Chapter 2. My Online Instruction Mulligan: How PARS Transformed My Technical Writing Community College Course

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Abstract: In this chapter, I will delve into the affordances of PARS-informed (personal, accessible, responsive, strategic) online writing instruction in an accelerated technical writing course for an underserved, two-year college population. Influenced by user-centered design and Borgman and McArdle's (2019) PARS approach, I transformed what had previously been a stale and frustrating online course into a dynamic, participatory community tailored to my students' unique needs. The redesigned course emphasized structure, connection, and accessibility to ensure student success and completion of learning outcomes. This chapter closes with remaining challenges in efficient online writing instruction and potential applications of my strategies.

Keywords: OWI, online writing instruction, online learning, technical writing, community colleges, two-year colleges

In 2019, I taught an online writing course for the first time in several years. I was optimistic but cautiously so because despite much success in my face-to-face instruction (e.g., teaching awards and positive evaluations), certifications to teach online, and comfort operating in our learning management system and other digital spaces, I had avoided returning to what was previously an unmitigated disaster. My previous online writing courses (OWCs) were riddled with slow feedback, poorly received activities, and a loss of connection to my students. It was a lot of work—many hours of preparation and labor for both the students and me—and it was not nearly the same as my vibrant face-to-face classes. The "Position Statement of Principles and Example Effective Practices for Online Writing Instruction" (2013) developed by the Conference on College Composition and Composition (CCCC) OWI Committee highlighted as its fourth principle that the appropriate teaching strategies "should be migrated and adapted to the online instructional environment," yet my pedagogy, activities, and assignments translated poorly, if at all (para. 5). Even my personalized touches felt stiff and forced. I had underestimated how much my pedagogical strategies and my course would need to change to achieve a thriving online environment.

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Yet I knew the importance of persisting and bettering myself at online writing instruction (OWI). Many students at my institution—Tidewater Community College (Virginia)—prefer or need asynchronous learning to meet their busy schedules, and I wanted to both challenge myself and dispel notions that online instruction isn't as lively or engaging. Though many may expect first-year learners at the two-year level to struggle in adapting to online learning, Shea and Bidjerano (2014) found in a National Center for Education Statistics study of 18,000 community college participants that students taking online courses experience a "boost to degree completion" and are more likely than their peers to earn a credential (p. 110). They write, "Online learning appears to represent a new path that for some students is far more efficient and effective in allowing access to and graduation from college" (Shea & Bidjerano, 2014, p. 110). If I wanted to help guide my Tidewater students to stronger professional writing habits that would benefit them across the curriculum, I had to return to my failed venture into online instruction. What I needed was an effective philosophy to aid in the redesign of my online course.

When my accelerated, eight-week Technical Report Writing class moved online due to enrollment concerns, I researched and implemented user-centered design and Borgman and McArdle's (2019) PARS (personal, accessible, responsive, strategic) approach, transforming what had previously been stale and overwhelming into a dynamic, participatory course. The results were better than I had anticipated, and this student-first course design has influenced all of my instruction, remote and in-person. In this chapter, I will detail my OWI mulligan, golf terminology for a chance at redemption after an initial blunder. I will share my experiences and analyze practical strategies and affordances for each of the PARS elements as well as limitations for implementing the philosophy in a fast-paced course designed for the often-underserved two-year college population. After establishing the unique needs of the students in my community college courses, I will review successes and perceived failures in personalizing my instruction, making my courses more accessible, becoming more responsive, and implementing strategies that foreground student success.

Community College Students

The first step to effectively designing any user experience, particularly one that involves students in a writing classroom, is to know the audience. Though many online teaching strategies may be intended as universal, what works in one situation—for example, for advanced students—may fall flat for others—like those for students who lack experience or confidence in their abilities. My OWC is designed for those who most need a meaningful connection, a clear sense of structure, and consistent guidance: two-year college students.

