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# Writing Classes with *Writeabout.com*: Learning Mode, Feedback, and Collaboration

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## Abstract

This review seeks to provide an alternative online platform for running an online writing class inside and outside the classroom. It focuses on *Writeabout.com*, which enables the integration of different modes of instruction, types of feedback, and collaborative activities that are necessary for providing an effective writing class. Its features allow teachers to create virtual classes and add students by using codes or importing from Google Classroom. The other features enable teachers to monitor the progress of each student's writing and give both oral and written feedback synchronously and asynchronously. *Writeabout.com* provides some stimulating ideas to inspire students to start writing. This review also elaborates on the pedagogical applications of *Writeabout.com* inside and outside the classroom in a self-access context and for developing learner autonomy in writing.

*Keywords:* collaborative writing, online writing class, writing feedback, writeabout.com

Writing has always been one of the most difficult abilities to master. The acquisition of a skill is frequently subjected to continuous practice and formative feedback (Cheng et al., 2015). Since the last decade, writing has shifted away from pen and paper and toward computers and the internet. This shift has prompted teachers to use online platforms that allow for synchronous and asynchronous writing practice and feedback delivery. Blogs and Wikis used to be popular platforms, but the trend has been leaning towards the use of more advanced, interactive online tools that can help with not only writing practice and feedback, but also delivery of oral feedback and tracking improvements. One online writing tool featuring such interactive and complex capabilities is *Writeabout.com*. It is an educational website that allows teachers to assist students with their sentence-building skills while also encouraging them to follow their passion for writing. This tool has grown into an important digital writing platform for classrooms, created by teachers who believe that writing should not be a chore for students, but rather a fun experience, and that sharing their writing with

their peers should not be a chore, but rather a fun and easy way for them to share their writing work with the class and the public.

### **The Features in *Writeabout.com***

First, there are features named ‘Classes’ and ‘Students.’ Teachers can create a class, then share the Teacher Code with students to join the class, or they can manually add students. Teachers can also import students from Google Classroom. Teachers can set a secret code to join class to keep students secure. Students only need to access the website and log in as students, then input the Teacher Code and set their own new usernames and passwords. No detailed registration is needed and the option to sign in with a *Google* account is available.

Under the *Students* feature, teachers can monitor student activity – check on individual student progress, manage students – ranging from managing students’ usernames and passwords to managing students’ writing publications and comments. They can also filter writing content and posts that students can see, access students’ data reports, and create a co-teaching class with other teachers. These two features allow teachers to have complete control over and monitoring of student writing activities, as well as to create a collaborative writing class that includes not only other teachers but also students from other classes, which has been deemed essential, particularly in the implementation of online writing classes (Savenye et al., 2001).

Other features are titled ‘Ideas’ and ‘Posts.’ *Ideas* gives students writing suggestions in a variety of areas, including society, hobbies, science, technology, the arts, and so forth. Each idea is presented with a prompt. For example, ‘Why do some parts of the planet experience drastic seasons while others maintain the same climate all year?’, ‘Pick a hobby or activity you do at least once a week, and explain how science is involved’, and ‘Why doesn’t it snow everywhere?’ Additional directions are provided for some suggestions to assist students with their writing. All the ideas are accompanied by visually appealing images. Furthermore, instructors can generate their own ideas to encourage student writing not only in their classes, but across the school; teachers can keep their own ideas private or aggregate all ideas in the Ideas gallery. Meanwhile, *Posts* allows teachers to view all the students’ writing by class, individual student, and by several categories, such as drafts and published writings. When teachers create collaborative work within the whole school and community, teachers can view writing posts from the involved students. Afterwards, teachers can click on any post that they want to read.

These *Ideas* and *Post* elements provide a platform for students to co-construct their writing while also inspiring student writing and scaffolding interactions between teachers and students, which can contribute to the development of learner autonomy in writing (Hyland, 2000).

