Writing Online: Rhetoric for the Digital Age


Pullman’s Writing Online: Rhetoric for the Digital Age addresses the increasing need to “learn, think, and write digitally.” Designed with an accompanying website, this text shows readers how to apply rhetorical practices to the digital world. While the book can be used without the accompanying website, Pullman strongly encourages readers to work through a section of the book and then apply those skills online. To aid in usability, the book includes a glossary of digital related terms—from &lt; a &gt; to zebra stripes.

Writing Online is divided into seven chapters, accompanied with an introduction and conclusion. The introduction provides readers with more than just an overview of the text; Pullman differentiates between oral, literate, and digital rhetoric. The introduction also familiarizes the reader with certain typographical aspects of the book, such as the use of the text [[Search: . . .]] to signal the reader to search on the Internet for a phrase and the use of bold lines to highlight key features for easy scanning.

The book’s chapters cover everything from creating a domain name to using markup tools. Beginning with Chapter 1: Hello world, Pullman emerges the reader into the digital world by demonstrating how to set up an online self. The subsequent chapters address the following aspects of digital rhetoric: invention, arrangement, memory, style, and delivery. Writing Online incorporates traditional aspects of rhetoric and composition, such as the Toulmin model and Aristotle’s appeals, and applies them to an online setting.

At the end of each chapter, a summary section reiterates, “Where you are now.” Readers can use this numerical list to ensure they have obtained all desirable outputs from the chapter. For example in Chapter 5: Memory, the “Where you are now” section provides the reader with a checklist of items that you should have completed by this stage in the book: a landing screen, an about screen, a launch pad, a portfolio, and a reading list.

The Conclusion invites the reader to reflect on the knowledge obtained from the book as well as revisit the three rhetoric epoch tables listed in the introduction. The “Where you are now” section in the Conclusion is extensive, highlighting deliverables from each of the seven chapters.

Overall, Writing Online is a helpful tool for anyone trying to improve his or her online presence using traditional rhetorical skills. Pullman’s work provides Web-based guidelines and strategies that are suitable for both students and teachers alike. Furthermore, the book’s structure makes it easy to apply the valuable knowledge learned within its pages.

Elizabeth McGhee

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Tutoring Second Language Writers


As a composition studies professional, I constantly look for new research to provide me with effective strategies for teaching English language learners. Bruce and Rafoth’s edited version of Tutoring Second Language Writers is a guide created specifically for writing center tutors to help them better address the needs of English language learners at the university level.

The book, which is composed of four parts, structures around American pragmatist John Dewey’s idea of reflective thinking. The first part, “Actions and Identities,” offers readers valuable information concerning labels, stigmas, and other social-related issues that second language writers encounter. This section’s chapters helped me to re-conceptualize the role of the writing center to incorporate a more diverse, welcoming attitude towards the growing population of international students.

“Research Opportunities,” the second part of Tutoring Second Language Writers, provides the
reader with relevant research methods and associated terminology. The chapter within this section that is most beneficial to my goal of acquiring effective teaching strategies is chapter 7, “Examining Practice: Designing a Research Study.” In this chapter, Babcock discusses research methods that tutors can use to gather valuable statistical information within their own writing center.

The third part, “Words and Passages,” includes personal stories from several experienced writing center tutors, many of whom are also second language writers. In chapter 10, “These Sentences Sound Like Me: Transformative Accommodation in L2 Writing,” Liu describes how one of her students successfully managed to shuffle between U.S. norms and her own cultural identity within her writing. Liu’s story relates the importance of accommodating to second language writers’ needs at the writing center.

The book’s fourth and final part, “Academic Expectations,” contains information regarding the challenges that writing center tutors should expect to face during a tutoring session. Most pertinent to my research is chapter 14, “Helping Second Language Writers Become Self-Editors.” This chapter, written by second language writers Praphan and Seong, offers effective strategies that tutors can use before, during, and after a tutoring session. For example, Praphan and Seong suggest that writing tutors should keep a journal to record what they learn from each session. This journal log could potentially become a valuable resource to share with other tutors or to use in training.

While Tutoring Second Language Writers does offer examples of successful tutoring strategies to use in writing centers, it does not provide much in the way of detailed instructional methodology. However, the book provides readers with an in-depth look into the social issues that second language writers encounter and offers a great amount of personal insight from experienced tutors. Also, the “Questions to Consider” and “For Further Reading” sections at the end of each chapter include helpful sources for those seeking additional research on working with second language writers.

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**Words on the Move: Why English Won’t—and Can’t—Sit Still (Like, Literally)**


Words don’t stand still. They’re constantly changing. We all know this; and yet, even professions that involve writing regularly use words in ways they haven’t been used in speaking for a long time. And words, of course, don’t exist by themselves; they’re embedded in a grammar. For this reason, we can say the same thing about grammar and about other aspects of language.

McWhorter is not being prescriptive. But any journalist or trade book writer knows that the further your writing gets from speech, the further you get from the reader, in such crucial elements of communication as understanding and remembering, interest, and building the relationship.

These are the things McWhorter explores throughout Words on the Move: Why English Won’t—and Can’t—Sit Still (Like, Literally)—things that can make our writing much more effective and successful...

Let’s look at a few differences; some of them obvious; others, a little less so. The classical bugaboo is the old “It is I” versus “It is me.” The argument disappears if you use the analogy: No one ever says “It is we” (unless you’re a Scotchman), in contrast to “It is us.” Plus, of course, we never use the long form, but rather “It’s us.”

Probably the next most famous relic is the sentence-ending preposition (ESP). Churchill did that one 50 years ago, with his immortal comment to his secretary who had drafted a document for him where he fine many ESPs “This is a situation up with which I will not put.” Yet even The Economist—the ultimate arbiter of good writing—continues to use it.

One of the major battles between our two modes of language is in spelling and pronunciation. Pronunciation varies all over the board: in regional dialects and over time. Spelling acts like a ball chain;