With many adult learners, first generation students, parents, full-time and part-time workers, and active and retired military, Tidewater Community

College in Virginia enrolled 33,000 students in 2017–2018, making it the second-largest community college in the state ("About TCC," 2020). Tidewater's student population is not unlike many two-year institutions across America with many students historically disadvantaged and/or facing food, job, transportation, or housing insecurity. A 2019 report by ITHAKA, an educational non-profit organization with a focus on digital preservation and increased access and affordability, revealed students struggling to balance basic needs with academic and professional responsibilities (Blankenship et al., 2019). A survey of 10,844 currently enrolled community college students found that over half of respondents—56 percent of whom are first generation, 32 percent born outside the United States, and 75 percent working adults—identified difficulty balancing school responsibilities with jobs, family life, and basic needs (Blankenship et al., 2019). The increased challenges faced by two-year students, including access, lack of academic preparation, and necessary resources, put them at a disadvantage in succeeding in higher education, particularly when an online course—especially a technical writing course needed by many students seeking a career in medical fields, business, engineering, or the sciences—is poorly designed or lacking in engagement.

Community college degree and certificate attainment has risen since the 1990s, yet many are failing to complete their goals. Mullin (2011) reports that 630,000 associate degrees were awarded in 2009–2010,—with 40 percent in the humanities or liberal arts and sciences—an increase of 86 percent from 1989–1990. Community college students regularly enroll to advance in the workplace and earn licenses and credentials, yet the vast majority fall short. The Century Foundation (2019) reports, "Only 38 percent of students entering community college complete a degree or certificate within six years. While 81 percent of students entering community college say they aspire to eventually transfer and receive a four-year degree, only 15 percent do so after six years" (p. 1). This dire situation has been the impetus for guided pathways restructuring, needs assessments and initiatives to address food and housing insecurity, and pushes for compassionate pedagogy.

For OWI strategies to be tailored to community college students and aid students in becoming stronger academic and technical writers across the curriculum, they must reach this under-represented population. They must also be easily utilized by faculty whose workload is 30 credits (15 credits, or five three-credit courses, per semester) minimum, with many instructors at Tidewater and other two-year institutions taking on overload credits each semester. Successful online writing strategies for my mulligan needed to be straightforward, easy to tailor and implement, and designed for the underserved. Borgman and McArdle's (2019) *Personal, Accessible, Responsive, Strategic: Resources and Strategies for Online Writing Instructors* meets that criteria as it carefully considers a wide range of students and faculty entering digital spaces and builds on user experience design principles.

PARS: Personal, Accessible, Responsive, Strategic

To use a golf metaphor, as frequently used in Borgman and McArdle's (2019) text, the problem for many community college students—especially those in fast-paced eight-week courses—is not that they are failing to sink their putts. The issue is that many have never been to a golf course. They do not even know how to hold a driver let alone get a ball on the green. Thus, the rhetorical design of the PARS approach centers on the audience. It is tailored to guiding online instructors to pay close attention to user experience: one that is highly structured yet loose and accommodating for the students. A practical application of a user-centered approach, created from years of collective experience of observations and feedback from students, rather than the systems-design too often utilized (Eyman, 2009), the PARS approach focuses course design and delivery on ensuring student success and completion of learning outcomes.

Contemporary user experience design, according to Greer and Harris (2018), aims to build a culture with three steps: "user research, iterative design, and collaboration" (p. 2). User research is gathered from useful insights and not simply likability, and iterative design "assumes and requires that products and platforms be revisable, flexible, and dynamic" (Greer & Harris, 2018, p. 3). Collaboration occurs between designers, instructors, and students, with the latter entering after a course is designed; Greer and Harris (2018) argue for student involvement early in the process. In the PARS approach, student feedback is solicited early in the course and the instructor both gets to know the students and collaborates with them to develop a dynamic class through personalization of the content.

Personal

Foregrounding unique, personal practices ensures that the student is central to all decision-making; in implementing user experience design and PARS elements, I paid close attention to these student necessities for the ideal digital learning environment and then aimed to meet those needs. Among the personal touches added to my Technical Report Writing course are the inclusion of a course overview, multimedia, and one-on-one connections.

