

**A Position Statement of  
Principles and Example Effective Practices  
for Online Writing Instruction (OWI)**

By:  
The Conference on College  
Composition and Communication Committee  
for Best Practices in Online Writing Instruction

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## Establishing a Statement of Principles for Online Writing Instruction (OWI)

According to the *Chronicle of Higher Education's* report *Online Learning* (2011), the number of postsecondary students taking at least one online course has tripled in the past ten years (p. B20). In line with overall trends in online and distance learning in general, exponential growth of online writing instruction (OWI) is in evidence, and the literature surrounding it has begun to proliferate (OWI Bibliography, 2009; Warnock, 2009). With the rise in Internet-based and Intranet-based courses as well as an abundance of mobile mechanisms for teaching and learning, online courses increasingly are a primary means of instruction for many first-year composition students; as a result, OWI rightly has received intensified attention within composition studies. This growth in courses and concurrent need for scholarly attention to OWI have driven the demand for a broadly encompassing statement about how best to teach writing online.

This document describes OWI principles and example effective practices for teaching writing in the online learning contexts common in postsecondary education. First-year writing instruction is one of the most obvious areas requiring such a document; however, other composition courses/levels and writing-intensive courses in various disciplines also will benefit from this document. Designed primarily for teachers and writing program administrators as well as other stakeholders invested in the teaching of writing, this document represents collaboration among hundreds of experienced and expert OWI educators. Indeed, the research process of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) Committee for Best Practices in Online Writing Instruction (OWI) has included field visits to leading-edge institutions, bibliographic study, national surveys, a published Report of the State-of-the-Art of OWI (CCCC Committee, 2011), Web/phone conferences with identified expert practitioners and stakeholders, and intensive discussion with CCCC members at meetings of the CCCC through panel presentations, discussions, and special interest groups.

Perhaps most importantly, this statement reveals a blueprint for further investigation into OWI. Addressing OWI is complex and challenging, particularly given the vast array of learner settings, needs, circumstances, contexts, and other factors. Fundamentally, however, educators must acknowledge that OWI is not a panacea for any failures in writing instruction more generally. Rather, OWI provides an opportunity for teaching various student populations in a distinctive instructional setting. As educators, it is our responsibility to be frank in our discussions about the realistic limitations of our work with students, and this document is designed to provide a clear entry point into those types of conversations about OWI. In short, with the rapid growth of all distance/online learning, the time has come to identify, develop, and articulate the OWI Principles that ground potentially successful OWI; such principles lead to example effective<sup>1</sup> practices as viewed by experts of teaching writing in these environments.

### Methods and Processes of Developing OWI Principles and Example Effective Practices

The process of discerning and collating OWI Principles and effective practices began in 2007 when the CCCC Executive Committee decided that a set of “best” practices needed to be developed for OWI to help guide those who teach writing in environments that are:

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term *effective* rather than *best* to describe practices that potentially are strong in more than one setting. Janet Moore (2011) of the Sloane Consortium introduced *effective practices* to acknowledge the “rapid” changes occurring in online instruction overall (p. 93). The Committee sees such changes as ongoing, which suggests that effective practices will continue to evolve.

- Digital (i.e., using computer-based or other integrated technologies that can be accessed virtually anywhere and anytime),
- Online (i.e., Internet- or Intranet-based), and
- Distributed (i.e., linked through a computer network while being geographically dispersed).

Questions included: What qualities of writing instruction and learning are the same as with onsite settings? What qualities are different? Does OWI itself call for new ideas, pedagogies, or strategies? If so, which ones are necessary to the digital setting? Which ideas, pedagogies, and practices from the traditional onsite setting can be migrated and adapted to the online environment?

Specifically, the CCCC Executive Committee asked that effective strategies be identified and examined for use with various online media and pedagogies primarily for teaching writing in fully online (i.e., having no onsite components) and hybrid (i.e., classes meeting in distance-based and/or computer-mediated settings *and* in traditional onsite classrooms) writing courses. While the focus of these practices would be on composition classrooms, other college writing courses and levels presumably would benefit from them. Additionally, the CCCC expressed that an effective practices document would be a useful way to share these ideas within the CCCC's community and also with the many stakeholders and interested audiences outside of that group.

To that end, the Committee was formed in 2007, charged, reconstituted in 2010, and recharged with the following duties:

**Charge 1:** Identify and examine best strategies for online writing instruction (OWI) using various online media and pedagogies primarily used for the teaching of writing in blended, hybrid, and distance-based writing classrooms, specifically composition classrooms, but including other college writing courses.

**Charge 2:** Identify best practices for using online instruction specifically for English language learners and individuals with disabilities in coordination with related CCCC committees.

**Charge 3:** Create a Position Statement on the Principles and Standards for OWI Preparation and Instruction. In consultation with the Assessment Committee and the Task Force on Position Statements, review and update the 2004 Position Statement "Teaching, Learning, and Assessing Writing in Digital Environments."

**Charge 4:** Share best practices in OWI with the CCCC membership in a variety of formats.

This document responds to these charges.

In writing this document, the Committee agreed that so-called "best" or effective practices are most usefully shaped in the context of particular institutional settings—such as 2-year colleges, 4-year colleges, state and private universities, and for-profit educational venues. To that end, we conducted our research within these contexts and in consultation with administrators and educators in such settings. The principles and practices outlined and described within this position statement can be used to guide institutions—from the private to the state to the corporate, for-profit—in their OWI programs and work.

Additionally, effective practices tend to be difficult to pin down in a fluid technological world. Yet, they certainly are needed as examples so stakeholders can understand ways to improve and support OWI education. To this end, the Committee first developed a series of grounding OWI Principles that will hold firm regardless of the modality (i.e., asynchronous or synchronous), medium (i.e., text-based, voice/audio, video, graphic), and technology (i.e., learning management system [LMS] or universal access platform). Hence, in this document, the term *OWI Principle* expresses the baseline requirements for OWI and the term *Effective Practice* expresses strategies for particular grounding principles. While we recognize that the work of OWI is constantly evolving as new communication and writing technologies are developed, this statement provides foundational principles that we believe will stand.

Finally, we note that similar effective practices often are necessary to address different OWI Principles. To that end, readers will find some redundancy among Effective Practices and overt connections to various OWI Principles in this document.

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### OWI Principles and Effective Practices

For each of the OWI Principles stated below, the Committee describes a rationale for that principle and provides example Effective Practices that can be adapted to varying institutional contexts. With the exception of the first one, these principles are not presented in order of importance but rather a sequence that addresses pedagogy, institutional level concerns, teacher concerns, and research.

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#### Overarching Principle

#### **OWI Principle 1: Online writing instruction should be universally inclusive and accessible.**

##### **Rationale for OWI Principle 1**

The primary ideas driving the OWI Principles outlined in this document are *inclusivity* and *accessibility*. Hence, OWI Principle 1 supersedes and connects to every principle in this document. In particular, the Committee believes that the needs of learners with physical disabilities, learning disabilities, multilingual backgrounds, and learning challenges related to socioeconomic issues (i.e., often called the *digital divide* where access is the primary issue) must be addressed in an OWI environment to the maximum degree possible for the given institutional setting. Furthermore, given that OWI typically is a text-intensive medium where reading is a necessary skill, addressing the accessibility needs of the least confident readers increases the potential to reach all types of learners.

The CCCC published in 2006 and reaffirmed in 2011 its statement regarding disability issues for educators, staff, and students. This statement recognizes that fully inclusive environments are necessary for the equitable and appropriate teaching of writing at the postsecondary level. The CCCC statement regarding disability issues strongly indicates that a proactive approach to physical and pedagogical access is superior to one that includes “added on” or retrofitted alternatives. It further states that:

Making writing classrooms and curricula inclusive and accessible to those with disabilities means employing flexible and diverse approaches to the teaching of reading and writing to ensure pedagogical as well as physical access; using multiple teaching and learning formats; welcoming students with disabilities in course syllabi; and including disability issues or perspectives in course content and faculty development workshops.

Additionally, this statement specifically addresses electronic environments: “CCCC is committed to accessible online environments, including making the CCCC Website accessible, as well as working to teach others about ways to make their program and course Websites fully inclusive.”

