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**Writing in a Secondary English Classroom Using Online Tools to Enhance Engagement
and Creativity**

by

Ashley Pingree

A thesis

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Abstract

Teaching in a digital world, an online world, became a reality for many teachers during the spring of 2020. Teachers were thrust into online learning settings, feeling overwhelmed and underprepared. However, the experience showed teachers how engaging online tools can be to students, especially when writing. To engage students and increase their creativity, I created and implemented a three-week unit using online editing tools, blogging, and podcasting. Students then took a survey to see the benefits and engagement the unit created. Overall, the unit engaged students by piquing their interest and improved their writing abilities through writing smooth sentences, creating an outline/rough draft before writing, and noticing simple sentence errors.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Being a teacher has never been a simple job. Teaching comes with many challenges, as most people find during their first year. However, each teacher was thrown for a loop when Covid-19 hit the United States, and schools were forced to online learning. Two years after online schooling, teachers shudder at the thought of conducting class through Google Meets and grading assignments solely on the computer. However, teaching online brought forth a question I struggled with: How can I encourage and engage my students as writers online? This question, created from months of online learning with high school students, brought me to my research question: Can a unit utilizing online tools increase student engagement and encourage students to become better writers?

As schools transitioned back to in-person learning, I realized this question remained with me. My students, post-online schooling, were still attracted to anything dealing with their computers and phones. While a screen no longer separated my students and me, I still felt a disconnect because of their attraction to technology. I especially struggled while teaching my students to write.

Writing, as teaching, was not an easy feat for any student. Some students felt more comfortable writing; others struggled through the entire process. However, what I found in my seven years of high school teaching is that the biggest struggle with writing is engaging students and encouraging them to write in an academic way. As a teacher, I questioned how to connect and engage my students to their writing while encouraging them to enhance necessary writing skills. Because of the interest and connection computers and phones create with students and the

amount of writing students produce on these tools, I wanted to utilize that interest and work from there.

However, students write with technology often, and the lack of engagement and connection exists still. In the article “The Impact of Digital Tools on Student Writing and How Writing is Taught in Schools” discusses teacher opinions surrounding technology and writing (Purcell et al. 2). Purcell and others argue, because of the immense use of technology by students, teachers believe students struggle to differentiate between a formal and informal voice, struggle to identify different audiences, and struggle to look at technology as a tool, not a toy (2).

Not only do students struggle with technology affecting their writing, teachers feel overwhelmed by the amount of technology available to them. Keith Heggart and Joanne Yoo claim in “Getting the Most from Google Classroom: A Pedagogical Framework for Tertiary Educators,” “The profusion of terminology means that it is difficult for educators to identify best practice, and hence, the use of technology has not proved to be unequivocally successful” (141). While new and engaging technology creates excitement, teachers struggle because the options are endless. However, I wanted to create a writing unit centering around using online tools and creative online outlets to engage writers and encourage academic writing because of my experience with online learning; I felt my students could have improved their writing skills more during online learning. Without proper preparation, the opportunity of learning online and utilizing online tools was wasted, but the experience inspired the unit I created. The questions from my teaching during Covid, the experiences teaching post-Covid, the lack of interest in writing from my students, and the amount of online tools available to teachers lead me to create a writing unit centering around online tools.

The unit created intends to engage students as writers and encourage use of academic writing skills, such as correct grammar and punctuation and clear sentence structures. Students create writing in an informal setting, allowing their engagement to increase and creativity to rise while still implementing good writing skills. Each activity connects to a different online tool, allowing for interest from students and a clear path for teachers. A unit involving online tools, such as Google and Hemingway, encourages students to write in an academic form. Students implement academic skills while utilizing their creativity and encouraging engagement through blog writing and podcast development. Utilizing online tools in a specific, intentional format increases student engagement in their writing and increases student overall writing abilities.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Teaching Writing at a Secondary Level with Technology

No student holds a future without writing. Some students will convince themselves they will not need to write in their future, but they will. In today's culture, writing is of the utmost importance. People write emails to employers and employees, people write statuses and captions to enhance their social media, and people write to their loved ones and friends through text messages. Everyone uses writing on a daily basis, whether a student believes it or not. When teaching writing at a secondary level, teachers need to show the importance of writing. According to Kristen Purcell and others in "The Impact of Digital Tools on Student Writing and How Writing is Taught in Schools," most teachers believe academic writing and writing effectively are required skills for student's futures. However, teaching writing is complicated for many reasons (6).

Engagement from students causes issues between teachers and learners. According to Hillcocks in *Teaching Writing Using Blogs, Wikis, and other Digital Tools*, students create less engagement in writing when they see little value in writing a five-paragraph essay or for a standardized test (qtd. in Beach et al. 5). *Teaching Writing Using Blogs, Wikis, and other Digital Tools* argues students engage in their writing when they are given freedom to research and understand a topic and when the audience goes beyond a teacher (Beach et al. 13-14). When students engage in their writing, "Students are more likely to improve their writing when they learn to self-assess and revise their writing with appropriate reader-response and feedback" (Beach et al. 5). Inserting digital tools into a classroom encourages students to engage in their writing, which ultimately improves their writing.

Amalia and others in “Teaching writing to junior high school students: A focus on challenges and solutions” claims, “Writing can help students to develop their social skills and promote their critical thinking. It encourages students to think critically in the process of giving argument and judgment. Therefore, writing is pivotal to be taught to students” (795). Not only will every student utilize writing in their future, but writing helps students to process their thoughts and encourage thinking outside of the box.

Writing, especially online, encourages students to work collaboratively. Nikolay Slavkov in “Sociocultural Theory, the L2 Writing Process, and Google Drive: Strange Bedfellows?” states, writing “... often involves pair or small group work with collaborative prewriting activities, feedback on different drafts, revisions, sharing of texts that are in progress or completed...” (82). Writing allows for students to enhance their collaboration skills and improve their own editing abilities. In a classroom using Google, the peer editing and collaboration process is especially simple, as peers can share their writings with others and edit in real time, working on the same document simultaneously (Slavkov 83).

While writing is an essential skill for student’s futures and technology can enhance student skills, struggles appear. Kristen Purcell and others claim in their article “The Impact of Digital Tools on Student Writing and How Writing is Taught in Schools” that most students write carelessly when using technology, using poor grammar and inadequate spelling (3). Teachers also believe students are more likely to take shortcuts in their writing with technology (Purcell et al. 3). The research on implementing technology in the classroom with writing is mixed. Research claims writing is a necessary skill, and writing is enhanced when using technology; however, technology can create poor, lazy habits in writers.

Google in the Secondary Classroom

Google has become a large asset to secondary schools, especially during the writing process. English and language teachers utilize this tool in many different ways to assist writing. However, Heggart and Yoo in “Getting the Most from Google Classroom: A Pedagogical Framework for Tertiary Educators” claim the immense amount of options creates difficulty for teachers when implementing technology in their classroom; therefore, many teachers struggle using technology (141).

However, technology encourages engagement from students and encourages new skills to be developed. Gregory Francom and others in “Comparing Google Classroom and D2L Brightspace Using the Technology Acceptance Model” state using technology with helpful tools and features encourages student productivity (114). Technology tools can be especially helpful if students are able to utilize them inside and outside the classroom (Francom et al. 115).