Martinez et al. (2017) note in their national survey of students in online writing courses the need for a tutorial or online orientation. A brief overview of the main areas of the digital space was an important first step in breaking any communication barriers. In addition to a Canvas learning management system orientation quiz, in my course modules area, I set up a "how to navigate the course" table with descriptions of each tab (course area) for students. Each course content module, which I keep limited to seven and aligned with major

topics and assignments, has an overview, learning objectives, and clearly labeled headings (e.g., readings, videos, assignments). Finally, the home page of the course features images that link students directly to the most often visited course areas: the syllabus, course information, an "about your instructor" page, the learning modules, and online support.

To further establish myself as personable and welcoming, I follow Borgman and McArdle's (2019) advice to "create learning opportunities that appeal to the various senses" (p. 20) by integrating a Prezi (prezi.com) "about me" with embarrassing facts of my guilty pleasures (see Figure 2.1) to highlight that I am also human. Sure, it builds credibility to read about my doctoral studies and 15+ years of teaching experience, but I want students to reach out to me any time in a conversational manner, and if they know of my awful childhood photo (see Figure 2.2) or aversion of mayonnaise or my love of The Bachelor television series, I am more likely to gain their attention. My Prezi introduction blends images, video, audio, and text to appeal to students, and it's the first of many multimodal readings. Students can likewise create their own Prezi introductions, post audio or video greetings, or attempt something creative to bridge the gap of the personalization lost when not in a face-to-face class. I encourage each student to make themselves more than just a name—and perhaps an avatar—on a discussion board.

Figure 2.1. Prezi likes and dislikes.

Figure 2.2. An unflattering childhood photo.

I also post weekly overview videos and short personal "shout outs" to students through the Canvas Studio (community.canvaslms.com) tool. These personalized videos (see Figure 2.3) let students know that my video recordings are not generic but individualized to respect the organic nature of every class. The recordings, as per Borgman and McArdle's (2019) recommendation and awareness of two-year student challenges with consistent computer access and/or reliable access or bandwidth, are typically at four minutes or less, though weekly overviews tend to run a bit longer (up to eight minutes at most) as I connect stories and strategies to readings and assignments. For example, I elaborate on the importance of a unique cover letter by sharing one of my own failures during a job search while in college. If students comment on the video and find that narrative engaging, I might extend the next week's video on designing instructions. I aim to connect with each class uniquely the same way that a performer does at comedy shows, reading the room to improvise and build on what works.

My Tidewater students have remarked on many occasions that they have not enjoyed English courses in the past—possibly due to struggles with the course content—but the unique video recordings result in positive feedback and encouraging course evaluations. These personal connections cannot fully replicate the face-to-face class, but the short video clips demonstrate to students that I care about their access, an important factor for the students at my institution.

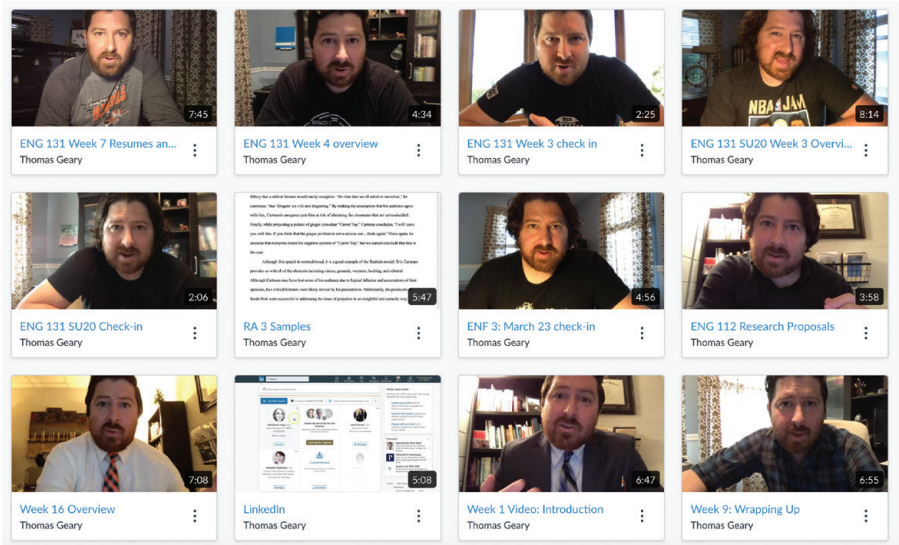

Figure 2.3. Canvas Studio video uploads.