Such inclusivity must be a fundamental part of any initiative that includes OWI, given its inherent connection to technology; patterns of exclusion have too often resulted from an uncritical adoption of digital technology and an indifference to how it could be used by persons with various disabilities and learning challenges. The Committee therefore posits that no statement of OWI principles and practices can be appropriate if it does not fully recognize and accommodate educators and students with varying physical, learning, linguistic, and socioeconomic challenges.

We specifically include multilingual learners who may have a different working knowledge of academic English and/or different cultural backgrounds. The CCCC Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers (2009) advocates that all writing teachers should be prepared to address pedagogically the linguistic and cultural diversity of the multilingual students in their classes.

Thus, both the CCCC Committee for Second Language Writing and Writers (2009) and the CCCC Committee on Disability Issues in College Composition (2011) agree that such teachers’ and writers’ needs must be addressed at all levels of writing courses to include such concerns as content, teacher training, and administrative actions. To this end, the Committee holds that—to the degree possible—all of its OWI Principles and effective practices should adhere to the need for inclusivity and accessibility at all levels of pedagogy, student satisfaction, faculty satisfaction, and administrative concerns, including selection of the technological modality and software for OWI.

Some of the guidelines presented below are adapted from Burgstahler and Cory’s (2008) principles of universal design while others are developed primarily for this document:

- *Equitable use*: The course and its digital designs should be usable by all students and teachers to include those with physical, visual, hearing, learning, attention, and communication differences (inclusive of multilingual students whose first language may or may not be English).
- *Technological equality*: The technology should be financially accessible to all students and teachers in the course.
- *Flexibility in use*: The course and its digital design should accommodate a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.
- *Simple and intuitive use*: Use of the course materials and the digital design should be comprehensible regardless of the user’s experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.
- *Perceptible information*: The course materials and the digital design should communicate necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user’s sensory abilities.

- *Tolerance for technological error:* The course materials and the digital design in particular should minimize the potential for failure based on accidental or unintended actions such as a technological crash. They should, for example, provide automatic protection of data entered and simple means for recovering such data.
- *Tolerance for mechanical error in writing:* Teacher response and assessment of writing should reflect an awareness of the relatively low value to be placed on mechanical and usage errors in student writing particularly for multilingual and physically and learning-challenged writers. Although grammar, mechanics, and usage need to be taught, evaluation should focus primarily on how well ideas are communicated and secondarily on sentence-level errors.
- *Low physical effect:* The OWC's digital design should be usable efficiently, comfortably, and with a minimum of fatigue.
- *Size and space for approach and use:* The physical design of the computer- or other classroom should be of the appropriate size and space for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of the user's body size, posture, or mobility.

We must note that adhering to the principles of universal design “reduces, but does not eliminate, the need for accommodations for students with disabilities” (Burgstahler & Cory, 2008, pp. 24-25). Therefore, there will be times when—regardless of how well prepared an OWI program is for faculty and students with different needs—some accommodations may need to be made (Burgstahler & Cory, 2008).

### Example Effective Practices for OWI Principle 1

**Effective Practice 1.1:** OWI teachers should determine their uses of modality and media based not only on their pedagogical goals but also on their students' likely strengths and access.

**Effective Practice 1.2:** Students should receive mandatory technology orientation sessions in advance of the teaching term, which will assist with providing adequately accessible OWCs. Ideally, these sessions would include opportunities for students to express areas of difficulty that can be addressed prior to the OWC. Such orientation sessions can help both the teacher and college staff to gather information about the needs of their disabled and otherwise challenged students and to find timely and helpful ways to address those needs. Carefully orchestrated orientation sessions also can permit stakeholders to assess students' skills and aptitudes for instructional technology use in distance settings.

**Effective Practice 1.3:** OWI teachers should (1) ask students to confirm that they have the required technology at the beginning of an online writing course (OWC) and advise students regarding how to meet the course requirements through, for example, institutional computing equipment and (2) keep cost in mind when assigning texts (hard copy and digital) and “bundled” supplemental materials, necessary equipment, software, and so on. Doing so will help address inadequate access to classroom materials, which remains an issue, particularly for students from certain socioeconomic backgrounds.

**Effective Practice 1.4:** Teachers should provide students with reasonable alternate means outside the LMS for conferencing or meeting for office hours. Such means include the phone, onsite meetings, or various asynchronous or synchronous online media outside the required LMS (e.g., Oovoo, Skype, and GoogleTalk).

**Effective Practice 1.5:** When teachers create their own Websites for courses, they should first develop these sites with accessibility and inclusivity in mind. Second, they should validate such accessibility and inclusivity through an external evaluation (e.g., those performed by *Bobby* in keeping with the guidelines set by the Center for Applied Special Technology [CAST] and the Web Accessibility Initiative [WAI]).

**Effective Practice 1.6:** Teachers should consider that students may use mobile devices to access the course materials. Therefore, teachers should design the course and course materials according to best design principles that cut across these devices.

**Effective Practice 1.7:** OWI teachers should notice which students participate less fully in online discussions, whether asynchronous or synchronous. Teachers should connect with such students to learn the reason. For instance, poor participators may have weak keyboarding skills that affect their ability to communicate fully or freely. A possible accommodation is to allow slow typists to provide more detailed asynchronous commentary to one or two discussion posts, favoring quality over quantity (especially if written discussion is graded).

**Effective Practice 1.8:** The institution's office of disability services should contact all students as soon as they register to let them know of the availability of their services. We make this recommendation in view of the time involved in preparing accessible materials for disabled students. By the time teachers share their syllabi with students, it is difficult to provide timely academic accommodations to the most disabled and/or challenged students. Without accessible textbooks and other learning materials, these students may fail. We encourage students to be proactive in obtaining academic accommodations, but expecting most undergraduate students to acquire such independence overnight is not realistic. Like their non-disabled peers, students with special needs also experience other pressures and require institutional support for success.

**Effective Practice 1.9:** Teachers must become acquainted with multimodal means for distributing and accessing learning materials. When students request different media, teachers should check with the office of disability services to learn where and how to find these media as well as who is responsible for acquiring it. In choice of media—Braille, large-print, recorded, or electronic texts—students' preferences and previous experience with technologies and learning styles should be honored. All U.S. institutions are required by law to provide material in students' preferred format, and the "reasonable accommodations" argument on the part of colleges has been rejected repeatedly by Federal Courts (Office for Civil Rights, 2010).

**Effective Practice 1.10:** OWI teachers should offer instructional materials in more than one medium. For example, a photograph or other graphic on the course Web space should be described textually. For another example, critical textual material should be described orally using an audio feature. Similarly, a teacher's video should be transcribed or closely paraphrased textually to accommodate a deaf student or one with auditory learning disabilities. Students should have a choice about whether to receive an essay response orally (through digital recording) or textually; alternatively, students might receive one essay response orally and the next one textually. If these practices seem onerous, it is helpful to remember that multimodality assists all learners and not just those with special challenges.

**Effective Practice 1.11:** Institutional administrators should select their LMS for OWI according to its accessibility (e.g., textual, video, and audio functions) to students with the disabilities and other challenges considered in this document.

**Effective Practice 1.12:** Instructors should focus primarily on how well the student is communicating ideas and secondarily on grammatical precision. Mechanical and usage errors are not uncommon for students who grew up speaking non-standard English or who have certain disabilities. While grammar, mechanics, and usage should be taught, they need to be emphasized in a contextual manner consistent with good composition instruction.

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## Instructional Principles

**OWI Principle 2: An online writing course should focus on writing and not on technology orientation or teaching students how to use learning and other technologies.**

### Rationale for OWI Principle 2

Unlike a digital rhetoric course an OWC is not considered to be a place for stretching technological skills as much as for becoming stronger writers in various selected genres. To this end, it is important to recall the access and inclusivity issues found in [OWI Principle 1](#). Students should use the provided technology to support their writing and not the other way around. It must be clear that OWI teachers and students alike do not need to be technology experts, computer programmers, or Web designers to accomplish the instructional purposes of an OWC.

### Example Effective Practices for OWI Principle 2

**Effective Practice 2.1:** The requirement for the institution's initial technology orientation should be handled by the institution's IT unit and not the OWI teacher of any OWC.