One of the most helpful ways to implement Google in the classroom is through collaboration. Writing and editing are collaborative processes, and Google allows for that to be done easily. “Teaching Writing with Google Classroom” suggests, in peer editing sessions, students are able to share their Google doc with peers. Then, peers are able to make comments and corrections utilizing the suggestion and comment feature (Gross). Jim Trostle claims in “Cooperative In-Class Writing with Google Docs,” “Classrooms, and face-to-face interaction, are still central points of learning. New technology, like Google Docs, allows group discussion to be accompanied and documented by group writing, leading to new forms of group conversation, attention to text production, and learning in the classroom” (61). Allowing students to utilize

online tools to work collaboratively on writing gives opportunity and allows for more critical learning to take place.

“Teaching Writing with Google Classroom” suggests, teachers can also use Google to monitor student progress throughout their writing (Gross). A teacher monitoring a student can even be done in real time, allowing for a teacher to comment and give immediate feedback to students during their writing (Gross).

The different ways to utilize Google in the classroom are endless, but students prefer using Google during the writing process, also. Kym Jolley in “Student perceptions of group writing processes and feedback” claims students prefer using Google Docs, especially when writing outside of the classroom (216). Students also prefer using Google when working collaboratively, editing or writing, with other peers (Jolley 216). Reading comments from teachers and peers also became easier with Google Docs, allowing for more revision from writers (Jolley 214). Finally, students felt submitting their work with Google became simpler (Jolley 215).

Online Tools in the Secondary Classroom

Using Google in a classroom is one step to implementing technology into the writing classroom. However, many teachers move beyond Google and implement technology such as online editing tools, blogging, and podcasting. “The Impact of Digital Tools on Student Writing and How Writing is Taught in Schools” states technology, such as social media and texting encourage students to be creative in their writing; however, technology, such as social media and texting, creates an informal environment for students to write in often, opposing the academic writing many teachers wish for their students to learn (Purcell et al.).

When writing online, many students find solace in using an editing tool to revise and review their work before submission. Websites, such as Hemingway, "... scan text and detect sentences that are either too complex or too long, and breaks them up into smaller ones" (Tooley). Using online editing tools can be beneficial to students, teaching them what to look for while editing their writing and peer's writing. Websites, such as Hemingway, look deeper into a student's writing, mainly looking for clarity in sentence structures. Issues, such as spelling, are not mentioned.

Another tactic teachers use to engage students in writing is blogging. Blogs are very popular, and teachers are seeing the results with their students. Hashem A. Alsamandani in "The Effectiveness of Using Online Blogging for Students' Individual and Group Writing" claims, "... participants showed noticeable improvement in several writing components, such as content, development, language mechanics, styles, voice, word choice and other writing sub-skills" (50). Encouraging students to write is one battle teachers face, but improving all the skills involved with writing is another. Blogging easily engages students and improves many writing skills.

Students also improve their writing because of their audience when writing with a blog. Will Richardson claims in his book *Blogs, Wikis, and Podcasts*, "The idea that the relevance of student work no longer ends at the classroom door can not only be a powerful motivator but can also create a significant shift in the way we think about the assignments and work we ask of our students" (27). Blogging helps students and teachers think outside of the typical assignment and into the realm of real life writing. This autonomy for all benefits teachers and students, who all have equal voice with blogging (Richardson 27). Once students realize they are writing for an

audience beyond their teacher, they take extra time to edit and improve their final copy, “to ensure the final product is more interesting in terms of both content and form” (Alsamandani 50).

Another large benefit to blogging with students is the connection students make with their topic. Beach and others believe “... blogging serves as a primary role in improving students’ writing by providing them with a social purpose for writing to peer audiences...” (118). Students are able to choose a relevant topic of importance to them and create a clear connection to the topic through the research and writing. These steps improve a student’s writing, but they also show students how a personal connection to their writing affects their overall text.

Beach and others also argue that the aesthetics of a blog help to connect writers with their overall product on a blog: “Students design their blog template, layout, color, and font in a manner that marks it as their own space. They can also easily embed images or video clips into their posts to convey their message or illustrate their ideas” (118). When students take time to design a blog page and then a blog post, they implement personality and preference. The time and the unique elements help to create a connection among students.

Another technology to engage students is podcasting. Podcasts have placed themselves into mainstream media lately. People love listening to the variety of topics anywhere they go. Utilizing podcasts in a writing classroom can be done in many ways. First, teachers can have students listen to podcasts. According to Herman Koppelman in “Using Podcasts in Distance Education,” “Students have an interest in external podcasts” (310). To utilize podcasts in the classroom, teachers can have students listen to an already created podcast or have students create their own podcast. Using an already created podcast benefits students by introducing them to

new voices and experts on topics (Koppelman 307). These voices add change and variety into a classroom, encouraging engagement.

Having students create a podcast also improves their engagement and confidence. Richard Beach and others claim, “Using these digital audio and visual production tools helps to bolster students’ confidence in their ability to communicate. Students ... are often more confident about their oral speaking than their writing skills” (140). When planning for the podcast, students utilize similar elements to that of writing. When creating a script, they edit and look for fluency. When practicing, students engage in different voices and practice using sentence structure to add emphasis (Beach et al. 140). When creating a podcast, there are also different formats to utilize, allowing for more creativity and for students to expand their comfort zone. Some of these formats include collaboration from peers, also (Beach et al. 142).

Podcasting is also beneficial to schools and students because of the easy access. Will Richardson claims in his book *Blogs, Wikis, and Podcasts*, if teachers and students have access to the internet and a recording device, they are ready to go (115). The equipment needed is found in most technology devices, such as laptops, iPads, and phones, today (Beach et al 146).

Chapter 3: Demographics

For this research, I used students in my high school English class. The high school is Litchfield High School, located in Litchfield, MN. The town itself is a rural town of Minnesota, housing roughly 7,000 people. Much of the town is employed by the local hospital and local school district. Many other townspeople are local farmers. The high school contains 500 students on average, classes equalling 120 students.

Litchfield High School runs on a 47-minute class day. During the day, some students receive free periods and study halls, depending on their age and the intensity of their classes. By the time a student is graduating, he/she needs to have four credits of English, meaning they need a passing English grade in each quarter of their high school career. If a student fails an English class, night school, summer school, or a retaken class are required.

Litchfield School District finds it imperative that students utilize technology during their education; therefore, each student in the district receives a personal device to use. K-5 receives an iPad to work with; 6-12 receive an 11-inch Macbook. The devices are regulated by the district, but students are allowed to bring them home for the school year. All students use their Macbooks on a daily basis in school. Because of the regulations used for students, some limits were provided as to what technology could be used and could not be used. The school utilizes Google for everything, so anything with Google was acceptable. Grammar websites (Hemingway and Grammarly) are also acceptable. However, creating a blog and podcast creates more restrictions.

The students specifically used in the study were part of the Litchfield Alternative Learning Program. The ALP is for students, ranging in grades from 9-12, who struggle in school

and are at risk of not graduating on time. Many of these students lack English credit because of the amount they are required to pass for graduation. This is where I come in; I teach one 47-minute class at the ALP during the day. My class is during third hour, which means it runs from 9:55-10:42. The class is a year-long class where we cover as many writing and reading skills as possible for graduation. Students start the school year with writing and grammar/convention work; then we read a Stephen King novel together; we end the year listening to a podcast and implementing anything engaging to the students.