Accessible

The second strategy in the PARS approach, accessible, is defined by Borgman and McArdle (2019) as removing obstacles to learning online as "the isolated nature of working online creates enough barriers for students, so navigating your course and finding what they need to be successful should not be an additional barrier" (p. 38). Accessibility involves understanding the target audience and continuous reflection, the process of assessing one's own instruction, including technology usage, and design throughout and after a semester (McCabe & Gonzalez-Flores, 2017). I strive to foster an accessible classroom through open educational resources, a needs survey, and visual clarity and general flexibility, taking into account Bjork's (2018) strategies for blending user experience design and digital rhetoric.

For six years, I have relied entirely on open educational resources (OERs) to keep the cost of course materials free for students. With students already facing many financial hardships, the cost of a textbook should be the least of their concerns. I was an early adopter of Tidewater's Z Degree (zero cost textbook) initiative, in which all courses use OERs or public domain material, and the move from costly textbooks to Creative Commons licensed resources has allowed me the flexibility and freedom to find resources of various modalities for my students, including but not limited to articles, videos, and podcasts. Hutchins (2020) contends that OERs pair well with student smartphones, increasingly used for educational purposes, and enhance experiences for students

with disabilities. I have found that nearly all students prefer using OERs because of the reduced cost and flexibility. Hutchins (2020) adds that although OERs remain underutilized with under 10 percent of college instructors adopting them, "the benefits of OER [are] not only cost savings but also accessibility, efficiency, [and] time savings" (p. 304). If a resource that I find is not highly accessible for all students—including closed captions for videos, easy navigation, and optimization for any device—then I can find and adopt a new resource at any point. A few high-quality OER repositories for composition and technical writing instructors include OER Commons (oercommons.org), Writing Commons (writingcommons.org), and Saylor Academy (saylor.org). These collections have significantly improved accessibility of course content in my Z Degree courses.

Early in the semester, I also disseminate a technological needs survey (see Figure 2.4) to determine what concerns exist regarding internet connectivity, buffering of videos, types of devices available, and other possible concerns community college students might face in an OWC. The survey has been beneficial thus far, revealing issues my Tidewater students face, such as slow WiFi and a lack of webcam availability for synchronous learning, recording of presentations, and/or office hours visitation. I plan to add a follow-up needs survey in future semesters regarding the course design and content to further gauge student concerns and provide data for my continued reflection.

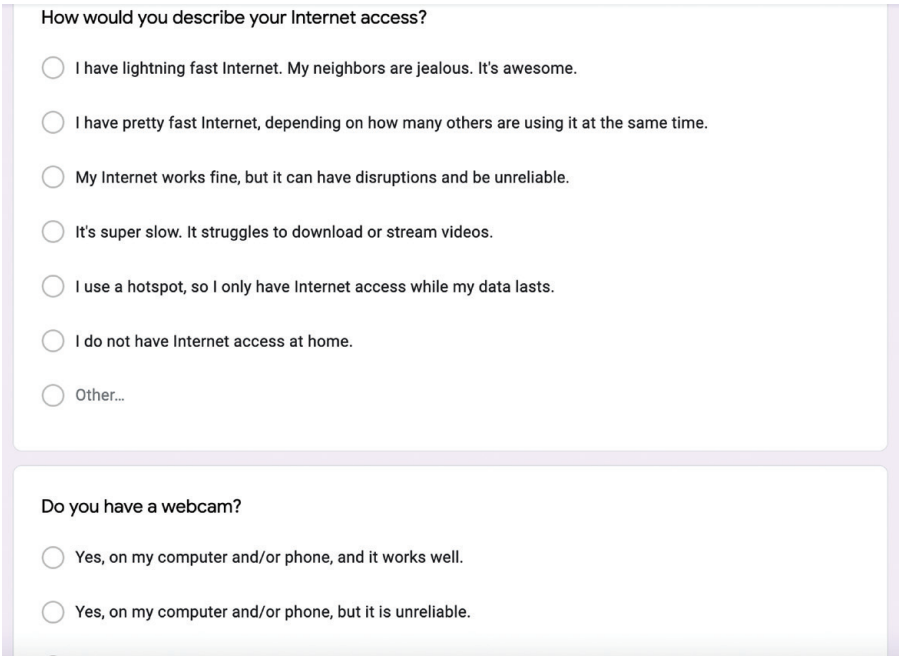

Figure 2.4. Technology needs survey.