### **Pedagogical Applications**

*Writeabout.com* can be utilized for both synchronous and asynchronous learning. Teachers can use synchronous mode to open the website and perform writing class exercises. Students can use their phones, tablets, and laptops to write. The student management function allows teachers to keep track of their students' writing progress. Teachers can assign students to finish their papers outside of class if the class time is insufficient. When students finish their writing, they just need to publish them, and they will appear on teachers' dashboards.

Teachers can use peer and teacher feedback to develop formative online writing processes in either synchronous or asynchronous forms. This sort of exercise was used by Waluyo (2020) in English classrooms at a Thai institution; students picked one writing topic and worked on it for several weeks. Every week, professors provided asynchronous responses to students' essays while also discussing their comments in general in class. At the end of the academic semester, the study discovered a substantial improvement in students' learning results. Teachers may encourage students to comment on their classmates' writing, or they may invite other teachers to provide comments on the students' work.

Another pedagogical application is implementing various forms of feedback. Feedback can be recorded, and the audio is simple to play and does not demand a large amount of internet connection. When it comes to written feedback, any word or sentence can be blocked, after which teachers can write and store remarks. In their compositions, students might see comments appearing on words and sentences. They can modify and resolve the remarks. Teachers may also view the modifications that students make. An experimental study discovered that teacher feedback is a key element influencing students' writing performance (Ahmadi et al., 2012).

Lastly, *Writeabout.com* can facilitate a collaborative writing class, not only among students, but also among teachers. It has the flexibility for teachers and students to view and give comments on each other's writing. Wigglesworth and Storch (2012) believe that learners working on writing assignments in pairs can improve learning by giving chances for language

conversation, based on their study examining learners' writing and answers to feedback. The addition of peer review and teacher feedback should, therefore, greatly improve the writing growth of students.

### **Supporting Student Learning Outside the Classroom**

*Writeabout.com* can be used to support student writing development outside the classroom. It provides a wide range of writing prompts that students can choose from to initiate their writing process under different categories, such as adventure and fantasy, creativity, culture, event, life at home, literature, and so forth. Each prompt is accompanied by a stimulating picture phrased in a question or statement form, which students just need to follow up with some details from their own experience and knowledge, eventually resulting in one piece of writing. Educators can also create a gallery of writing prompts for their students that are taken from the website sources; if necessary, educators can create their own prompts appropriate for their student learning and create a gallery of the self-made prompts. Both the prompts from the website and created by educators can be made accessible for students to develop their writing autonomously outside the classroom. In a self-access context, students can collect their favourite writing prompts and create their own galleries. The features in *Writeabout.com* allow students to share their writing with their classmates and deliver oral and written feedback, which can enable the creation of collaborative learning activities outside the classroom among students.

Previous research has investigated the beneficial effects of using writing prompts in conditioning foreign language students to produce the expected essay writing genres (Miller et al., 2016; Way et al., 2000). Teng (2021) recently investigated the efficacy of incorporating metacognitive prompts in collaborative writing on academic English writing skills, and the study discovered that EFL students developed academic writing skills better when they were given writing prompts that could stimulate the initiation of their writing process, develop awareness of the writing topic, and have control of their ideas while writing. Using *Writeabout.com* to support student writing development outside the classroom may result in similar outcomes as shown by previous research. Furthermore, when students use the writing prompts autonomously and collaboratively with their classmates, the social dimensions of learner autonomy in writing are created. Murray (2014) divides learner autonomy's social dimensions into three categories: emotional, spatial, and political. Students will be engaged in observation and adaptation of their

own thoughts and feelings (emotional dimensions), as well as controlling their writing management and content, due to the possible interactions that can occur outside the classroom between students and various writing prompts, students and their classmates' written and oral feedback, and students and teachers (spatial dimensions) in *Writeabout.com*.

### **Limitations**

The free edition allows for just 5 posts per student and a maximum of 250 students. For more, a \$95.00/year membership is necessary.

### **Notes on the Contributors**

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