At the ALP, my class ranges in size from 10-15 students, depending on the year and semester. Because of the small number, a great connection is made between my students and me. Typically, these students have struggled through one (or two) or my classes in mainstream schooling, so a relationship has been formed since the beginning. However, at the ALP, students are willing to be vulnerable and work diligently to graduate on time. The small number and the attitude of the students makes for a relaxed atmosphere accompanied by positivity from everyone. The students cheer each other on when they struggle and enjoy hearing personal anecdotes from each other and me.

The struggle the ALP students experienced in mainstream schooling is typically their only similarity. Students range in socioeconomic status and cultural background. The class in the spring consisted of eight females and three males. Five of these students were seniors graduating in the spring of 2022; six students will return to the ALP for the 2022-2023 school year. Of those six, three are juniors, one is a sophomore, and two are ninth graders.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Before the unit

As a class, students listened to a season of a podcast. Students listened to *Serial* season one, featuring the story of Adnan Syed. *Serial* is hosted by Sarah Koenig and is created by NPR. The story revolves around the murder of Hae Min Lee, and Adnan is found guilty; however, the trial is unfair in many aspects and a clear murderer is never discovered. Adnan is blamed for the death of Hae though and is sent to prison.

On a daily basis, as a class, we listened to the podcast together. Unless absent, students do not do any listening on their own. Whole-class listening accomplishes skills required for students to continue forth in the unit. First, they understand how a podcast is created and the formatting of a podcast. Students understand what the end result should sound like. Whole-class listening also creates engagement from students. While listening to an episode of the podcast, we often stop to discuss new information given and plausibility. Students are also very willing to share their opinions of Adnan and whether he is guilty or innocent.

Typically, an episode of the podcast takes one to two class periods, depending upon the length and discussion before, during, and after the episode. As a class and individually, students keep a log of evidence from the podcast and people introduced. Figure one gives an example of worksheets given to students to utilize during season one of *Serial*. We often review this information together at the beginning of class, to be sure everyone understands any new information being given. As a teacher, I also review information I know will be important in future episodes.

Fig. 2 Survey before unit

Before Blogging and Podcasting

Form description

Email *

Valid email

This form is collecting emails. [Change settings](#)

I use editing websites, such as Grammarly or Hemming, to edit my paper before submission.

Never 1 2 3 Always

How do you feel about what you write? Explain.

1 2 3 4 5

Terrible Great

I read through the final draft of a writing assignment before submitting it.

1 2 3

Never Always

I review comments from a peer before submitting a writing assignment.

1 2 3

Never Always

What is your background with blogging? (reading blogs and writing blogs)

Long answer text

Do you listen to any podcasts? If so, which ones?

Long answer text

Are you a writer? (If your answer is YES, then tell me how you learned to write. If your answer is NO, tell me how people learn to write.)

Long answer text

In what areas, if any, do you feel you need improvement as a writer?

Long answer text

and what the benefit was. Students then took forms home to sign with their parents or signed forms for themselves, if old enough.

Then students were given a survey before the three-week unit began. The survey questions asked about their writing history and preferences. The questions ranged from short answer to scale (1-5) questions. Review figure two to see the questions specifically about students writing preferences.

Once students finished their survey, I assigned a blog post to students. The blog post had a few requirements. I asked students to find any podcast they found interest in and give a review of the podcast overall. Students were required to listen to two episodes of the podcast to ensure understanding of the content and format. Once students completed that, they need to write a 200 to 300-word blog giving a review of the podcast they chose. In the blog, students were asked to

include one image, an introduction, a conclusion, a brief overview of the podcast, and good/bad of the podcast. Figure three includes more details about the assignment overall.

To aid students in the process of review, I gave students a worksheet to help formulate ideas for the blog post. Figure four contains the specifics. The worksheet asked students about the format, the host, the length, and overall content.

Fig. 3 Podcast requirements

After listening to season 1 of Serial, you will find a podcast and review it as a whole.

- Step 1: Find a podcast to review. It can be any podcast you choose!
- Step 2: Listen to at least two episodes to understand the content/format of the podcast overall.
- Step 3: Analyze the podcast for entertainment and understandability. Decide whether you would continue listening to the podcast or not.
- Step 4: Create a blog post with your overall opinion of the podcast.

On Thursday, we will do peer edits of your blog.

Day two

Before I gave students time to listen to their chosen podcasts, I showed students an example podcast review blog from my blog. I reviewed a news podcast I listen to daily, *Up First*. We read through the entire blog together. When we finished, we reviewed the elements of the assignment and where they occurred in my blog post.

During class today, students were given time to listen to their podcast and fill out the podcast review worksheet. Most students were able to find a podcast by themselves, but I aided a

Fig. 4 Podcast Review Worksheet

Name _____

Podcast Review

- Title of podcast: _____
 - Titles of episodes you listened to: _____

 - Summarize the podcast: _____

 - What did you learn from this podcast that you didn't know before? What did you find most interesting or surprising about the podcast? _____

 - Who is the host? Do they do a good job hosting? _____

- Would you keep listening to the podcast? Why? _____

few students in finding a podcast they would enjoy. Students were allowed to use their phone or computer to listen to the podcast. Most students opted to use their phones. Students were also asked to use headphones during this process, to avoid bothering others.

I advised students to listen to at least one podcast episode during class today and one tomorrow, to be sure to keep on schedule.

Day three

Today, students continued listening to their chosen podcast, if they needed. At this point, most students finished two episodes of their podcast. For those who had finished listening, they began a rough draft of their podcast on Google Docs. I asked students to write a rough draft on Google Docs to allow for easy peer editing later in the process.

While students were listening or writing, I asked each student where they were at in the process and if they had any questions for me.

Day four

During class today, students began their rough drafts or finished their rough drafts. During writing, students finished their podcast review worksheet to help guide them through their blog post. Again, we reviewed what each blog post needed to include, emphasizing the idea that students needed to consider the format of the blog they listened to and include good and bad things about the podcast.

Regardless of where they began class, they need to be prepared with a rough draft for peer edits tomorrow.

Day five

Today, students need to peer edit each other's blog posts. Since students wrote their rough draft on Google Docs, students are going to share their rough drafts with assigned peers and using the "suggesting" mode on Google Docs to leave comments and feedback for peers.

When assigning peer edit groups, I require that students are completed with their rough draft. If students are not finished, they can take the class time to work on their blog. Of the students who are finished with their rough draft, I create peer edit groups ranging from two to

three students. I select groups based on student's comfortability with each other. Students who are comfortable with each other tend to leave better feedback and are more open to the editing process than those who do not feel comfortable.

When using Google Docs to edit papers, students are able to leave comments for their peers to read and "write" over the paper, allowing the writer to accept and deny corrections made by their peers. Figure five contains an example of what this would look like to a writer. As a teacher, this also makes grading peer edits simple. I can see the exact comments students leave for their peers, and I can see the corrections accepted/rejected by a writer.

