Foreword

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I've worked with Casey and Jessie for years in organizations and roles connected with online writing instruction and online literacy instruction (OWI and OLI). They work hard. They are creative. They have good spirits. They are *doers.* Through The Online Writing Instruction Community site, they have built, well, a community of instructors interested in OWI: Just what it says it is. *The PARS (Personal, Accessible, Responsive, Strategic) Approach to Online Writing Instruction* continues that mission. In *The PARS Approach,* they have set up a method of OWI that is lively and usable and encourages teachers to take on OWI and *do* it.

In the book, Jessie and Casey make a commitment to a *version* of teaching. They use golf (and all of its terminology) as a metaphor throughout the book to frame and illustrate their version of teaching and the PARS approach. They say, "the goal of our text is to offer one specific approach to OWI, the PARS approach," and that is indeed what they do. Materials about OWI are often broad, in a perhaps well-meaning effort to appeal to a wide range of teachers and pedagogies. That is fine, but Casey and Jessie say, "Up until this point, there has not been a book written with one distinct approach to OWI." This overt specificity is a strength of their book: In what follows you will find a *method*, a way to teach, that while it's based on generally good teaching theory, is also quite usable.

I think almost all teachers will find here a teaching piece specifically for their class[rooms], and for some instructors, particular the many contingent faculty

who Jessie and Casey say "are often relied upon to teach online writing courses more frequently than full-time or tenured faculty," this book can offer a comprehensive approach. PARS can help when there is little training for these faculty, which is unfortunately too often the case. Many schools, the authors say, offer these teachers "little to no training," and while these faculty, "due to their resilience," often still do a good job, "this happens with more extra work and headaches than would occur were professional development support made available."

The authors write with poise and confidence. They say, "When instructors combine the four elements of the PARS approach, being an online writing instructor can seem more manageable." Why shouldn't they be confident? They are experienced teachers, and their stories of teaching run throughout the book. Interestingly, they both started out, as many of you no doubt have or will, as hybrid instructors. They also say, "We've self-taught ourselves one too many times on basic skills and strategies," and they hope their book helps you avoid that.

As teachers, they are student-centered in ways specific to OWI: Online *and* writing courses. For example, they recognize that particularly when teaching online, instructor connection with students takes time: "It takes strategy and time to show your students how much you care about them." They also point out how trust is built in the specific context of writing instruction: "Students need to build a relationship of trust with you as their instructor because they are sharing something very personal with you: their writing."

In fact, the strength of this book is that the approach they describe is highly practical, down to day-to-day activities. They raise topics like how to re-think how you handle email when you teach online. They offer advice about finding out, on the front end, what hardware you will need. They discuss scheduling and time, which are challenges for teachers and students in online instructional settings. In a good representation of their voice, they write: "Create a schedule that works for you and stick to it!"

This practical guidance stretches across all four PARS components. For instance, in terms of (p)ersonal, they say they "have inviting personalities" and they "encourage students through multiple means to interact" with them, while pointing out that "[i]nstructing students from a distance requires more work on the instructor's part. It challenges instructors to be their best self in every mode of communication and that's hard!" Jessie offers a personal bio as an example. Responsive is a key aspect of OWI, and they describe numerous strategies while making clear that "Responsive is different than being available." PARS is all about (s)trategic: being strategic "is a pillar to success in distance education. The most important thing a (novice or experienced) instructor or administrator can do is be [W1] strategic about their process." In being strategic, they circle back to the students: "We tend to apply user-centered practices . . ."

Finally, accessibility has been a central idea for those working in OWI. It was Principle 1 in the 2013 CCCC "A Position Statement of Principles and Example Effective Practices for Online Writing Instruction (OWI)" and remains first in the

newly released Global Society of Online Literacy Educators' "Online Literacy Instruction Principles and Tenets." Casey and Jessie have locked onto OWI as an (a)ccessible practice, whether that accessibility is codified or not: "While this principle is not explicit in terms of meeting ADA guidelines, we believe that if you build your materials from the ground up with accessibility in mind, you will create a learning environment that is more inclusive than any other." They also make sure accessibility encompasses not just the courses, but the administration of them: for online writing program administrators (OWPAs), "being accessible for your colleagues is an essential part of administration." Sometimes, in the hustle and bustle of not just our terms but our professional lives, we forget that hype aside, online learning is still accompanied by tremendous promise. Jessie and Casey reinforce this, saying that distance education has "brought education to those that may have never even dreamed of a college degree." But if the courses are not accessible, not just to students but those who teach and administer, the education will never reach its potential.