**Effective Practice 2.2:** An OWI teacher should not be considered a technology point person to be held responsible for technical assistance or technology repair. Teaching writing is the key work of the OWI teacher. Therefore, reasonable technical assistance should be available to teachers in person (if onsite) and by phone, email, or instant messaging during all instructional hours. In case of technology failure, teachers should have an alternate lesson plan when the technology cannot be fixed on the spot.

**Effective Practice 2.3:** Web-based or Web-focused assignments should be about the rhetorical nature of writing for the Web and not about html coding or Web development. To that end, teachers should use transparent software (e.g., WordPress or Dreamhost) so that students focus on learning composition and not on learning technological platforms or software.

**Effective Practice 2.4:** To maintain the appropriate focus on writing, OWI teachers should be provided professional development in the institution's technologies sufficiently in advance of a scheduled online course. An example would be to provide such professional development at least one term prior to teaching the first OWC.

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### **OWI Principle 3: Appropriate composition teaching/learning strategies should be developed for the unique features of the online instructional environment.**

#### **Rationale for OWI Principle 3**

Some changes in traditional composition pedagogy are necessary for teaching writing in the OWI setting, an environment that is by nature text-centric and reading-heavy and that requires intensive written communication. Educators who develop and teach OWCs should use pedagogical theories and strategies that account for the distinctive nature and opportunities provided by the online setting. New pedagogies should be explored and implemented to leverage the inherent benefits of the electronic environment in relation to composition instruction (e.g., discussion boards and blogs that allow students to exchange thoughtful claims and support in writing or private messaging that allows students to communicate with one's teacher through writing).

OWI-specific pedagogies can address the diverse learning needs of students, who can benefit from the different ways writing can be taught online. Such approaches foster a culture of learning and knowledge creation—rooted in the multimodal online environment—that opens up new opportunities for student thought and expression and prepares students for the 21st-century skills and modalities that will help them thrive as citizens and workers.

#### **Example Effective Practices for OWI Principle 3**

**Effective Practice 3.1:** When text is the primary medium, OWI teachers should use written language that is readable and comprehensible. OWI often uses text alone—through syllabi, instructions, readings, and peer and teacher responses to student writing—to teach writing contexts, skills, and genres. Specifically, written instruction should use straightforward, plain, and linguistically direct rather than indirect language. It should avoid ambiguous rhetorical questions, phrasal verbs, idioms, and metaphorical/figurative language as much as possible (see plainlanguage.gov, 2012; Hewett, 2010).

**Effective Practice 3.2:** Text-based instruction should be supplemented with oral and/or video instruction in keeping with the need for presenting instruction in different and redundant modalities (see [OWI Principle 1](#)). Similarly, when oral and/or video instruction is used primarily, comprehensible text should supplement the instruction.

**Effective Practice 3.3:** Online written instruction should take advantage of the opportunities of the word processing system, text editor, html creator, and the LMS to mirror the types of online writing students most often read. These include:

- Writing shorter, chunky paragraphs
- Using formatting tools wisely to highlight information with adequate white space, colors, and readable fonts
- Providing captioned graphics where useful

- Drawing (when tools allow)
- Striking out words and substituting others to provide clear examples of revision strategies
- Using highlighting strategically

**Effective Practice 3.4:** Teaching in the text-centric OWI environment should be explicit and problem-centered. An example strategy for problem-centered, text-based teaching that uses explicit language is a “four-step intervention process”:

- A. Identify the problem
- B. Explain why it is a problem
- C. Demonstrate how to address (revise) and avoid the problem
- D. Give the student something to do in revision—a way to change the writing and an instruction to try a revision action. (Hewett, 2011, pp. 12-13)

**Effective Practice 3.5:** Text-based teacher response to student writing should be explicit in how to improve the writing, if that is the goal of the response. When there is no face-to-face explanatory opportunity and text is the primary means of teaching the writing, example strategies for intervening in a clearly written, problem-centered manner include:

- Asking open-ended (e.g., wh- [i.e., what, when, where, why, who] and how) questions
- Demonstrating how to do something
- Illustrating by examples, anecdotes, and numbers
- Modeling by writing at the level that is being required of the student
- Providing doable tasks with instructions to try them out
- Explaining terms and actions that might be unclear otherwise (Hewett, 2011, p. 12)

**Effective Practice 3.6:** Online text-based lessons should be supported through redundancy and repetition using the electronic tools and software that are available.

**Effective Practice 3.7:** Teachers should provide students with additional and supportive course materials through hyperlinks, electronic documents, and access to databases.

**Effective Practice 3.8:** From a classroom management perspective, teachers should maximize their use of the online environment for explaining assignments and answering questions, holding small group or whole class meetings, showing examples, responding to student texts, and encouraging student writing in as many forms as may be pertinent to course goals. Students and faculty often use writing to connect for guiding tasks, sharing and critiquing assigned texts or student writing, and evaluative commenting.

**Effective Practice 3.9:** From a writing instructional perspective, teachers should take full advantage of the flexibility of electronic communications in the planning and guiding of projects and activities. The concept of the “classroom” can be expanded productively to include time when students and teacher are not physically present in a room. For example, discussions, collaborative work, research, invention activities, and individual and group instruction and guidance begun in class can continue beyond that point using both asynchronous and synchronous modalities.

**Effective Practice 3.10:** Teachers should moderate online class discussions to develop a collaborative OWC and to ensure participation of all students, the free and productive exchange of ideas, and a constant habit of written expression with a genuine audience. Discussion board facilities in LMSs, blogs, and some social media can host discussions that are integrally part of assigned projects.

**Effective Practice 3.11:** The inherently archival nature of the online environment should be used for learning. To this end, teachers should use the digital setting to encourage students to rhetorically and metacognitively analyze their own learning/writing processes and progress. Such strategies can identify growth areas and points for further assistance. These opportunities make OWI ideal for multiple drafting opportunities and portfolio-based assessment.

**Effective Practice 3.12:** The feedback loop both for essay response and question/issue response as well as the expected timing for these processes should be well-defined in any OWC. Feedback timing is a critical issue in the success of OWI. For example, teachers should indicate to students the timeframe (i.e., number of hours) within which they should expect response to an essay or an email and by when any problem resolution might be expected. Doing so builds appropriate boundaries, trust, and a sense of relationship. Such timeframes might be set by Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) or by teachers as appropriate to the institutional context.

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#### **OWI Principle 4: Appropriate onsite composition theories, pedagogies, and strategies should be migrated and adapted to the online instructional environment.**

##### **Rationale for OWI Principle 4**

[OWI Principle 3](#) explains that those teaching OWCs should think of ways to maximize the distinct opportunities of the electronic environment. However, one impediment to those moving their instruction online is the unfounded belief that *everything* about their teaching will have to change.

Composition studies has a rich research and teaching history, and the Committee recognizes that many core pedagogies of onsite writing instruction can and should remain in OWI. Many pedagogical theories and strategies that have not been designed with OWI in mind can be adapted to the online setting. Indeed, various foundational rhetorical and writing theories and their connected onsite pedagogies and strategies can be migrated online successfully. Teachers should seek opportunities to use their established practices when moving online while seeking alternative ways of offering those practices within digital spaces and using electronic tools.

##### **Example Effective Practices for OWI Principle 4**

**Effective Practice 4.1:** When migrating from onsite modalities to the online environment, teachers should break their assignments, exercises, and activities into smaller units to increase opportunities for interaction between teacher and student and among students using both asynchronous and synchronous modalities.

**Effective Practice 4.2:** Teachers should use known practices for developing knowledge in the online setting. They should employ the interactive potential of digital communications to enable and enact knowledge construction (e.g., group projects and one-on-one teacher-student dialogues).

**Effective Practice 4.3:** Teachers should use universal and time-honored rhetorical theories to emphasize the rhetorical nature of communication through online and Web-based discourse.

**Effective Practice 4.4:** Teachers should engage understood and accepted thinking about communication and interacting in composition courses by employing LMSs and other digital environments to extend the reach of classroom interactions (e.g., reading responses, debates, peer review and editing); to develop rhetorical understanding via online access to real audiences; and to keep students informed of assignments, grades, and policies.

**Effective Practice 4.5:** Teachers should engage learner-centered and writing-intensive pedagogies via electronic means (e.g., collaborative invention and writing, online research, and teacher and peer review of work in progress).

**Effective Practice 4.6:** Teachers should incorporate redundancy (e.g., reminders and repeated information) in the course's organization. Such repetition acts like oral reminders in class.

