CHAPTER TWO

Setting Up and Managing the Writing Workshop

Compared with traditional instructional models, the writing workshop appears unstructured and casual. Students flourish because of the independence offered in the writing workshop, but this independent activity requires significant behind-the-scenes preparation. Teachers prepare students to participate in the writing workshop for many weeks before knowing that they can function appropriately. The best, most productive writing workshops take place in environments where students observe standards and adhere to processes that minimize off-task behavior, freeing them for the significant creative and cognitive task of writing well. Lucy Calkins describes her own epiphany relative to setting up structures and processes for learning how to write:

> I have finally realized that the most creative environments in our society are not the kaleidoscopic environments in which everything is always changing and complex. They are, instead, the predictable and consistent ones—the scholar's library, the researcher's laboratory, the artist's studio. Each of these environments is deliberately kept predictable and simple because the work at hand and the changing interactions around that work are so unpredictable and complex. (1983, p. 32)

You'll find that students of all levels need time and practice to prepare for the activities necessary for productive writing workshops.

Getting Off to the Best Possible Start

It may seem daunting, but you'll find that careful up-front preparation and continual monitoring and refinement through the first several weeks of class are critical to minimize disruptions, help students to focus, and thus reap the long-term benefits of writing workshop.

Because the writing workshop's focus on individual responsibility is different from the traditional classroom experience, students need help to adjust. Writing teachers from elementary school through college have found that there are no shortcuts to helping students understand how to function socially (by using time wisely) and physically (by being where they ought to be) in this environment so that they can function cognitively as writers engaged in the craft. In order to succeed in this, students need explicit instruction in what to do and how to do it. This setting-up period can take as long as a month, and even after that month students may require periodic tune-ups in the form of reminders, further modeling, and mini-lessons on acceptable and unacceptable behaviors.

By the end of September you may be tempted to put your head down on your desk, wondering whether you will ever get to teach students about their writing. If so, you are not alone. Most teachers experience impatience as they launch the writing workshop. You'll have to trust that the sacrifice of time and energy is tolerable, because using that time to build structure and clarify activities allows for little interruption once this period is over. Front-loaded preparation that includes significant modeling, practice, and troubleshooting of what to do, when to do it, and how to do it helps keep your writing workshop productive. Teachers who don't prepare up front may see their workshops morphing into a giant mass of activity without clear direction. Advocates of the writing workshop have watched their colleagues try to "begin in the middle" of this kind of instruction, neglecting to provide appropriate and significant preparation for students. These teachers almost inevitably abandon the practice in favor of one that is more teacher centered, insisting that students cannot work with this much independence. Counterexamples exist across the grade levels, where students do work productively and independently, if not 100% of the time, at least for an acceptable portion. When you listen to teachers in these kinds of class-

rooms describe their process of preparing students, it is consistently a matter of high expectations, significant practice, and ongoing feedback on how students are behaving and how they are writing. It *is* worth the effort.

Teachers who have never experienced writing process as students, and may never have observed it, will have to rely upon the experiences of veteran teachers of writing workshop for a while, until they find their own rhythm and ways. In your zeal to get on with it and experience the pleasures of watching student writers grow, you may be tempted to skip or to go too quickly through these important steps—steps that, although not part of the writing process per se, are definitely part of the writing process *classroom*. As you read, be sure to refer to the *How's It Done?* boxes that you will find in this chapter and in those that follow. In these you will find the experiences of veteran writing process teachers, and particularly the schedules, templates, and other resources that have helped them to manage this work. The first *How's It Done?* box shows a calendar used by one ninth-grade teacher to plan the first 3 weeks of her writing workshop, a time she devotes exclusively to helping students ready themselves for the workshop ahead. In this chapter and the ones that follow, all teacher and student names are pseudonyms.