Look, my knowledge of OWI definitely surpasses my knowledge of golf. I have only played a handful of times (not counting mini-golf), and those few rounds mostly ended because I had run out of golf balls: The ones I had were nestled in the woods, across some road, or at the bottom of a pond. In South Carolina, during a round I played in college, my friend's father grew exasperated, especially as I tried to fish a *slightly* mis-hit ball out of the water. "You're going to get eaten by an alligator!" he finally yelled, wondering why he had paid for me.

So I'm a great audience, because despite my minimal golf knowledge, the metaphor that drives the book spoke to me. "Golf is a great game for novices to learn," Casey and Jessie say: "[. . .] people hopefully enjoy the game for what it is—a game against yourself." They emphasize that "with practice everyone gets better," and they use that concept to build the connection to OWI, OWI administration, and course design. "When we play (teach, administer or design an OWI course) and get small 'wins,'" they write, "we want to keep going and make ourselves better. When we golf, and when we teach writing in an online setting, we aim to be 'par for the course' (pun intended), so the acronym is a good fit, albeit a little cheesy." They self-deprecatingly (that's what academics love to do!) say their acronym is a "little cheesy," but I think it fits with what they try to accomplish. (Note I have resisted the urge to have a play on words with golf and "*Fore*word." Now I've done it—there's *apophasis* for all you rhetoricians out there!)

In line with its overall practical bent, *The PARS Approach* helps them describe a tangible way of approaching virtual teaching. "For the hole in one!" sections are pointed and helpful, such as the advice to use icebreakers. The "Drive for Show, Putt for Dough!" sidebars provide discussion of "relevant activities or strategies" that they use in their "own individual online writing courses." Using PARS also clearly helped them compose in an accessible writing style, and, again, one that is filled with teaching stories—we need more stories of teaching! You are not reading a lecture from two out-of-touch noodlers. No, they have been doing the work of OWI. I think you will be able to relate to them.

They open and close with the statement that "we're all online writing instructors." I agree (Hewett & Warnock, 2015). As they point out, the logistics of instruction and the culture of writing involve digital tools in increasing ways now. But there is also a distinct group of those interested in OWI. In the broader field of composition and rhetoric, OWI carved out a robust and *caring* place for people with similar interests to meet and work. At conferences, particularly at the annual CCCC meeting (which is where I met both Jessie and Casey), OWI teachers, administrators, and scholars would come together, eager not only to share ideas and research, but for fellowship. This may be particularly important in OWI, as Casey and Jessie say: "Those without a home institution or those stringing together work at multiple institutions especially benefit from instructor to instructor camaraderie." As they note, I was hoping even back in 2009 for a digital community space for online writing instructors "so as to maximize the best practices of instruction and to refine our own approaches" (Hewett & Warnock, 2015, p. 166).

In that saying, I was in some way beckoning to Stephen North's articulation of the composition "House of lore," a lovely metaphor of writing instructional knowledge, a structure he describes as "a rambling, to my mind delightful old manse" (North, 1987, p. 27). The "House of lore" has always appealed to me, as I see the fundamental truth of it. All of our teaching knowledge is stored in the collective mind of composition teachers, but it is dispersed: How do we share it? How do we catalogue and disseminate the vast knowledge about teaching and our field in general that is being created every day?

This book does its part. *The PARS Approach* will help you *not* start from scratch. Jessie and Casey provide you with a usable framework to make OWI less burdensome. At the end, they say: "We hope that through reading the chapters in this text you feel better equipped to plan for and mitigate those friction points in your online writing courses." Let me follow their golf metaphor: This book will help you avoid many teaching sand traps, but the authors also recognize that you are going to land in one now and again, so it also provides you with ways and strategies to wedge your way out (look at me, communicating in golf-speak!). In OWI and composition in general, we need more experts sharing practices and more metaphors for such instruction. In the pages that follow is a way to that sharing, and an approach, a method, that I think will appeal to many of you.

References

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