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### **OWI Principle 5: Online writing teachers should retain reasonable control over their own content and/or techniques for conveying, teaching, and assessing their students' writing in their OWCs.**

#### **Rationale for OWI Principle 5**

Particularly in first-year writing courses, a tension can exist between institutional/programmatic instructional requirements and outcomes and the flexibility that experienced educators need to teach effectively. Within the context of institutional/programmatic outcomes, online writing teachers should have the freedom to develop their OWCs with content, methods, and technologies that best suit their purposes, expertise, and teaching style. Because achieving advanced levels of fluency in writing requires the complex integration of different kinds of skills and knowledge (e.g., rhetorical awareness, linguistic competency, and genre literacy), highly qualified writing teachers not only are "content experts" in rhetorical, linguistic, and genre literacy but also are knowledgeable about composing and assessing learning situations in response to their specific students.

This principle speaks to the larger issue that faces many institutions with vast numbers of OWC writing sections. The pressures of these large programs lead to unified (and often restrictive) course templates and core syllabi and sometimes even more restrictive course shells. These features often are the result of programs that rely heavily on contingent faculty; it is well known that institutions turn to uniformity of method and materials in lieu of hiring, training, and retaining expert, full-time writing teachers.

Online writing teachers do their best work when they retain some control over their courses, and OWI effective practices should be accounted for in helping to balance necessary institutional *pedagogical*

*goals with teacher flexibility.* This recommendation (and every listed effective practice for this principle) strongly relies on teachers having received the training, professional development, and assessment described in [OWI Principle 7](#).

### Example Effective Practices for OWI Principle 5

**Effective Practice 5.1:** Writing program course curriculum guidelines should account for any current or expected OWI. Teachers regularly should be informed of significant changes and relevant updates.

**Effective Practice 5.2:** OWI teachers should have flexibility in making necessary accommodations for students with physical, learning, multilingual, or socioeconomic challenges.

**Effective Practice 5.3:** OWI teachers should have flexibility in choosing the subject matter and focus of the OWC course content.

**Effective Practice 5.4:** OWI teachers should have flexibility in assignment specifics when the genre, length, and subject matter already are selected by the unit.

**Effective Practice 5.5:** OWI teachers should have flexibility in adding relevant support materials to enhance the engagement of students and to keep the course current.

**Effective Practice 5.6:** OWI teachers should have flexibility in engaging individual styles of communication to meet both teachers' and particular students' needs for interpersonal contact.

**Effective Practice 5.7:** OWI teachers should have flexibility in grading or assessment style including whether to grade online discussions and writing drafts formally and whether to use letter, numerical, or portfolio grades.

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**OWI Principle 6: Alternative, self-paced, or experimental OWI models should be subject to the same principles of pedagogical soundness, teacher/designer preparation, and oversight detailed in this document.**

### Rationale for OWI Principle 6

As emergent forms of online teaching increasingly are offered by many colleges and universities, and as these fall outside traditional onsite education models, some credit-bearing, online-supported, composition entities will receive less professional oversight and may fail to offer students adequate preparation for later work. OWCs listed as “self-paced” or “independent learning” frequently have a fixed syllabus that students work through at their own pace, with varying amounts of oversight from an educator, depending on the institution and the individual teacher. These self-paced OWCs are a component of OWI in the sense that they use digital technology, occur in online settings, and typically are geographically distributed. Hence, they are subject to many of the strengths and limitations of online teaching generally; they should reflect the principled approaches of OWI as outlined in this

document. Similarly, experimental models for OWI, such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), are emerging. These, too, should reflect the principled approaches of OWI as described in this document.

### Example Effective Practices for OWI Principle 6

**Effective Practice 6.1:** The WPA should have final approval of alternative, self-paced, or experimental OWI models integrated into the online curriculum.

**Effective Practice 6.2:** The WPA should select OWI-trained teachers for alternative, self-paced, or experimental OWI courses.

**Effective Practice 6.3:** Teachers of alternative, self-paced, or experimental OWI courses should receive the same training, and they should be offered the same professional development as other OWI faculty.

**Effective Practice 6.4:** The alternative, self-paced, or experimental OWI course itself should be observed on a regular basis and judged for the content and quality markers determined by the WPA or unit.

**Effective Practice 6.5:** Alternative, self-paced, or experimental OWI course teachers should be evaluated/assessed by a peer or supervisor who has similar training and equal or superior abilities/experience in writing instruction generally and OWI particularly.

**Effective Practice 6.6:** Alternative, self-paced, or experimental OWI course teacher assessment should be engaged as rigorously as—and not more rigorously than—it would be in a similar traditional onsite course.

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## Faculty Principles

**OWI Principle 7: Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) for OWI programs and their online writing teachers should receive appropriate OWI-focused training, professional development, and assessment for evaluation and promotion purposes.**

### Rationale for OWI Principle 7

This principle establishes an environment in which WPAs and their online writing teachers can develop, thrive, and meet OWI students' needs. Prior to supervising OWI teachers, WPAs need to have training and experience in OWI. Regarding faculty, OWI-teacher candidates should be selected first from a pool of experienced and proven writing teachers. Teachers—especially novice teachers (e.g., graduate student teachers) and contingent faculty—should not be placed into OWCs until they have received appropriate training *by their WPAs and institution*. Although such a requirement places restrictions on the teaching pool, institutions should establish some way of training teachers and having them demonstrate their ability to teach writing online before they do so with an OWC.

WPAs and OWI teachers need proficiency in three specific areas. (1) They must be able to teach writing. (2) They must be able to teach writing specifically in a digital environment. (3) They must be able to teach writing in a course in which text is the primary communicative mode. Similarly, WPAs and OWI teachers need support through regular professional development opportunities and mentoring. As professional knowledge and theories change regarding OWI, active OWI teachers and WPAs who supervise them need to be educated and given opportunities to enact new ideas in their teaching and programs. Additionally, OWI programs and teaching should be assessed regularly and appropriately for the environment and in a manner comparable to traditional courses/writing program in the institution or unit.

### Example Effective Practices for OWI Principle 7

**Effective Practice 7.1:** WPAs who will supervise OWI teachers should receive the same training, professional development, and assessment—as well as practical OWC experience—prior to training and managing OWI teachers.

**Effective Practice 7.2:** Teacher candidates for OWI should first be skilled, experienced teachers of postsecondary writing at the required levels and for the needed genres. Individual writing programs should develop methods, such as reviewing teaching experience and unit-based teacher evaluations, for determining such strengths.

**Effective Practice 7.3:** Teacher candidates for OWI should self-select or otherwise express willingness to teach in an OWI setting. Teachers who are not willing should be given accurate information about the writing program's current and projected future needs for OWI teachers and whether the ability to teach in an OWI setting will have an effect on retention or promotion. Because the institutional needs for increasing OWI course selections must be accounted for, teachers should be encouraged to understand the professional development opportunities and needs for future writing courses (see [OWI Principle 12](#)).

**Effective Practice 7.4:** Given that not all teachers are well-suited to OWI work, those who would do better in traditional settings should be identified and assigned to such settings whenever possible. Where personality or conditions of access, as outlined in [OWI Principle 1](#), indicate a poor match for OWI, such teachers should be accommodated whenever possible.

**Effective Practice 7.5:** Prospective OWI teachers should receive training particular to online teaching and learning, including differences in modalities, logistics, time management, and career choices.

**Effective Practice 7.6:** Prospective OWI teachers should receive OWI-specific training as outlined below:

- Training should include the technological elements of teaching both asynchronously and synchronously using the institution's approved technologies. These elements include online techniques for teaching students to achieve strong writing in a computer-mediated setting. This training should be augmented with knowledge regarding any freeware that the institution approves generally or for OWCs specifically.
- In keeping with [OWI Principle 1](#), training should address issues of accessibility such as how to welcome all students to the course through an inclusive syllabus, how and when

to provide course materials in multiple modalities and formats, and the various technologies useful for connecting with student writers of different backgrounds and physical or learning capabilities.

- Teacher training should occur in the setting (e.g., fully online or hybrid) and modality (e.g., asynchronous or synchronous) and using the media (e.g., text, audio, video) through which the teacher will be expected to perform.
- Teacher training should include individualized instructional and mentoring opportunities that support the teacher's unique capabilities and growth.
- Online writing teachers should be provided with an online network to associate and communicate with other online writing teachers at the institution.