Organizing Your Physical Space

Students in traditional classrooms often require specific directions when they are asked to move out of their seats for group or paired activities, but in the fluid environment of the writing workshop, students are always moving and need to do so on their own initiative. The writing workshop was initially modeled after fine-arts courses. In courses like painting and sculpture, the instructor might talk with the students for a short time, but his or her primary role is to circulate among the students as they work to provide feedback and guidance. Likewise you'll seldom find yourself in the traditional front-of-the-room pose while students are in a writing workshop. Although this may be new for you, it is also very new for your students. They may be accustomed to this in the shop room and the gymnasium, even the science laboratory, but seldom in English. However, traditional classroom setups do not lend themselves to the kind of activities students will do in a writing workshop. Even if the teacher can negotiate through rows of student desks, the collaborative nature of the writing workshop makes rows of stu-

How's It Done?: Scheduling the First 3 Weeks

Ms. P knew her 10th-grade students would not be used to all the freedom and responsibility required to work most productively in her writing workshop. She also knew that even the most dedicated students might struggle with the cognitive challenges. In response, she planned a 3-week "training" period. This training period included instruction in how writers get the most from this time. Since Ms. P planned to have students work in writing workshop on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays in 3-week chunks, her training period would follow that same schedule as summarized below.

This calendar notes training directed at students' work in a peer response group. This is often the activity that needs the most practice. These activities range in duration: some take the whole class period and others are over with class time to spare. When Ms. P has time, she also models activities related to planning, drafting, editing, and getting and using teacher feedback.

Ms. P believes this to be time well spent because students are learning about behaviors as they are also learning how to pick out the elements of strong writing and identify what would improve a paper.

Sept. 1	Sept. 3	Sept. 5
Introduce idea of writing workshop. Ask students to think about the reasons people write, the difficulties, and what is most pleasurable. Show students a visual of stages of the writing process.	Tell students that the hardest part of this is managing the peer response process and that they are going to learn how to behave and what to say. Show anchor chart of desirable and nondesirable behaviors. Show them where in the room they will go for the peer response group, where to sign up for it, and how long it should be.	Invite four adults to come to the room and model. Have adults and students write for 10 minutes. Prompt: Talk about a time when your experience didn't match your expectation. Adults participate in peer group as students watch and comment.

(continued)

Sept. 8 Debrief further about adult example. What did they do well? What could they do better? Read teacher response and ask students to respond in the whole group as they would in the small group.	Sept. 10 Place students in groups of four or five at random. Ask them just to go around the table and read their responses. Each person should be told something nice about his/her paper, so students get used to reading and listening before they are ready to attempt substantive feedback.	Sept. 12 Show students a videotape of other students working in a group (from last year) and have them comment.
Sept. 15 Ask four students to volunteer to read their work and get feedback while the rest of the class observes and, when they are through, comments.	Sept. 17 Ask students to write for only 5 minutes. Prompt: Something you recall struggling to learn to do. Put them in groups of four or five and have them respond to these very short pieces. Every student should get at least one piece of usable feedback.	Sept. 19 Reflect back on all activities to remind students what is and what is not a productive group. Tell students they will begin to use this process with their writing next week when the writing workshop begins.

dents sitting at their desks a barrier to the work. Most high schools are not equipped with rooms designed solely as workshops, so you will have to shift the furniture for this period and save a minute or two at the end of the workshop to reassemble the room for the next period if writing workshop is not the only course you teach.

Students may be planning their writing, drafting, getting and giving feedback, revising, or editing during the writing workshop. Each of these activities will need to be staged in a different location within your room. This helps facilitate your role of advisor and also the important activities involved in student collaboration.

Student Desks

Ideally, student desks are separated somewhat to allow for teacher circulation, paired consultations among students, and some measure of privacy when desired. Students generally work on planning, drafting, and revising at their own desk, as these tend to be individual activities.

Peer Response Areas

Two areas are needed for two different kinds of collaborative activities. One, a peer response area, can be space on the floor or at a table, with enough space for multiple groups of four or five students to meet. Another space should be for collaborative or group editing. This table or area on the floor should be distinct from the peer response area to emphasize the different nature of the two tasks. Students (and sometimes teachers) have a good deal of trouble distinguishing the activities of feedback to prompt revision and collaborative editing support. Untangling these activities by physically separating them secures the difference in students' minds. Finally, students will meet with the teacher in a writing conference either at the teacher's desk—in which case a student space is needed—or by the teacher moving to the student desk—in which case a teacher space is needed.