The design of content in my courses is intended to be visually consistent and appealing. Document design principles in user experience aid in reading comprehension and demonstrate concern regarding student accessibility of content, particularly with my open educational resources replacing a textbook. Jones (2018) highlights the importance of collaboration and input from students in syllabus design, and those principles similarly apply to the design and delivery of a learning management system's course content. Jones (2018) notes, "headings, density of text, and white space can work along or against other design elements to increase accessibility of information or to cause readers to disengage with the text" (p. 2). The consistency of weekly announcements that use bulleted lists and avoid underlined text (to avoid URL link confusion) as well as the use of graphics and calendars comfort the reader and make for a more enjoyable, accessible online experience. Adding a final review for the effective application of design principles prior to publishing a course or new content can help in improving readability and visual consistency; this step was key to my successful mulligan in online instruction.

Bjork's (2018) student-centered perspective to OWI combines usability with rhetorical implications. His heuristics for mixing user experience design and digital rhetoric include an emphasis on awareness of all student-users including those who are marginalized or with disabilities, the development of community rather than task completion, and an understanding "that tasks are never neutral acts and . . . the subject positions of student-users impact how they navigate these tasks" (2018, p. 8). Consideration of students of all backgrounds, their experiences, and their needs aids greatly in building a more accessible space for dynamic learning. We might not be able to eliminate all aspects of the digital divide, but incorporating OERs, needs surveys, and visual consistency can make for an improved user experience and more attention paid to the course content and instructor feedback from the student perspective.

Responsive

Responsiveness—the third PARS element—was essential to transforming my bogey (a bad course) into a birdie (a successful course). Though in my previous efforts I felt overwhelmed by grading and constant discussion replies, Borgman and McArdle's (2019) advice about setting boundaries and providing quick responses changed my mindset. By implementing well-designed rubrics (see Figure 2.5) and quick, holistic feedback, almost an "ungrading" method as opposed to lengthy walls of text that could intimidate, I found my feedback as a conversation with the students.

What I had been experiencing in my earlier online courses was not unusual. Borgman and McArdle (2019) elaborate on the challenge of adapting to the workload of an online course and knowing how to set limits: "Just because something exciting is available all of the time, doesn't mean being a part of it all the time is healthy or productive. Online instructors run the risk of being overly responsive" (p. 54). My eagerness to get involved in every student discussion and to offer am-

ple feedback to each activity and assignment had burned me out, and I needed new strategies for handling the heavy workload of a two-year college instructor. I wanted to connect with each student and provide thoughtful commentary, whether in discussions, minor activities, or major assignments, but with six or seven classes of 20–25 students, it just wasn't possible.

The incorporation of a rubric and a fast, holistic set of comments saved me. It still provides students with feedback and opens a dialogue regarding their work, which can be continued during office hours or via email, without inundating them with many sentence-level remarks (or me with grading). Inspired by writing center pedagogy, comments on grammar, mechanics, and/or style are usually reserved for only the first page of a longer submission with patterns identified rather than each specific instance marked. The rubric (e.g., the Project Proposal categories of content, design, grammar and style, and Gantt chart) visually shows students where they can focus during revisions, and it allows for flexibility of a grading range for each category. Pairing the rubric with brief, timely feedback initiates an immediate conversation with the student, an important but easy to overlook aspect of teaching at the two-year college. Students can become overburdened with family, career, and coursework, but keeping them invested in their learning is more likely when feedback is unintimidating and timely.