**Effective Practice 7.7:** Novice OWI teachers should be assigned experienced OWI mentors while teaching their first two regular OWCs.

**Effective Practice 7.8:** When possible, institutions/units/writing programs should help teachers to progress into fully online teaching. For example, they may want to assign new OWI teachers to hybrid courses to build practical experience.

**Effective Practice 7.9:** Workshops and/or other in-service training in OWI concepts and techniques should be offered by institutions/units/writing programs on a regular basis and at times that are accessible to teachers. Teachers active in OWI also should receive compensated opportunities for ongoing professional development through such experiences as workshops, conferences, and research.

**Effective Practice 7.10:** The OWC itself should be observed on a regular basis and judged for the content and quality markers determined by the WPA or unit.

**Effective Practice 7.11:** Online writing teachers should be evaluated/assessed by a peer or supervisor who has similar training and equal or superior abilities/experience in writing instruction generally and OWI particularly.

**Effective Practice 7.12:** OWI teacher assessment should occur in the setting and modalities that the teacher uses in the online writing course.

**Effective Practice 7.13:** OWI teacher assessment should be engaged as rigorously as—and not more rigorously than—it would be in a similar traditional onsite course.

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## **OWI Principle 8: Online writing teachers should receive fair and equitable compensation for their work.**

### **Rationale for OWI Principle 8**

The work involved with OWI is new to some institutions and, as such, requires additional effort on the part of WPAs and faculty. At a minimum, the efforts involved in developing and teaching new OWCs should be presumed to represent intellectual and pedagogical labor equivalent to (and no less than)

developing a new onsite writing course. Thus, also at a minimum, the compensation currently in place for teachers concerning the development of a new onsite course also should apply when asking teachers to develop an online course.

Other issues arise in terms of how much time and effort go into OWI-based teaching. For example, new research indicates that there is a quantifiably heavier reading load for teachers particularly in asynchronous settings, as well as a heavier reading and writing load for both teachers and students (Griffin & Minter, 2012). In the online writing setting, teachers need to build informational redundancy into a Web-based, LMS format. In other words, they often need to provide a syllabus in more than one form or in more than one online space. Assignments need to be written and distributed in more than one module or more than one format for ease of finding and retrieval. Furthermore, teachers need to provide content and instructional accessibility through redundant voice, visual, and text-based materials, in keeping with [OWI Principle 1](#).

Altering course materials in these ways requires time and energy as well as thoughtful literacy approaches and knowledgeable language choices. Although some effective practice strategies can help to mitigate time load issues, they may add up for teachers. Therefore, the Committee recommends additional compensation for first-time OWI teachers who are learning how to accommodate such necessary organizational and pedagogical strategies. Compensation in various forms (e.g., pay adjustments, course load modifications, and technology purchases) should be provided.

### Example Effective Practices for OWI Principle 8

**Effective Practice 8.1:** To the extent that developing an online writing program, new OWC, or online writing workshop often requires additional preparatory, individual learning, and instructional time, such developers should receive appropriate compensation.

**Effective Practice 8.2:** First-time OWI teachers should receive appropriate compensation to accommodate learning and putting into practice the exigencies of OWCs.

**Effective Practice 8.3:** Given the principled requirement for training in OWI (see [OWI Principle 7](#)), new OWI teachers in training and their trainers should receive appropriate compensation commensurate with their time and effort.

**Effective Practice 8.4:** Given the principled requirement for training in OWL tutoring (see [OWI Principle 14](#)), new OWL tutors in training and their trainers should receive appropriate compensation commensurate with their time and effort.

**Effective Practice 8.5:** At various times in the institutional or unit teaching cycle, when new OWI courses, revised OWI courses, or new technologies are developed and/or provided, OWI teachers and trainers should receive compensation commensurate with their time and effort.

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**OWI Principle 9: OWCs should be capped responsibly at 20 students per course with 15 being a preferable number.**

### Rationale for OWI Principle 9

The CCCC's *Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing* (1989), regarding the teaching conditions necessary for a quality education, stated that no more than 20 students (and preferably 15) should be in a college-level writing course. Further, it indicated that teachers should have no more than 60 students of writing in any one term. These guidelines were written in 1989 before the major onset of OWCs that continue to increase in number. Teaching writing through digital media is a text-intensive enterprise, even when voice and video are used. Text-heavy writing instruction leads to a high literacy load in terms of reading and writing for teachers and students, as noted in the rationale for OWI Principle 8. Because contemporary writing pedagogy encourages high-quality, individualized teacher-to-student interactions as well as peer reading and written discussion opportunities, the literacy load must be made manageable. Given these realities and the necessity to provide a robustly accessible teaching and learning environment (see [OWI Principle 1](#)), the maximum number of students in an OWC should adhere to these teaching conditions.

Coordinating the statement cited above with the principles of the *CCCC Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers* (2009) and with OWI Principle 1 of this document, any OWC solely comprised of physically-, learning-, linguistically-, or socioeconomically-challenged writing students (i.e., sometimes called "developmental" or "basic" writers) should have no more than 15 students. In such cases, teachers should be assigned a maximum of 45 such writing students per term. The added concerns of assisting students with basic reading and writing skills in a text-intensive online setting requires additional time and especially thoughtful writing on teachers' parts, as well as possible offline phone or in-person interventions. Fifteen students remains a reasonable number in these conditions.

### Example Effective Practices for OWI Principle 9

This OWI Principle stands without example effective practices as the Principle itself clearly articulates effective practice in this area.

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## Institutional Principles

**OWI Principle 10: Students should be prepared by the institution and their teachers for the unique technological and pedagogical components of OWI.**

### Rationale for OWI Principle 10

Adequate preparation is another issue of access, enabling students to succeed in a different learning environment by assisting them with technological and cognitive challenges. Any individual online course should include some form of orientation for students. Sometimes such orientation is left to general technology or advising units and is not provided within each course. Having been appropriately oriented to the institution's LMS (in keeping with [Effective Practice 2.1](#)), for example, students still need to understand what the OWC will be like. For this understanding, they need formal preparation particular to learning writing online. For instance, unlike some online courses, an OWC is not a self-paced or

individually managed course in that regular and frequent student-to-group and student-to-teacher interactions are necessary within a well-defined time frame.

To this end, a clear OWI-orientation program should be provided at the institutional or unit level such that students are made aware of the unique requirements and technological opportunities of the OWC. Whether an institutional or unit trainer prepares and delivers such orientation, teachers should be primed to support and/or repeat elements of that training in the OWC to assist with student success. Neither institutional/unit administrators nor teachers should assume that because many students are frequent technology users, they will be successful with OWI. Indeed, the kind of online communicating that tech-savvy students do in their personal lives often is fast, frequent, and informal, which typically is not the kind of communicating they will need to do regularly to be successful in OWCs.

### Example Effective Practices for OWI Principle 10

**Effective Practice 10.1:** Appropriate OWI preparation should begin with interface familiarization and experiential exercises that make clear the public (i.e., communication to/from the teacher and among all students in the course) and private (i.e., communication between the teacher and individual student) spaces. Students need to be introduced to the writing-course specific uses of the LMS. At a minimum, students need to know where to access their assignments and readings, where to post and retrieve formal writing, where to meet and write publicly with peers, and where to communicate privately with the teacher and peers.

**Effective Practice 10.2:** Preparation for OWI should include specific lessons and examples regarding the study habits and skills (e.g., time management, self-motivation, and organization) students will need prior to taking an OWC. Optimally, the teacher should be a part of this process. Specifics may include such factors as the time needed to draft and redraft an essay and how that affects timing for sharing the draft online with peer group members, for example.

**Effective Practice 10.3:** Institutions offering OWCs should create resources for students *before the course is taught for the first time* to help students gain an understanding of the differences between writing in a traditional setting and in their specific online learning setting.

**Effective Practice 10.4:** Following from [OWI Principle 2](#), the institution should provide 24/7, accessible technical support for any LMS or other approved software or technology used for meeting with or participating in the OWC. Teachers should not be considered the primary IT expert for the OWC.

**Effective Practice 10.5:** Teachers should conduct trial runs prior to the term with the enrolled students to create comfort with the environment among the students.