Students were given the entire class period to edit papers. If students finished editing before the end of the class hour, I encouraged them to edit their papers and be ready for another

Fig. 5 Google Doc Comments

The image shows a Google Doc interface. On the left, a document titled "Podcast Script" contains instructions for a partner discussion. Below the text is a form with the following fields:

Title of Podcast: ??	
Title of Episode: <i>The Bad Guys</i> Review	
Episode topic: <i>The Bad Guys</i> movie	
Talking Points	Speaker(s)

On the right, a sidebar displays four comments from Ashley Pingree, each with a checkmark and an 'X' icon:

- Comment 1: "Students can leave comments on rough drafts." (Accepted)
- Comment 2: "Format: indent first line, indent left" (Rejected)
- Comment 3: "Add: 'with a partner'" (Rejected)
- Comment 4: "Delete: '??'" (Rejected)

round of editing their blog post tomorrow. Everyone finished editing their peer's papers and their own papers during class.

Day six

Today, students were asked to use the website Hemingwayapp.com to edit their papers. Hemingway claims to aid writing with cohesion and understandability, not necessarily simple errors. Many students struggle writing simple, clear sentences while still getting their ideas put forward.

When brought to the Hemingway website, students copy and paste their paper into the editing area. On the right side, the editor gives students suggestions about the use of adverbs, the

Fig. 6 Hemingwayapp.com

The screenshot displays the Hemingway Editor interface. At the top, there is a toolbar with options: Bold, Italic, H1, H2, H3, Quote, Bullets, Numbers, and Link. On the right side, there are buttons for 'Write' and 'Edit'. The main content area shows a sample text with various highlights: yellow for complex sentences, red for dense and complicated sentences, purple for words that can be replaced with shorter alternatives, blue for adverbs and weakening phrases, and green for passive voice. The right sidebar provides readability metrics: 'Grade 6' (Good), 'Words: 133', and a list of suggestions such as '2 adverbs, meeting the goal of 2 or fewer', '1 use of passive voice, meeting the goal of 2 or fewer', '1 phrase has a simpler alternative', '1 of 11 sentences is hard to read', and '1 of 11 sentences is very hard to read'.

Hemingway App makes your writing bold and clear.

The app highlights lengthy, complex sentences and common errors; if you see a yellow sentence, shorten or split it. If you see a red highlight, your sentence is so dense and complicated that your readers will get lost trying to follow its meandering, splitting logic — try editing this sentence to remove the red.

You can **utilize** a shorter word in place of a purple one. Mouse over them for hints.

Adverbs and weakening phrases are **helpfully** shown in blue. Get rid of them and pick words with force, **perhaps**.

Phrases in green have **been marked** to show passive voice.

You can **format** your *text* with the toolbar.

Paste in something you're working on and edit away. Or, click the Write button and compose something new.

Hemingway
Editor

Readability
Grade 6
Good

Words: 133
Show More ▾

- 2 adverbs, meeting the goal of 2 or fewer.
- 1 use of passive voice, meeting the goal of 2 or fewer.
- 1 phrase has a simpler alternative.
- 1 of 11 sentences is hard to read.
- 1 of 11 sentences is very hard to read.

use of passive voice, and the use of simple sentence structures. Figure six is an image of Hemmingapp.com being used as an example.

Once students edited their papers after using Hemingwayapp.com, they posted their writings to their blogs. Again, the blogs were an ongoing assignment created at the beginning of the school year, so students are used to this process. This is, however, the last blog post of the school year for them.

Fig. 7 Podcast Handout

Beginning Your Podcast

After listening to *Serial* and podcasts you like, you will be creating a podcast of your own. This assignment can be done in pairs or individually; your call!

Here are the requirements:

- Your podcast must be between 3-5 minutes in length
- You must have a clear topic and order to your podcast (I have an outline to help you with this!)
- You must edit and record your podcast using SoundTrap
- Have intro and outro music
- You must submit your podcast via Google Classroom and your blog

1. First, decide what **type** of podcast you will be creating. Our podcast about Adnan from *Serial* was an informational podcast. Some of you have listened to entertainment podcasts (*Impulsive*). Here are some ideas:

- Nonfiction Narrative (*Lore*)
- Fiction Narrative (*Night Vale*)
- Conversational / Co-hosted (*Stuff You Should Know*)
- Interviews

2. Then, you need to decide on a topic for your podcast episode you will be submitting to me. This topic should relate with the type of podcast you choose.

3. Choose a name for your podcast and the episode you are creating.

4. Fill out the script outline **before** you begin recording.

- You may need to do some research for your podcast, and that's okay! Do what you need to do to get information!

5. Learn SoundTrap!

- This is what you will be using to record and edit your podcast. I will give a tutorial about this later, so no need to worry about this too much right now.

6. Submit your podcast via Google Classroom and your blog

After students submitted their blog, I graded their blogs on the following content: introduction, conclusion, clear summary of the podcast, thorough review of the podcast with good and bad elements included, and the use of one image.

Day seven

For class today, I introduced the idea of creating a podcast. To introduce the podcast, I gave students an assignment sheet with requirements and steps to begin the process. Figure seven contains the handout.

I review the entire handout with students. I read through the requirements, reviewed the steps to take, and asked if there were any questions from the students. Students were able to follow along with a digital copy posted on Google Classroom.

After introducing the podcast, students listened to an example I created. I walked them through the process briefly and let them listen to the entire episode. Creating the podcast myself helped me understand the steps students needed to take and also allowed me to have an example for students to listen to.

Once students listened to my example, I gave them one assignment to complete for the day. Students were to choose a partner, if they wished, and to pick a topic of their podcast/podcast episode. The handout gave students a few ideas as to creating a topic for their podcast, but I assisted students through this process. To assist, I asked students questions: “What are you interested in?” “What do you think you could talk about for three minutes?” Questions like this helped students to think about what they already know. Once a topic was chosen, students needed to post their topic on Google Classroom for me to check later that day and in order for them to remember tomorrow.

Day eight

Yesterday, students were asked to choose a topic for their podcast and podcast episode. Today, I introduced students to the outline format to begin creating their script. The script is the “writing” part of their assignment. Students do not need to use complete sentences when creating this outline, but they need to make sure their ideas flow from one to the next and the big information is contained on the script. Figure eight includes the digital worksheet students were given. Figure nine is an example outline I showed students of my example podcast.

Fig. 8 Podcast Script

Podcast Script

Use this script outline to begin your podcast discussion. Use the talking point section to write down topics you will discuss during your podcast. Then decide who will speak about each topic. Once you have decided that, you can rearrange and change the order, if needed.

Title of Podcast:	
Title of Episode:	
Episode topic:	
Talking Points	Speaker(s)
Introduction (short) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	
Main points (at least three!) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 	
Conclusion of main points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	
Sign off <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	

☰ ☰ +

Fig. 9 Example Podcast Script

Podcast Script

Use this script outline to begin your podcast discussion. Use the talking point section to write down topics you will discuss during your podcast. Then decide who will speak about each topic. Once you have decided that, you can rearrange and change the order, if needed.