Project Proposal

Criteria	Ratings			Pts
Content	**20.0 to >15.0 pts** **Strong Content** The proposal establishes a clear rhetorical situation and feasible Technical Report topic with ample depth and research to support claims. It not only meets the assignment, but demonstrates a fully developed sense of the scope of the project. References are included.	**15.0 to >8.0 pts** **Average Content** The proposal meets the assignment's objectives but lacks a strong sense of audience, topic, limitations, scope, and/or purpose. The proposal does not demonstrate sophisticated thought or a strong grasp of the target audience and may be lacking recommended sections. One or two references are included.	**8.0 to >0 pts** **Poor Content** The proposal fails to meet the assignment by lacking an appropriate rhetorical situation or purpose. It does not meet length or content requirements and may not establish a clear Technical Report issue. No References are included.	20.0 pts
Design	**10.0 to >8.0 pts** **Strong Design** The Project Proposal is consistent and visually appealing for the target audience. Bullet points, hierarchy of information, and appropriate white space are utilized appropriately.	**8.0 to >4.0 pts** **Average Design** The Project Proposal includes some effective design elements to guide the target reader but is inconsistent. The design may impact the readability of the document.	**4.0 to >0 pts** **Poor Design** Little to no attention is paid to the design elements of the Project Proposal. The target audience might struggle in understanding the document due to its poor readability.	10.0 pts
Grammar and Style	**10.0 to >8.0 pts** **Strong Grammar/Style** The prose is clear and memorable. The proposal contains few, if any, grammatical or mechanical errors and illustrates the group's control of diction for the target audience.	**8.0 to >4.0 pts** **Average Grammar/Style** The proposal displays weaknesses in grammar, mechanics, or punctuation through consistent but not egregious errors such as fragments, missing commas, or spelling. The vocabulary resembles a conversation and not a well thought-out professional proposal for the target audience.	**4.0 to >0 pts** **Poor Grammar/Style** Excessive errors of grammar, spelling, or punctuation cause the reader to struggle to comprehend the proposal. Meaning is unclear due to incomprehensible sentences.	10.0 pts
Gantt chart	**10.0 to >8.0 pts** **Strong Gantt chart** A clean and easy to comprehend Gantt chart is included with the Project Proposal. It establishes a realistic timeline for the Technical Report and includes a variety of components of the final project.	**8.0 to >4.0 pts** **Average Gantt chart** An effective Gantt chart is included with the Project Proposal but it might be struggle to engage the viewer due to concerns with readability or feasibility of the timeline components. Aesthetic concerns might impact the chart.	**4.0 to >0 pts** **Poor Gantt chart** No Gantt chart or a very poorly constructed Gantt chart is included with the Project Proposal. It may be very difficult to understand, not resemble a timeline chart, or demonstrate no realistic timeline for the project.	10.0 pts

Figure 2.5. Rubric for a Project Proposal.

Shivers et al. (2018) advocate for low-stakes weekly activities, and even in an accelerated course, this advice can assist the student in building confidence to tackle major assignments. Early low-stakes activities—like a professional email and memorandum in my Technical Report Writing course—can familiarize students with the grading system, use of rubrics, and revision process. It also can guide them seamlessly from one assignment to another, which aids in how a student "reads" the course. That type of strategic design might seem effortless, but it requires much intentionality and effort.

Strategic

Strategic design, the fourth of the PARS elements, is defined as "approaching the online course in a way that makes you think about designing an entire experience for a very specific user" (Borgman & McArdle, p. 72). The move from the low-stakes efforts toward major assignments, a linear, cumulative design, along with careful alignment with announcements and videos, guides the student to a firm, scaffolded grasp of the content and, in my class, toward a polished ePortfolio for a public audience (Shivers et al., 2018). Earlier Technical Report Writing assignments like the resume and cover letter, project proposal, instructions or manual, and memoranda can be highlighted on the digital platform of their choice to demonstrate students' professional writing abilities, and students apply all that they have learned regarding design principles to polish their websites. By showing students from day one of the semester how all of these assignments build and lead to a cumulative portfolio, I hope to set a clear, reasonable expectation for the semester and avoid miscommunication, which Borgman and McArdle (2019) note is frequent in OWI: "[O]ften a lot of the headaches that occur in online courses happen because of the gap in understanding of what is expected from each party involved, instructor and student" (p. 74). A well-structured map might not come naturally and could even necessitate an overhaul of a course, but it is key to ensuring a positive course experience for students.