**Effective Practice 10.6:** Students should receive accessible back-up plans for when technology fails, either on their end or the institution's end.

**Effective Practice 10.7:** In most cases, teachers should make use of the institutionally approved software and/or LMS on which students are prepared for the OWC. Although composition teachers may desire to bring additional, often free, software into the OWC, they should: (1) have a clear pedagogical rationale for doing so; (2) have appropriate permission to do so; (3) make

sure that it is accessible to all students; and (4) prepare students adequately for the change and/or addition to the LMS.

**Effective Practice 10.8:** Students should be apprised of the time teachers will require for formal or informal conferences with teachers. Typically, OWC students should meet teachers in digital or technology-assisted media (e.g., phone or Skype) in keeping with the nature of the course although they may request a phone (if desired) or onsite (if feasible) conference with the teacher.

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### **OWI Principle 11: Online writing teachers and their institutions should develop personalized and interpersonal online communities to foster student success.**

#### **Rationale for OWI Principle 11**

Students' motivation as learners often is improved by a sense of interpersonal connectedness to others within a course. Composition teachers long have practiced pedagogy of collaboration and individualization in which students are encouraged to see themselves as connected to their peers while being unique writers. It is believed generally that such writing courses inspire student success and satisfaction.

To that end, student investment is thought to be fostered when OWCs create community among teachers and students. Developing community is driven both by the institution and faculty interaction with students. Institutions not only must be committed to students and the delivery of highest quality OWI, but such a commitment should be communicated clearly by institutional leadership. It also should be fostered by an instructional practice of ongoing, student-centered evaluation of course work and learning.

#### **Example Effective Practices for OWI Principle 11**

**Effective Practice 11.1:** OWCs should have no more than 20 registered students (see [OWI Principle 9](#)). Online environments have built-in community meeting spaces. However, classes larger than 20 make it difficult for students to know each other and each other's writing, which often requires written personal attention to a large number of peer discourse opportunities. Furthermore, larger classes make personalized connections between teacher and students and among students and peers difficult.

**Effective Practice 11.2:** OWC teachers should develop course community early by employing "icebreakers" and other activities that make use of the LMS and that engage student writing.

**Effective Practice 11.3:** Instructors should set expectations about course objectives, assignments, and learning by communicating with students one-to-one and as a group, regularly and systematically, using both asynchronous and synchronous modalities.

**Effective Practice 11.4:** As with any composition course, teachers should respond to students' formal projects in a timely manner that has been outlined clearly for students (see [Effective](#)

[Practice 3.12](#)). Particular to OWI, however, they should employ the kinds of strategies suggested in [Effective Practice 3.3](#) and [Effective Practice 3.4](#), and take advantage of the unique opportunities of the online environment as described in [Effective Practice 3.2](#).

**Effective Practice 11.5:** Informal student writing integrated in the course (e.g., asynchronous discussions, blogs, reading responses) should use the technological opportunities that most likely will elicit meaningful responses among class participants.

**Effective Practice 11.6:** Teachers should seek regular, course-specific feedback on OWI course implementation and activities, instructional goals, and performance. Such meta-feedback should make use of private communication venues within the LMS in order to develop the interpersonal relationship between teacher and student. When possible, for student comfort, such feedback should be collected anonymously and implemented publicly.

**Effective Practice 11.7:** Teachers should develop forums, threads, and assessments in which students can have open discussions, either with or without teacher involvement, about course dynamics. Not only does the OWC provide a place for course-specific self-reflection, it can also provide an ideal setting for more broadly evaluating the nature of student learning such as online modalities for writing, the effectiveness of the LMS, and the like. If students are given opportunities to express their experiences and to vent their frustrations, perhaps in threads like “Lounge” or “Comments about our learning platform” or in an anonymous midterm course evaluation, that might engender a greater willingness to persevere in a new or different learning setting. Additionally, such communications enable OWI teachers to make adjustments and provide feedback to their administrators.

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## **OWI Principle 12: Institutions should foster teacher satisfaction in online writing courses as rigorously as they do for student and programmatic success.**

### **Rationale for OWI Principle 12**

Teacher satisfaction in an OWI environment is critical. Many teachers learned their craft in traditional, onsite settings, so they may experience anxiety and/or dissatisfaction in this newer educational setting. Teacher satisfaction is dependent on a number of affective factors, including being personally suited to teaching online and being comfortable communicating with students using digital/electronic means.

Teachers should be helped to understand the relative advantages and disadvantages of teaching an OWC in their institution, which includes such pedagogical factors as understanding how communication in the OWC environment differs and learning the benefits and challenges of the asynchronous and the synchronous modalities. Developing that understanding includes clearly describing any employment conditions specific to teaching an OWC course in the institution such as onsite and/or online office requirements; whether teaching an online course is understood to be equal in time or weight to a traditional onsite course; and how teaching an OWC is assessed for job retention, promotion, and tenure.

Time is a particularly sensitive issue for teachers, onsite as well as online. However, a standing misconception is that teaching and learning in an online environment is less time-intensive than teaching on campus because the teaching and learning often can be accomplished asynchronously and at one's own convenience. Research consistently has indicated that teaching online can be more time-intensive (Allen & Seaman, 2010; Seaman, 2009; Worley and Tesdell, 2009) because most communications and interactions (e.g., instruction, assignments, questions, answers, and grades) in OWCs are fully online. Teaching writing online involves focused teacher responses that are crafted to specific student compositions. Unlike what people might imagine can be done in other disciplines, most of these communications cannot be automated; there is no "leveraging" or "scalability" of these essentially unique interactions (as compared to, for example, providing the same content video to hundreds, if not thousands, of students). To that end, concerns about time management can be an issue that contributes to teacher dissatisfaction.

With their individual habits, logistics, time management, and personal career issues, teachers who are more suited to online modalities can engage the students and invest them in their own learning online, all of which contribute to teacher satisfaction.

### Example Effective Practices for OWI Principle 12

**Effective Practice 12.1:** Teachers should have the choice of whether to teach in an OWI-based or traditional setting. Institutions should allow for teachers' preference for teaching in onsite, hybrid, or fully online courses and settings.

**Effective Practice 12.2:** WPAs should provide adequate training and professional development to all OWI teachers prior to their first OWC teaching experience. (See [OWI Principle 7](#) for more specifics of this practice.)

**Effective Practice 12.3:** Employment requirements for teaching writing online should be stated clearly when new teachers are hired. Changing requirements should be communicated to all teachers as soon as possible. Individual teachers should have adequate opportunity to discuss with the WPA how any changes relative to OWI may affect their careers.

**Effective Practice 12.4:** All teachers who do or who might teach using OWI should be educated about the relative benefits and challenges of teaching an OWC in their institutional context, such as:

- Time required to conduct "in-class activities" when meeting both asynchronously and synchronously.
- Time required for assessment of student writing (e.g., traditional essays, other writing, and asynchronous discussions) regardless of genre (i.e., formal or informal), modality (i.e., asynchronous or synchronous), or media (i.e., text-based or voice/video).
- Time required for "office hours" and information about whether these are to be met online, onsite, or both.
- Time required for formal or informal conferences with students. Typically, OWC teachers should meet students using digital or technology-assisted media (e.g., phone or Skype) in keeping with the nature of the course, although students may request a face-to-face conference with the teacher. Such requests should be accommodated when feasible.

- Whether teaching an OWC is understood to be equal in time or weight to a traditional onsite course.
- How teaching OWCs are assessed for job retention, promotion, and tenure.
- To what degree the institution will be increasing its OWCs and, therefore, its need for more online writing teachers.

**Effective Practice 12.5:** All teachers who teach or who might teach through OWI should be provided professional OWI-focused materials and encouraged strongly to study these materials prior to and during training and/or teaching in the OWI setting.

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**OWI Principle 13: OWI students should be provided support components through online/digital media as a primary resource; they should have access to onsite support components as a secondary set of resources.**

### **Rationale for OWI Principle 13**

Writing instruction that is conducted online requires online support systems. Such support should take the form of online writing labs (OWLs; also known as online writing centers) as well as online libraries, online accessible information technology (IT) support, and distance-based student counseling. Such reinforcing programs provide student access to the same support components that students in traditional, onsite courses receive. This issue is one of access and inclusivity (see [OWI Principle 1](#)), but it also is one of enabling students to use the digital educational environment more fully (see [OWI Principle 10](#)). When students are in a “learn-anytime” environment, they should have broad access to support services.