Title of Podcast: Reviews with the the Young and Old		
Title of Episode: <i>The Bad Guys</i> Review		
Episode topic: <i>The Bad Guys</i> movie		
Talking Points	Speaker(s)	
Introduction (short) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome to Reviews with the Young and Old 	Ashley	
Main points (at least three!) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Background of the movie: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Based off of the chapter book series Uses the bad guys and turns them good <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Wolf, piranha, shark, snake, and spider There is obviously a twist and a little romance My review of the movie: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Really good! Engaging and fun for people of all ages The plot was unpredictable, even to me I liked all the characters, especially the wolf and the fox. Definitely see it again! Interview with Tess: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> How would you describe the movie? What did you like about the movie? What did you not like about the movie? 	Ashley	
		Ashley
		Ashley + Tess

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Who was your favorite character? Would you see it again? 	
Conclusion of main points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall, we would see the movie again. We recommend people see it, young and old! 	Ashley + Tess
Sign off <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thanks for listening to ?? Come back next week for another young and old review of ??. 	Ashley

I read through my example script with students and explained how closely related to my podcast it actually was. Once I read through my script, students were encouraged to begin

working on their script. I explained how this process is different for each student. Some students may need to do research, others will not need to. Students received the rest of class today and tomorrow to write their scripts. The following day would be a peer edit day for scripts.

Day nine

Students worked on their scripts all class. I circulated and answered questions from students.

Day ten

Today, students were expected to have their podcast script completed. Groups who had their scripts completed participated in peer edits. Groups were decided upon topic and connection among students, similar to before.

For today's peer edits, students still made comments using Google Docs, but I asked them to view the document differently than a typical peer edit. Since this is an outline and is meant to be spoken, I asked students to focus on content, not conventions of writing. Peer editors needed to understand the topic and flow from each idea. Most of the editing today was done via commenting on Google Docs, not necessarily suggesting mode.

Once peer edits completed, students finished their outlines for tomorrow.

Day eleven

Today, I introduced SoundTrap to students. SoundTrap is the online recording and editing system students used for their podcast. The system itself is simple and understandable. First, I showed students the website with a brief tutorial about recording and editing. I showed students my podcast on SoundTrap and what it looked like when I broke it down. I also showed students where to find music to include in their podcast and how to edit audio recordings. This

was very brief because students understood the website well and tend to enjoy experimenting on websites like this more than listen to their teacher talk about it.

After introducing SoundTrap, students used the rest of class to record their podcast and play around with the website. Some students waited until later to record their podcast; other students used private areas near the classroom to record their podcast.

Day twelve through fourteen

The next few days, students were given class time to complete the recording of their podcast and edit their final outcome. As a teacher, I circulated the classroom and answered questions. I also checked in with each student on their progress daily.

Day fifteen

After the three-week unit, students were given a similar survey asking questions regarding their experience in the unit and preferences. The questions also ranged from short answer to scale (1-5) questions. The survey was completed via Google Forms again. Figure ten includes the questions from the survey.

Once students completed the survey, they needed to submit their podcast via Google Classroom from SoundTrap. To do this, students share a shareable link from SoundTrap to the assignment on Classroom. Some students also opted to make me an editor on their podcast, to ensure the podcast was submitted.

Fig. 10 Post-Unit Survey

After Blogging and Podcasting

Form description

Email *
Valid email

This form is collecting emails. [Change settings](#)

How do you feel about what you write after blogging and podcasting?

1 2 3 4 5

Terrible Great

I read through the final draft of a writing assignment before submitting it.

1 2 3

Never Always

I reviewed comments from a peer before submitting my writing assignment.

1 2 3

Never Always

I used editing websites, such as Grammarly or Hemming, to edit my paper before submission.

1 2 3

Never Always

Rate the website, SoundTrap, used to create your podcast.

1 2 3 4 5

Terrible Great!

Did you have any issues using the website SoundTrap? Please explain.

Short answer text

Did you enjoy the blogging assignment? Explain.

Long answer text

Did you enjoy listening to the podcast? Explain.

Long answer text

Did you enjoy creating a podcast? Explain.

Long answer text

What has changed in your writing since the blogging and podcasting assignments?

Long answer text

In what areas, if any, do you feel you need improvement as a writer now?

Long answer text

Chapter 5: Limitations

As mentioned before, administration encourages teachers to use new technology in their classes, but parameters are given to protect the students. Blogs are allowed with stipulations. To create a blog, most students used Google Sites; others used Wordpress, depending on their age. Students 9-10 used Wordpress because of restrictions from Google for Google Sites. Students 11-12 used Google Sites for their blog. To create a podcast, students all used SoundTrap, an online audio recorder and editor. The privacy for this site is acceptable to the technology department at the school and allows for students to edit their podcast and also share their podcast, when they wish.

The ALP becomes a safe-haven for the students out there; they feel safe and comfortable, where they have not necessarily felt that way before at school. However, the students at the ALP have a higher turnover rate than the students in the high school, which means I typically end the year at the ALP with a much different student body than I began with. During this past school year, roughly half of the students stayed in my class the entire year and half of the students were new starting in January of 2022. Reasons for high turnover rates range from early graduation, return to mainstream schooling, and moving out of town. The high turnover rate also creates an issue with fluidity. Some students learned from me all year, understanding my expectations and my style of teaching, while others were new to me in January.

Chapter 6: Discussion

Editing Using Google and Hemingway

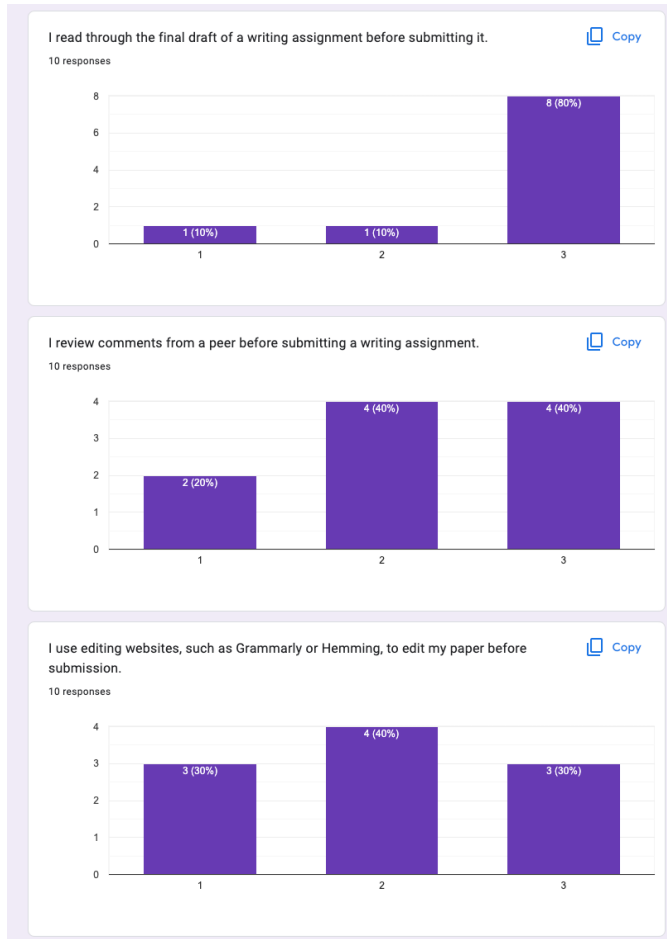
Editing is a difficult concept for students. When students are done writing, most want to submit their draft as the final assignment, avoiding the editing process all together. However, those who write often know the importance of this step; editing has the potential to create a large change in one's writing skills and overall product. Wanting to turn in an assignment before editing deals mostly with student motivation. Many students lack motivation to edit and refine their writing (Amalia et al. 802). The editing process can be tedious and overwhelming, but using tools such as Google and Hemingway make a cumbersome task attainable and realistic.