My own audience-focused strategies also take into account Wiggins and McTighe's (2005) backward design, "a map for how to achieve the 'outputs' of desired student performance" (pp. 5-6). Working from learning outcomes and objectives back to assignments, activities, readings, and tools used ensures that the process is one that was well thought out from the student's experience. My own content grid for the Technical Report Writing course (see Figure 2.6) labels first the module and the appropriate course learning outcomes. Then, I create learning objectives based on Bloom's taxonomy, list assessments and learning activities for that module and the open educational resources utilized, and estimate the time spent to complete everything at a satisfactory level. The content grid aided my (re-)development of the course from bogey to birdie and ensured that the backward design principle was carefully implemented to maximize student success.

Module	Learning Outcomes	Learning Objectives	Assessments & Learning Activities	Learning Materials	Time on Task
Module 1: Memos, E-mails, Summaries	Revise and edit effectively in all assignments, including formal media such as e-mail messages to the instructor. Develop professional work habits, including those necessary for effective collaboration and cooperation with others. Recognize, explain, and use the formal elements of specific genres of organizational communication: white papers, recommendations and analytical reports, proposals, memorandums, web pages, wikis, blogs, business letters, and promotional documents.	• Students will develop and utilize strategies for starting the writing process. • Students will identify the aspects of a rhetorical situation in a recall quiz. • Students will review memorandum samples and compare and contrast strengths and weaknesses of the samples. • Students will compose a well-designed, error-free 1-page memorandum that addresses a target audience of the instructor's choice. • Students will assess and evaluate each other's memos by completing a draft worksheet.	Discussion: E-mails (student-student interaction, student-content interaction) Discussion: Memos (student-content interaction, student-instructor interaction) Discussion: Summaries (student-content interaction, student-instructor interaction) E-mail Assignment (student-content interaction, student-instructor interaction) Memo Draft Workshop (student-student interaction) Group Memo Assignment (student-content interaction, student-student interaction, student-instructor interaction) Daly Summary Assignment (student-content interaction, student-instructor interaction) Review Quiz (one quiz that spans multiple modules, but I'll put it here and Module 2) (student-content interaction, student-instructor interaction)	• Read: Audience Analysis https://www.prismnet.com/~hcexres/textbook/aud.html ("Audience Analysis" by David McMurrey) • Read: Effective E-mail Communication: https://learn.saylor.org/mod/page/view.php?id=5576 ("Effective E-mail Communication" by Saylor Academy) • Read: Memorandums and Letters: https://saylordotorg.github.io/text_business-communication-for-success/s13-02-memorandums-and-letters.html ("Memorandums and Letters" by Saylor Academy) • Read: Organization by Saylor Academy: https://saylordotorg.github.io/text_business-communication-for-success/s10-01-organization.html • Read: Writing Summaries from Sources by Rick Dolliesjager: http://community.tncc.edu/faculty/dolliesjager/Writsums2.html • Read/Browse: Sample Formal Reports and Sample E-Portfolios (posted under Modules) • Watch: Video (see below)	12 hours

Figure 2.6. Course content grid.

Though I have yet to share my course content grids with Tidewater students, a step that I feel could both increase transparency and result in useful student input, the impact is felt in the course design in our Canvas LMS. The modules that take shape in the course content grid are the organizing units of the course, and each one contains the learning objectives and resources as well as additional material that students might find useful. Assignments, announcements, and videos are hyperlinked both in the modules as well as their separate areas in the course. A course architecture that seamlessly guides students from one activity to the next can be time consuming on initial setup, but it functions as a virtual hand holding and a reliable, consistent design that welcomes students of any level of preparation. Strategic instruction is perhaps the most essential element of the PARS approach for two-year college instructors to incorporate into their OWI.