OWLs, for example, support the process-oriented elements of writing as well as its social nature. As do brick-and-mortar writing centers, OWLs foster one-to-one relationships between tutors and writers and provide tailored feedback and assistance to students as a complement to in-class, faculty-led instruction. Tailored, personalized feedback from peer or professional tutors can afford invaluable learning opportunities for student writers. With institutional and faculty support, students must be prepared to use OWLs as sites of interaction and dialogue and not as linear “drop-off” points to “fix” papers. OWLs can further benefit OWI students by strategically modeling asynchronous or synchronous interactions within the writing process.

### **Example Effective Practices for OWI Principle 13**

**Effective Practice 13.1:** At all institutions where OWI is practiced—whether or not an onsite writing center is available—an OWL should be developed and provided to OWI students. Like the traditional writing center instruction that uses a one-to-one model and oral discussion between the student and the tutor, OWL feedback uses a one-to-one model and interpersonal connections to address students within the online environment. Fundamentally, an OWL is capable of providing appropriate support to OWC students. As such, an OWL’s work should be understood as a dialogue-intensive exchange in which the tutor uses questions to engage the student and to interact with the text.

**Effective Practice 13.2:** OWL support should match the course modality and media. For instance, if the course is asynchronous, then asynchronous tutoring should be available. If the course is synchronous through voice and video, then the online tutor should be available synchronously through voice and video. For hybrid courses, both a traditional onsite writing center and an OWL should be available. Whenever possible, asynchronous and synchronous online tutorial support should be available to all online writing students, in keeping with an accessible OWI program (see [OWI Principle 1](#)).

**Effective Practice 13.3:** OWI teachers should teach their students how to use the OWL, how to read and interpret any textual feedback or advice, and how to make decisions about the uses of that feedback in their writing. Example strategies for accomplishing these goals include the following:

- Students should be disabused of the belief that OWLs are editing services where they can send their papers to be “fixed” and returned immediately. To this end, teacher instruction should include the fact that OWLs are teaching facilities and that using OWLs takes time, energy, discipline, and commitment on the part of the student.
- Teachers might ask students to make an appointment with a tutor at the OWL to work on an early draft of their essay. This guidance may help OWL tutors to set expectations with students and begin developing an ongoing relationship with them.
- In asynchronous, synchronous, and hybrid OWCs, students can work with an online tutor in the “pre-writing” and drafting stages of writing either asynchronously, synchronously, or both, respective of their OWC modality. Students can then submit archives of those initial synchronous discussions with the final draft of their essay/writing piece to the teachers as a longitudinal record. To underscore their learning, students might be asked to write metacognitively about why and how they chose to use certain feedback.
- To encourage online interaction with students, asynchronous OWLs may provide both detailed expectations of online tutoring (i.e., copied and pasted from a standard statement and then individualized) and an initial response for the student. They might require the student to respond to the tutor’s initial response before getting more feedback. This asynchronous exchange of text would be intended to encourage more robust conversation.

**Effective Practice 13.4:** Teachers should communicate with the institution’s OWL, providing valuable information about course assignments and writing expectations to be shared with the tutors.

**Effective Practice 13.5:** To encourage adequate online engagement with students, OWLs should have access to as many of the latest technologies as possible, including online interactive media, live chat, and mobile device applications.

**Effective Practice 13.6:** If both asynchronous and synchronous modalities are offered in the OWL, tutors and students should be led to use the modality most suited to their tutorial goals and particular needs. For example, asynchronous tutoring may work best with receiving both global and local response to a draft, while synchronous tutoring may work best with brainstorming an idea or working intensively with one of the student’s chosen concerns (e.g., thesis, introduction, and outline of arguments).

**Effective Practice 13.7:** Writing centers should continue to explore ways to engage students online, finding new means to interact with students and their texts as technology continues to provide new opportunities.

**Effective Practice 13.8:** OWI students should have equal access to institutional library resources. Online access to journal articles and books should be a priority; in its absence, a rapid-delivery system for copied journal articles and for borrowing books should be made available to students.

**Effective Practice 13.9:** OWI students should have online and phone access to institutional IT assistance with broad access. It is reasonable for the anytime learner to expect 24/7 access to accommodate the time flexible learning schedules made available by online courses.

**Effective Practice 13.10:** OWI students should have equal access to the institution's full array of counseling. It is reasonable for the anytime learner to expect 24/7 access to accommodate the time flexible learning schedules made available by online courses.

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### **OWI Principle 14: Online writing lab administrators and tutors should undergo selection, training, and ongoing professional development activities that match the environment in which they will work.**

#### **Rationale for OWI Principle 14**

As it is with writing instructors, tutor (peer or professional) training and ongoing professional development are paramount. Such training and orientation must address the distinctive nature of online writing tutoring in asynchronous and synchronous venues.

The OWL coordinator should be well-versed in both traditional writing center and OWL pedagogy and theory. This individual should be experienced with the environments and modalities in which the tutoring occurs. To this end, the coordinator should select online tutors for their (1) writing tutoring potential and/or experience; (2) strengths in expressing writing instruction *in writing*; and (3) comfort level with online technologies, which can be developed further in training. For OWL tutors to model technology use for students, it is crucial that they be trained through and with the settings, modalities, media, and technologies in which they will tutor. Further, they should receive individualized mentoring as well as any group training. All tutors should be trained to interact with students using diverse media—print and electronic text, audio, and video—and they should be prepared to work with students with diverse abilities and learning styles, in line with [OWI Principle 1](#).

The OWL's commitment to screening, training, and professional development will yield higher quality tutorial sessions that ultimately benefit all students. For peer and professional tutors alike, such commitment ultimately will refine and hone their practice and understanding of OWL tutoring.

#### **Example Effective Practices for OWI Principle 14**

**Effective Practice 14.1:** OWL administrators who will supervise OWL tutors should receive the same training, professional development, and assessment—as well as practical OWL experience—prior to training and managing OWL tutors.

**Effective Practice 14.2:** To assess an individual’s ability to work within the OWL environment, OWL administrators should develop role-play screening exercises that reflect the actual conferences that tutors will have with students.

- One example scenario is, with minimal direction, to have applicants critique a writing sample as if they were writing directly to the student, which tests an individual’s intuitive orientation to the pedagogy of a given OWL.
- Another example scenario is to ask applicants to explain orally what they see in the writing and then ask them to write their observations and advice in a manner comprehensible to typical students and to students with special needs and challenges. Training later can address specific strategies.

**Effective Practice 14.3:** As [Effective Practice 3.1](#) indicates for OWI itself, tutoring in an OWI setting often uses text alone in the response/feedback to the writing. Hence, OWL tutors require equally strong practices, and they should use written language that is readable and comprehensible to all students without audio-enhanced or body-language-based explanation. Specifically, written instruction should use straightforward, plain, and linguistically direct rather than indirect language. It should avoid ambiguous rhetorical questions, phrasal verbs, idioms, and figurative language as much as possible.

**Effective Practice 14.4:** As [Effective Practice 3.3](#) indicates for OWI itself, online written tutoring should take advantage of the opportunities of the word processing system, text editor, html creator, and the LMS to mirror the types of online writing students most often read. These include:

- Writing shorter, chunky paragraphs
- Using formatting tools wisely to highlight information with adequate white space, colors, and readable fonts
- Providing captioned graphics where useful
- Drawing (when tools allow)
- Striking out words and substituting others to provide clear examples of revision strategies
- Using highlighting strategically

**Effective Practice 14.5:** As [Effective Practice 3.4](#) indicates for OWI itself, tutoring in the text-centric OWI environment should be explicit and problem-centered. An example strategy for problem-centered, text-based tutoring that uses explicit language is a “four-step intervention process”:

- A. Identify the problem;
- B. Explain why it is a problem;
- C. Demonstrate how to address (revise) and avoid the problem, and
- D. Give the student something to do in revision—a way to change the writing and an instruction to try a revision action.