Before beginning the unit, a survey asked students about their editing habits. In the survey, 80% of students claimed to read their final writing before submitting the assignment for a grade, 10% claimed to do it sometimes, and 10% said they never read their writing before submitting to the teacher. For peer editing, 40% of students claimed to always review comments from their peers, 40% claimed to review comments sometimes, and 10% claimed to never review comments from their peers. Finally, 30% of students claimed to use editing websites, such as Hemingway, before submitting their paper for a grade, 40% claimed to do it sometimes, and 30% said they never use editing tools like Hemingway. Table one contains a bar graph of these results from the Google Form survey.

During the course of the unit, students edited their blogs before posting their writing to their official blog. Before students peer edited blog posts, they submitted their writing to Hemingwayapp.com to review for clarity: 33% of students claimed to use the website to edit

Table 1

Editing Habits Results



their blogs, 44% said they used the website a bit, and 22% said they did not use the website at

Table 2

Editing and Blogging Results

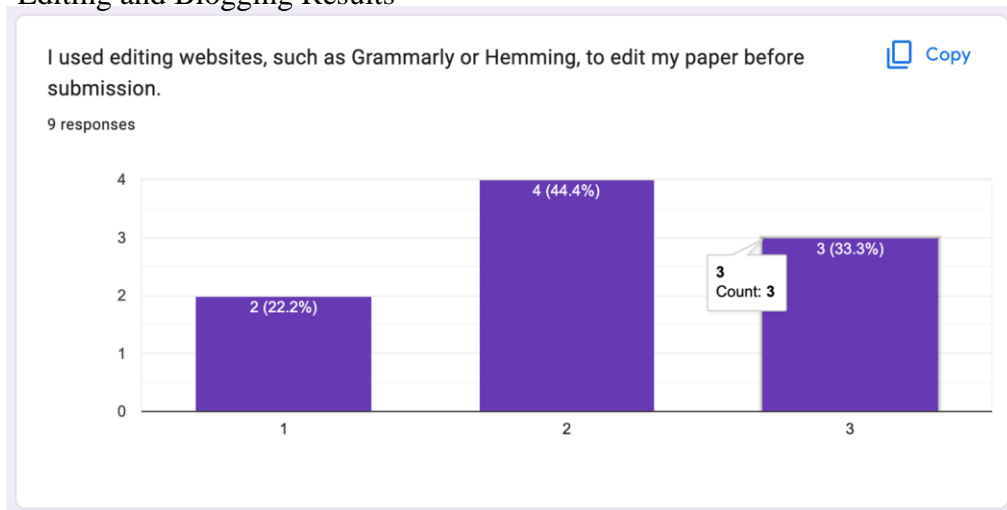
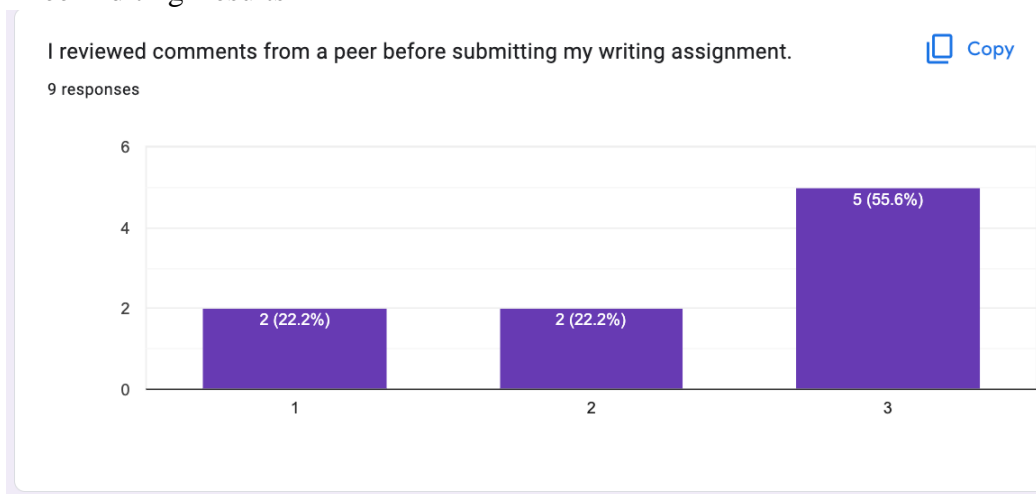


Table 3

Peer Editing Results



all. Table two shows these results.

Students also completed peer edits before posting their blogs. For peer edits, students were placed into groups of two to three students chosen by their teacher based upon the topic of their blog and relationship with other students. Working collaboratively helps students during the writing process, which is beneficial while using Google. Google allows for easy editing with Google Docs using the suggesting feature and also makes sharing documents simple. Students appreciate the simplicity of sharing and editing with Google and also the collaboration piece of peer editing (Heggart and Yoo 149-150). During peer edits, 55% of students reviewed the comments thoroughly, 22% reviewed the comments briefly, and 22% did not review comments/did not participate in peer edits. Table three shows these results.

When students were asked how the unit improved their writing abilities, one student stated, “Adding more detail to my writing.” Another student stated, “ive understood more about writing and learned more rules.” Both of these comments refer to the editing process. Students

not only improve their grade by editing their writing, but they also improve their overall skills when they are editing peer's writings and editing their writing with comments from Hemingway. Before the unit, few students submitted their writings to peers or online tools. During the unit, more students completed these steps, which improved students' overall writing abilities and overall understanding of their own writing abilities.

Improving Writing by Creating a Blog

Blogging is part of mainstream culture at this point. Many people blog or read blogs on a regular basis. Two new blogs are created every second (Richardson 19). Teachers see the benefit of blogging for students. First and foremost, it gets students writing. Blogging is an effective way to have students write on a regular basis about topics they are interested in. Secondly, blogging improves many aspects of writing for students, such as voice, perception of audience, and confidence (Alsamadani 44). Through a study on secondary students blogging over two weeks, researchers found the most improved portion of student writing was their overall content, while mechanics, word choice, and style improved slightly (Alsamadani 47-48). Not only does blogging improve aspects of student writing, but in this day and age, it is accessible. Almost all students have access to a device and internet to write a short post about a topic of their choice.

Before beginning the unit, many of my students had experience with blogs. One student claimed, "I first made a blog in my 9th grade English class. It wasn't until my senior year English Class that we started doing blogs again. I like reading and writing blogs but usually I only do it if It's assigned to me." Another student stated, "i used to read them but not right now." A final student stated, "i like reading and writing blogs." No student in the class mentioned having no understanding of a blog. Because each student started with some understanding of a

blog and the process, the teacher can provide less background information. The background students began with helps the blogging assignment begin with good understanding.

