



## Guidelines for Creating Online Writing Labs

Online Writing Labs (OWLs) have become a staple of college and post-secondary level writing programs throughout the country. Recently, a growing number of secondary and middle schools are beginning to use a variety of OWL strategies to support the implementation of a strong writing curriculum. OWLs may stand alone, or in connection with an existing writing center or writing lab tutoring program. Secondary and middle school OWLs cover a wide range of pedagogical goals and offer a variety of services. The following download offers guidelines and resources for setting up an OWL for your school.

- **Determine what type of OWL best suits your needs and pedagogical objectives.**

*Static Sites:* The most basic form of OWL is a *static site*, offering instructional text, examples of how to implement principles, and responses to students' frequently asked questions. The [Purdue University Online Writing Lab](#) is one of the most commonly cited static OWLs. The [Online Writing Lab](#) at Edina High School (Edina, MN) and the [Writing Lab](#) at Lakewood High School (Lakewood, CO) have also made use of this form.

*Social Interactive Sites:* Some OWLs are built as social and interactive sites where students can chat with a tutor, submit their paper for online feedback and comments, or post questions and receive feedback from peers or teachers. The [Online Writing Lab](#) at Laguna Beach High School (Laguna Beach, CA) offers students the chance to identify areas in which they need 'assistance, submit a paper, then receive feedback from a tutor.

*Combination Sites:* Some schools, such as [A.C. Reynolds High School](#) (Ashville, NC) and the [Peru School System](#) (Peru, IN) have made use of both static and social interactive principles in developing their OWLs.

### Considering a Static OWL?

How can the set-up of this site support the goals of our writing program?

Who do we want to write the content for our OWL?

How can the creation of the OWL reinforce the program's goals amongst students or faculty?

What external and research resources do we want to encourage students to use?

### Considering a Social Interactive or Combination Site?

Do you want your social interactive/combination site to feature real time interactions between students and peers and instructors? Real time interactions could include synchronous chat features or web forums. Time-displaced systems may rely more heavily on email or file submission/retrieval systems.

Strategize ways to keep your OWL focused on student implementation of writing principles so that the OWL doesn't turn into a glorified editing service.

- **Determine what type of OWL best suits the existing technological resources of the school.**

Funding and supporting an Online Writing Lab can be a challenge depending on the technological resources of your school, so writing programs should consider the best way to tap into the school's existing resources. Depending on the school's resources and the purposes of the OWL, a web-supported blogging software may be a better choice for your school's OWL. Al Raby High School (Chicago, IL) has used blogspot to construct an effective Social Interactive OWL, but online blogging platforms might work equally well for static and combination sites.

- **Determine what types of instructors or tutors are best suited to your planned OWL and strategize training for online writing instruction.**

Do you want current writing instructors leading the OWL? Classroom assistants or Parent volunteers? If you plan to use a Social Interactive site, the writing program may want to build on the resources in *Taking Initiative on Writing: A Guide for Instructional Leaders* to provide support and training for online instruction. NCTE also offers support materials, like Beth Hewett and Christa Ehmann's *Preparing Educators for Online Writing Instruction: Principles and Processes*. Schools might also consider engaging an NCTE Consultant for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Literacies.

**For Further Reference:**

Harris, Muriel and Michael Pemberton. "Online Writing Labs (OWLs): A taxonomy of options and issues." *Computers and Composition* 20.2 (2003): 145-159.

Hewett, Beth L., and Christa Ehmann. *Preparing Educators for Online Writing Instruction: Principles and Processes*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2004.

NCTE Committee on Best Practices for Online Writing.  
<<http://www.ncte.org/cccc/committees/owi>> Nov. 2009.

**Gere, Anne Ruggles, Hannah Dickinson, Melinda McBee Orzulak and Stephanie Moody. *Taking Initiative on Writing: A Guide for Instructional Leaders*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2010.**