**Effective Practice 14.6:** As [Effective Practice 3.3](#) and [Effective Practice 3.5](#) indicate for OWI itself, text-based tutor response to student writing should be explicit in how to improve the writing, if that is the goal of the response. When there is no face-to-face explanatory opportunity and text is the primary means of tutoring, example strategies for intervening in a clearly written, problem-centered manner include:

- Asking open-ended (e.g., wh- [i.e., what, when, where, why, who] and how) questions
- Demonstrating how to do something
- Illustrating by examples, anecdotes, and numbers
- Modeling by writing at the level that is being required of the student
- Explaining terms and actions that might be unclear otherwise
- Providing doable tasks with instructions to try them out

**Effective Practice 14.7:** As [Effective Practice 7.5](#) indicates for OWI itself, tutor technology training should occur using the actual technology platform the tutors will use with students.

**Effective Practice 14.8:** As [Effective Practice 7.6](#) indicates for OWI itself, tutor pedagogy training should occur using the actual technology platform that tutors will use with students.

**Effective Practice 14.9:** Tutor training should be grounded in practical role-play exercises that hone an individual's subject-area expertise and, more importantly, the ability to tutor writing online. Specifically, useful pedagogy training should ask OWL trainees to complete asynchronous and synchronous simulations with the goal of developing personal skill and comfort.

**Effective Practice 14.10:** Tutor trainees should be paired with veteran OWL tutors who can offer asynchronous and synchronous mentoring and commentary on their performance.

**Effective Practice 14.11:** Both tutor trainees and experienced tutors should be given multiple opportunities for self-reflection about their OWL tutoring practices.

**Effective Practice 14.12:** As [Effective Practice 7.6](#) indicates for OWI itself, both during and after training, tutors should have access to an online network (e.g., listservs, email distribution lists, or social networking pages) of fellow tutors with whom they can associate for support and professional development.

**Effective Practice 14.13:** OWL administrators and tutors alike should receive compensated opportunities for ongoing professional development through such venues as workshops, conferences, and research.

**Effective Practice 14.14:** OWL tutor assessment should be engaged as rigorously as—and not more rigorously than—it would be in a similar traditional onsite writing center.

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[Research and Exploration](#)

**OWI Principle 15: OWI/OWL administrators and teachers/tutors should be committed to ongoing research into their programs and courses as well as the very principles in this document.**

**Rationale for OWI Principle 15**

Emerging from the Committee's work is a repeatedly articulated need for professional development in the area of OWI and OWLs (see [OWI Principle 12](#) and [OWI Principle 14](#)). To be sure, there is urgent need to educate the writing community on OWI and OWLs and to help direct the teaching and learning of our students with what is known about state of the art and effective practices. Advances in OWI and OWLs should be grounded in valid and reliable research findings and systematic information dissemination. OWI and OWLs are particularly well positioned as sites of ongoing research in that almost all interactions are saved and archived (e.g., via email, platform communication, online group discussion, writing revisions), enabling empirical analysis.

Therefore, to bolster the theoretical and pedagogical frameworks for OWI and OWLs, OWI and OWL administrators and teachers/tutors alike should be committed to ongoing research of their courses, students, and programs. Such research should draw directly from these courses, students, and programs when appropriate. Such pedagogically driven research must be validated both by the scholarly community and administrators in composition studies. Empirical, repeatable, and longitudinal research that addresses questions regarding the phenomena of OWI and OWLs will drive a deeper understanding of OWI and OWLs, ultimately benefiting students and the teaching and learning of writing in online contexts. Both qualitative and quantitative methodological designs can be employed to address key questions surrounding OWI and OWL outcomes, processes, and participant perspectives.

**Example Effective Practices for OWI Principle 15**

**Effective Practice 15.1:** Qualitative studies that investigate the processes of asynchronous and/or synchronous OWI or OWL interactions should be designed and deployed. Such studies might explore student and teacher/tutor behaviors, actions, and relationships within the context of the actual exchanges. Studies might examine participant perceptions of OWI or OWLs (e.g., benefits, challenges, experiences) via interviews with students, teachers/tutors, and administrators.

**Effective Practice 15.2:** Quantitative studies that investigate student performance in terms of learning outcomes or benchmarks, grades, and course retention should be designed and deployed. From an administrative perspective, return on investment studies also can be deployed to help understand the financial impact (and potential benefits and challenges) of OWI or of an OWL to institutions.

**Effective Practice 15.3:** Where possible, longitudinal research should be designed and institutionally funded to understand the differing complexities of learning to read and write in digital, online, and distributed online educational settings.

**Effective Practice 15.4:** OWI and OWL administrators and teachers/tutors should engage actively in the scholarly conversation by sharing research findings at regional and national conferences and through peer-reviewed journals and other academic publications.

**Effective Practice 15.5:** OWI and OWL administrators and teachers/tutors should share research findings with the general public in suitable venues to assist with setting appropriate expectations for and understanding of OWI and OWLs.

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### Conclusion

The Committee intends to continue its work with identifying OWI Principles and Effective Practices for OWI as a means of validating this document. Additionally, we will work to present example effective practices using various media for the Web that will be accessible to CCCC members, WPAs, writing teachers, and writing tutors nationwide.

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## Appendix A

### Definitions and Acronyms

Following are key definitions and how they are used in the specific context of OWI for the purposes of this document.

- **Accessible:** An information technology system that is accessible is one that can be operated in a variety of ways and does not rely on a user's single sense or ability. For example, a system that provides output only in visual format may not be accessible to people with visual impairments, and a system that provides output only in audio format may not be accessible to people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Some individuals with physical and/or learning disabilities may need accessibility-related software or peripheral devices in order to use systems that comply with Section 508 (Guide to Disability Rights Laws). For the purposes of this document, accessibility issues also include those that affect multilingual writers and writers with socioeconomic inequality for whom literal access to technology has or can be problematic.
- **Assistive technology or devices:** Assistive technology is "any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities" (29 U.S.C. Sec 2202[2]). Examples include screen reader software, screen magnifiers, adapted keyboard and alternative input/ output devices, mobility devices, assistive hearing devices, and can include learning software, among many other things.
- **Asynchronous:** Referring to a learning modality that permits participants to communicate over flexible time periods; typically, there is a significant time lag (non-real-time) between and among interactions. Most often, asynchronous interactions occur through text although one-way voice and video communications also can be asynchronous.
- **Digital environment:** A learning setting that is computer-based or that uses other integrated technologies that can be accessed anywhere and anytime.
- **Disability:** According to the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), "the term 'disability' means an individual has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of his/her major life activities or there is a record of such an impairment or an individual is regarded as having such an impairment." Caused by injury, disease or medical condition, or neurological, chemical, or developmental factors, severe disabilities affect about 12% of the U.S. population.
- **Distributed environment:** A learning setting that is linked through a computer network while being geographically dispersed.
- **Fully online:** Any writing course that meets in a completely online-based setting through computer mediation with no scheduled face-to-face interactions among or between students and faculty.
- **Hybrid:** Sometimes called "blended," any writing course that meets in both a distance-based or computer-mediated setting and in a traditional onsite classroom.
- **Learning Management System (LMS):** Also known as a "Course Management System" (CMS). Some of the most common examples are Blackboard, Moodle, Angel, and Sakai. These are online sites that house the course's content and facilitate communication among teacher and students.
- **Massive Open Online Course (MOOC):** Also known as scalable online educational experience (SOE<sup>2</sup>). College classes that are (1) extremely large with as many as 50,000 or more participants, (2) open access to all who can pay when they are not free, (3) online with potential for both

asynchronous and synchronous components, and (4) courses that enable various set-ups such as credit, noncredit, drop-in, or enrolled participants.

- **Multimodal:** Strategically using modes of communication beyond traditional alphabetic text, for example, still image, motion video, and sound.
- **Online environment:** A learning setting that is Internet-based (e.g., through the World Wide Web) or Intranet-based (e.g., through a common server).
- **Online:** Referring to any communication or activity, such as instruction, that is mediated by digital, Internet-connected technologies. In most contexts, the word *online* refers to text-based technologies (e.g., discussion boards, emails, blogs, chat), but it also can refer to other media, such as audio (e.g., podcasts) and video (e.g., video presentations, live video meetings).
- **OWC:** Online writing course.
- **OWI:** Online writing instruction.
- **OWL:** Online writing lab or online writing center
- **Synchronous:** Referring to a learning modality that permits participants to communicate in real time or nearly in real time. Many real-time synchronous interactions occur through two-way voice or voice and video. Many near-real-time synchronous interactions transpire using text in a chat-based scenario.