After students wrote their blog, they were asked if they enjoyed the blogging assignment, few students mentioned not enjoying the assignment, stating “not really” in the survey. Other students felt neutral about their feelings for the blogging assignment, stating “The blogging assignment wasn’t my favorite but it was okay.” Most students seemed to enjoy the blogging assignment in some form. One student claimed, “Yes, I enjoy writing and the blog posts were never too hard.” Another student stated, “the blogging assignment was fun and i liked what it was about.” Seeing that most students enjoyed blogging or felt neutral about the assignment gives positive feedback to the teacher, knowing the assignment engages student interest.

When encouraging students to write, engagement is necessary. Richard Beach and others perceive students need a platform to begin conversations that matter to them; they call this “employing social conversation” for students (118). Giving students a choice in a topic and a platform to speak from allows their voice to be heard about topics that matter to them, which creates engagement and encourages writing from students. Blogging is how Richard Beach and others suggest students find their social voice (118). The blogging assignment engaged students, giving each student a space to write more often and improve upon their skills, such as voice and audience perception. The fact that students liked the assignment proves their engagement.

Improving Writing by Creating a Podcast

Podcasts have taken the world by storm. The passion from audiences comes from a few reasons. First, podcasts range in topic and range in their expertise. Some podcasts focus on nonfiction information; other focus on a fictional story. Some podcasts are made by amateurs,

while others are made by professional news sources. Second, podcasting does not take much technology skill or preparation to do well (Richardson 113-114). These reasons are why podcasting is a perfect addition to a classroom.

Not only can anyone podcast about any topic, but students are interested in podcasts (Koppelman 310). In a Google Form survey, my students showed an interest in podcasts. One student stated, “I really enjoyed listening to the Serial podcast that we listened to in English. I have also recently been listening to another true crime podcast, which I think is really interesting.” Another student stated they listen to the following podcasts: “Ladies & Tangents by Jeri and Ciara, UnFiltered by Zane and Heath, Under Cover, and Adulthood with Teala & Nia.” However, 50% of students answered they do not listen to podcasts outside of the classroom setting. This ratio benefits an introduction to a new activity; students can give insight and others will be intrigued by the novelty of the podcasts. The mixture of new and informed students allows for interest to grow among each student and increases engagement through the interest.

As a class, we listened to *Serial* created by NPR. We followed the storyline together and discussed everything as a class, to introduce everyone to podcasts. Only 22% of students felt neutral about listening to the podcast. The other 78% enjoyed the podcast. One student claimed, “Yes listening to the podcast was one of my favorite things we did.” Another student suggested, “Yes at first I wasn't interested in it until you listen more and more which will eventually draw you into it more which will make you want to listen to it.” Listening to the podcast provided students an opportunity to understand the format of a professionally made podcast and to become interested in podcasts overall, allowing for a natural segway into creating their own podcast.

Once students finished listening to the podcast, they created a podcast of their own.

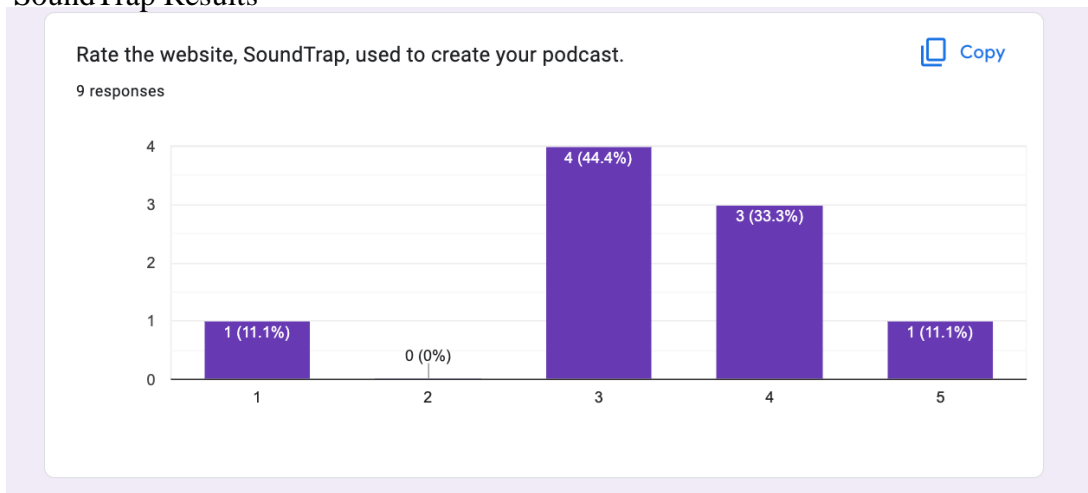
Students chose their own audience and topic; some even chose to work with a partner, to be more comfortable (Beach et al. 146). In the creation of the podcast, 22% of students did not enjoy creating the podcast, 33% felt neutral about creating the podcast, and 44% enjoyed creating the podcast overall. One student claimed, “Yes, I was surprised that I actually enjoyed creating the podcast.” Another student stated, “Yes, it was very fun. Me and my partner who I did podcast with, have always talked about making podcasts for fun so it was nice to be able to do it for a class.” A final student said, “i thought it was fun and very creative...” Not all students enjoyed creating a podcast, but most of the students felt engaged in the podcast creation in some way. Creating a podcast from scratch emulates the process of writing a paper in many ways (creating an outline, creating cohesive transitions, creating fluency among each sentence), so the engagement from students provides an increased interest in the writing process overall.

Before creating the podcast, students created an outline, to help organize their ideas and to stay on track while recording (Beach et al. 142). The creation of the outline and the recording of the podcast was meant to help students with the flow of their sentences and word choices. During this process, one student claimed, “I've realized I can explain things a lot better if i'm speaking rather than writing. I'm also more aware about my grammatical errors.” When speaking, students often find their own errors. The recording of the podcast helped students to realize this benefit of speaking their writing and thoughts. The process of recording and hearing their own writing allowed students to identify and fix their own writing errors, which is something we worked on most of the year.

For the creation of the podcast, the class used SoundTrap, a website designed for recording and editing. The website has a free trial for education and then moves to a paid membership. When asked about the website, students felt neutral about the use: 44% felt neutral about using SoundTrap, 33% liked the website, 11% really liked the website, and 11% really did not like the website. Table four shows these results. When asked if students enjoyed using the website, one student suggested, “I had a little trouble moving the sound, but overall i thought that SoundTrap was a easy website to use.” Another stated, “No, It was a bit confusing at first but after a while you get used to it and understand how to use the website.” Most students claimed to have no issues using the website overall. As a teacher, the ease of use for students and for me as a teacher encourages me to use the website again in the future.