Limitations

Though the implementation of PARS and user-centered design principles resulted in a successful redesign of my technical writing course, the process was not without some bogeys, which is to be expected in an accelerated two-year college technical writing course. Among the limitations that I faced were a heavy workload, constant notifications—both for the instructor and students,—a difficulty in sustained conversations, and a failed group memorandum assignment.

Though the responsive strategies in the PARS approach, including setting limitations, using rubrics, and opening with low-stakes activities, cut down on the heavy grading load, there were still relentless submissions and notifications from the learning management system. I have adapted to a constant heavy grad-

ing load as a community college instructor with a 30-credit hour obligation, but it is a challenge when the number of students in each course exceeds that which is recommended by the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Its ninth principle of OWI is, "OWCs should be capped responsibly at 20 students per course with 15 being a preferable number" ("A position statement," 2013, para. 10). My technical writing course remains capped at 25 students with overloads welcome. The myriad student works to grade were paired with constant updates by Canvas of new submissions, on the web and the mobile app as well as emails, a reminder that I would never be caught up. Students similarly faced the heavy workload: at least one assignment and several readings and discussions each week can be grueling.

Sustained conversation with and between students via discussions is recommended by McCabe and Gonzalez-Flores (2017) as important to online courses as they build community. In my experience, however, I tapered off the number of replies to students after the first half of the semester, focusing on grading their work and providing one-on-one feedback. What this left was a course that felt disconnected, especially after an early group memorandum assignment. Though I advocate for group work because of its importance in many businesses and areas in which technical writing is common, the group assignment has not been favored by students, who find it difficult to work with one another on differing schedules. Group work of any type, including in-depth peer review, has been a struggle in my eight-week courses. Even when I have implemented mid-week deadlines, there does not seem like there is enough time for students to truly engage one another unless they can meet synchronously. A nationwide survey by Martinez et al. (2019) similarly found that some online writing activities "were not always implemented in ways that improve student writing, rendering them somewhat ineffective" ("Implications," para. 2). Even as a low-stakes assignment, the memorandum was viewed was one of the most disliked assignments of the semester, leaving me to reconsider the inclusion of a collaborative document in such a fast-paced course with a unique population of working adults and active military students who might not be available to log in several times a week.

Final Thoughts and Application

In spite of a few drawbacks, I am satisfied with the transformation of my Technical Report Writing course through the use of the PARS approach and user experience design guidelines. In future semesters for all of my courses, I plan to involve students even more in the design process through inquiries, additional needs surveys, and potentially focus groups. To continue to utilize the same approach and rest on my laurels might be easy, but it fails to incorporate those that my decisions impact the most: the students. Jones (2018) writes, "While instructors often develop the content for their courses based on programmatic student learning outcomes, established course objectives, vetted scholarship on teaching and learning

. . . there is little to no collaboration or input from students, the end-users of the [syllabus] document" (p. 3). Creating a dialogue with my community college students and consistently returning to reflection of what worked will ensure that all documents, OERs, activities, assignments, and design and delivery choices have been vetted.

Any writing instructor who plans to implement the PARS approach in their OWI should consider these three points as the foundation of their conversion:

- Know your students. It's hard to personalize your content, make a course accessible, or strategize student completion if you are not aware of their needs, which can vary at each institution and even class. Use surveys, course evaluations, and student feedback as opportunities to learn what works for them.
- Put yourself in your students' shoes. Many students prefer OERs and bite-sized videos (four minutes or less) because they increase accessibility. Which other student-focused changes can you make to your course content? Review the visual design of your course. Can the readability be improved for students?
- Be open to change. It's hard to admit that a pedagogical strategy, activity, or trusted assignment is not working. But it's even harder for your students to succeed if they're being set up for a frustrating experience. Adaptability is key.

When properly applied, the PARS elements guide students and serve as a virtual caddie, a golfer's trusted assistant and advisor. Like any good caddie, the PARS approach provides us with the tools and insights needed to be successful. It reminds us to treat our course material as revisable and flexible and to foreground the student experience. Combined with an orientation, clearly structured information, and a personalized one-on-one connection, this student-friendly approach not only gets students on the course but also teaches them the basics. Instead of forcing the marginalized and underserved to match our golf handicap, we can meet them where they are and level the playing field.

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