’ve ever had.

best espresso machine
on February 4, 2014 at 4:30 PM said:

Howdy just wanted to give you a quick heads up. The text in your content seem to be running off the screen in ie. I’m not sure if this is a formatting issue or something to do with browser compatibility but I thought I’d post to let you know. The layout look great though! Hope you get the problem solved soon. Thanks

best jig saw
on February 4, 2014 at 8:22 PM said:

It’s amazing to pay a visit this web page and reading the views of all friends regarding this article, while I am also keen of getting familiarity.

infrared grill reviews
on February 4, 2014 at 9:55 PM said:

My developer is trying to persuade me to move to .net from PHP. I have always disliked the idea because of the expenses. But he’s tryiong none the less. I’ve been using Movable-type on a number of websites for about a year and am
worried about switching to another platform. I have heard very good things about blogengine.net.

Is there a way I can transfer all my wordpress posts into it?

Any help would be really appreciated!

best induction cooktop
on February 4, 2014 at 11:45 PM said:

I just like the valuable information you provide for your articles. I will bookmark your blog and test again here frequently.

I am rather sure I will be told a lot of new stuff proper here! Best of luck for the next!

band saw reviews
on February 5, 2014 at 12:01 AM said:

Terrific work! This is the type of information that are meant to be shared around the internet. Disgrace on the search engines for not positioning this put up higher! Come on over and talk over with my website. Thank you =)

best robotic pool cleaner
on February 5, 2014 at 1:04 AM said:

I do not know whether it’s just me or if everyone else experiencing problems with your blog. It seems like some of the written text on your content are running off the screen. Can somebody else please provide feedback and let me know if this is happening to them as well? This may be a problem with my browser because I’ve had this happen before. Appreciate it