Table 4

SoundTrap Results

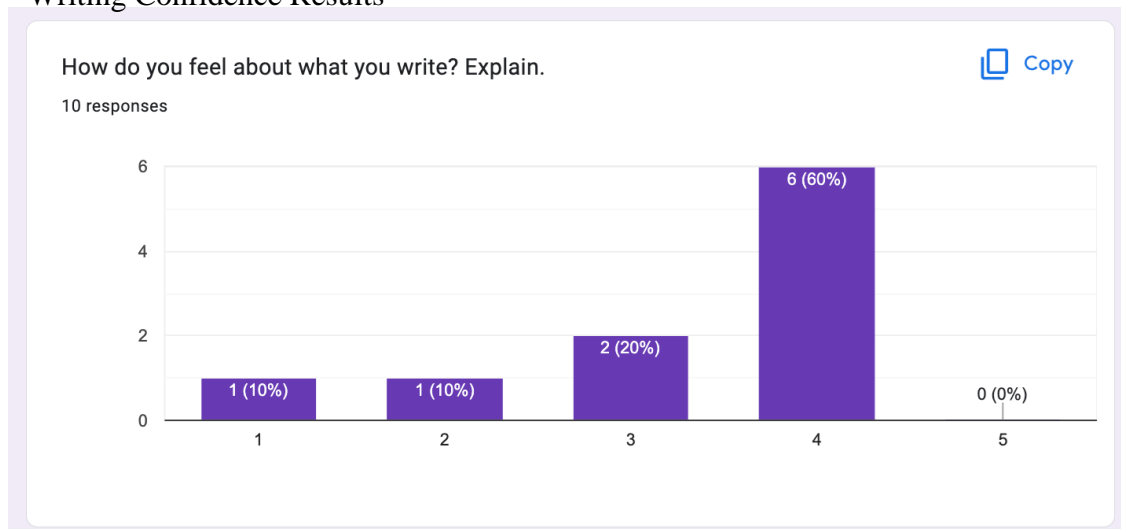


Overall Benefits of Writing Often using a Device

The introduction of writing online and with devices has given teachers many benefits; however, it has introduced challenges. Teachers struggle to teach formal writing and

Table 5

Writing Confidence Results



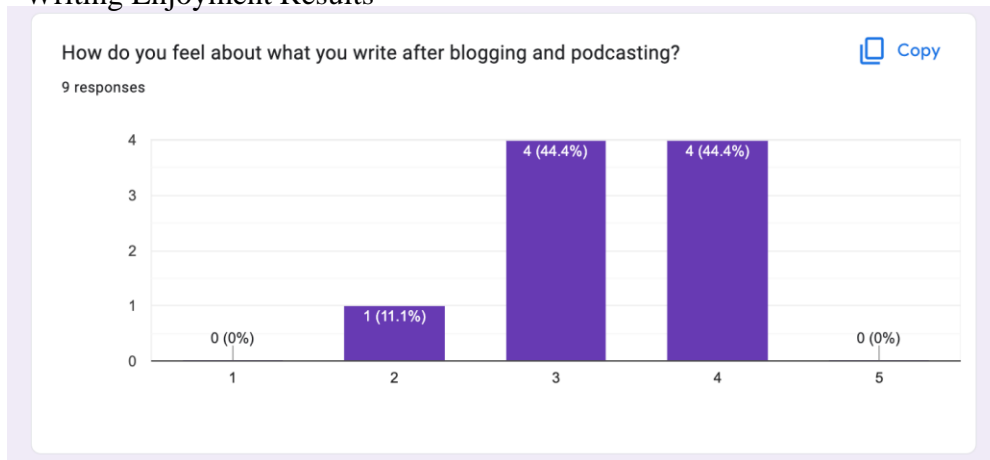
conventions, to teach different voices and audiences, and to teach thinking critically about texts and writing (Purcell et al. 3). Despite these circumstances, devices and online tools engage students and create interest among them, while writing does not. Many students, even writing online, claim they do not feel great about what they write often. In a survey before the unit, 60% of students said they felt good about what they wrote, 20% said they felt neutral, 10% said they felt bad, and 10% said they felt terrible about what they wrote. No student felt great about what they wrote. The results are shown in table five.

In the same survey, students were asked if they considered themselves writers; 70% of students said they did not consider themselves writers. Many students, however, wished they could improve upon their writing skills. One student claimed, “No, I wish I was a better writer

though. People learn to write by mistake and error. You can't become a good writer without

Table 6

Writing Enjoyment Results



making mistakes and learning from them. I think I could be a good writer if I taught myself a few more things but getting all my thoughts onto paper is the toughest part, my words never come out the way I want them to.” Another student claimed, “no i am not, im sure that is someone is passionate about what they are writing about it just comes easy.” Both students wished to improve upon their writing abilities and had ideas of how to do so, but they needed assistance in that process.

After the unit, students felt differently about their writing; 44% felt good about their writing, 44% felt neutral, and 11% felt bad about their writing. Zero students felt great or terrible about their writing. Table six shows the results of this question. Many students improved how they felt about their writing after the unit, which creates confidence, a key in writing.

After the unit, students also analyzed what changed in their writing since blogging and podcasting. A few students mentioned nothing changing in their writing. However, many students mentioned significant differences in their writing. One student stated, “i can write more

better and use better words.” Another student claimed, “ive understood more about writing and learned more about rules.” Another student mentioned, “probably how i go about writing my paper.” Each student mentioned specific differences in their writing after the unit. Each student gained a skill needed in writing. The skills gained in writing are skills students will need to write anything in the future; writing an email or a memo to coworkers requires the same skill students improved upon in this unit.

Reflections

After each unit I complete, as most teachers do, I analyze the process and the overall results from my students. For this unit, there are a few aspects I will change in the future.

First and foremost, I would give students specific instructions for peer edits. My students completed peer edits many times during the year of my class, but I found their edits and comments to be lacking. Most students needed more engagement on their writing overall from this portion of the unit. The students also would have benefitted from me giving specific instructions as to what to look for when editing writing, for their peer’s writing and their own writing. In the future, a checklist or a short lesson with students would only benefit the process overall.

Secondly, I would give more mini-lessons during the unit. At this point in the school year, students forget little things we worked on all year. Quick reviews of conventional edits, such as capitalization, apostrophes, and active verb choice would benefit the final products. Students also mentioned still needing practice with spelling and gaining content in the Google Form survey.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In the present day, I believe the job of a teacher is not associated with the idea of “techie”; however, online schooling during the spring of 2020 and the immersion of devices into schools changed that thought. Teachers are asked to use technology on a daily basis. At this point, most schools provide students with the internet and a device for learning. Schools provide the tools to encourage learning with technology; however, teaching with technology is a different skillset. Teaching writing can be especially difficult with technology and devices. Students are used to writing in an informal setting to an informal audience, but each student will need to write in the future. Some students will write emails to their bosses and customers; some students will write ten-page long papers for their professors; some students will write notes to their children’s teachers. Because students cannot avoid writing, students need to write in high school. In order to encourage students to write, engagement is necessary. English teachers need to engage students to write, and technology can provide that engagement. Using online tools, such as Google and Hemingway, to edit their writing, students can see errors and work collaboratively to enhance their overall writing. Alternative writing assignments, such as blogging and podcasting, engage students in new and creative ways.

A three-week unit was created, utilizing each of these technology platforms: editing tools, blogging, and podcasting. The unit worked with low-level students who struggled in English classes in the past. However, during the course of the unit, students showed engagement and increased writing abilities. Students became engaged in the blogging assignment and by creating a podcast of their choice. Students also improved their writing through the editing assignments using Google and Hemingway. Through this unit, teachers see the benefits of writing using

devices and online tools, such as blogging, podcasting, and Hemingway. Now, there can be a little less fear if online schooling becomes a reality again for teachers across the nation.

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