Finding Space for Word Processing

Word processing has been shown to have a positive influence on student writing (Graham & Perin, 2007). Even without a computer for every student, word processing can be integrated into the writing workshop (see Chapter 5 for a fuller discussion of using computer word-processing technology to support the writing process). If computers are available, students will move to them during drafting, after feedback as they begin revision, and after collaborative editing support as they prepare their paper for publication. Unless laptops are available for students' use at their own desks or tables, they will have to move to the computer area to work on these activities. Laptop carts or computer labs can also be integrated into the space needed to work on writing. Teachers should not be discouraged from supporting student writing with technology merely because they do not have a computer available for every student.

You can and should take measures beforehand to regulate how you would like students to move when they are ready to engage in a new part of the writing process. Because student movement can be chaotic, teachers will regulate, in their own way, how they would like students to move. Is all movement silent? Do students first put their name in a slot at the front of the room indicating where they will move and for what purpose? Teachers have devised many strategies for keeping student whereabouts under control. It is important that students show that they are moving through the writing process both physically and cognitively. A sample log that you may consider using to keep track of student activity is presented later in this chapter. Other teachers prefer to put all student names on magnets or clothespins and have the students move their name to the slot corresponding with the portion of the writing process in which they are engaged. A graphic of this can be found in Figure 2.1.

Preparing Students for Participation

The most important preparation you can provide for writing workshop students is to help them learn to collaborate on their work. Having an audience provided for a writer and being an audience for other writers are among the most important components of the writing workshop, yet these are not intuitive activities for most students. Students need

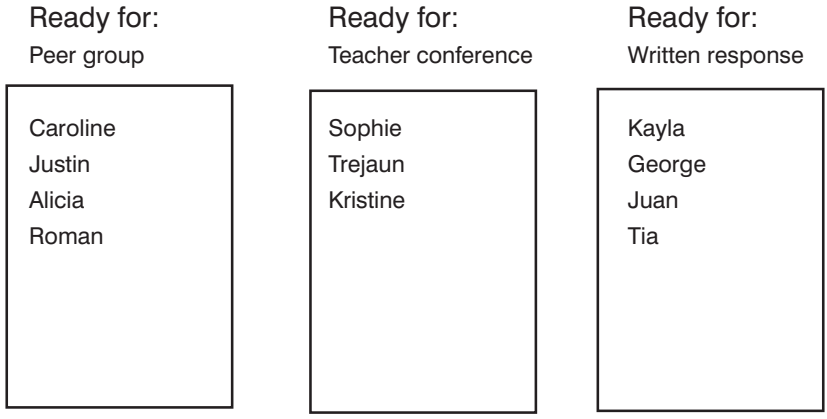

FIGURE 2.1. Sign-up sheets.

careful, planned instruction in the behaviors necessary to encourage success in giving and receiving feedback. They need to know how to handle too much or too little feedback and how to respond to wanted and unwanted commentary. Chapters 7 and 8 provide suggested strategies on how to support students in giving and receiving feedback as part of the writing process. This includes how to be a good responder and writing partner and how to use advice given by a peer. These skills alone, however, won't help students become better writers if they do not know how to handle themselves in the classroom. Off-task behavior will derail both weak and strong students, and the whole purpose of this setting-up time is to minimize this problem. Many secondary teachers spend a better part of the first weeks of class explaining the structures in the writing process, modeling how one moves around, setting up opportunities for guided practice, giving support, and helping students move toward independence in the social, physical, and cognitive tasks before them.

Kicking Off with Mini-Lessons

A mini-lesson is a short piece of whole-group instruction that can introduce a strategy or behavior you want to cultivate. The writing workshop almost always begins with a mini-lesson. As time progresses and students become more comfortable in the workshop, you'll likely focus these lessons on characteristics of good writing and strategies for improving writing. In the beginning, though, you will want to focus these lessons on being a member of a writing workshop classroom. Some of these initial mini-lessons might include how to know when you have a complete first draft, where to go to get feedback, when to go to the teacher, when and where to edit, or what to do if you finish your work. You will be the best person to determine which physical or cognitive tasks need the most rehearsal for your students. Thus you might find that students have no difficulty getting up from their desk and moving quietly to the peer review table. You also might find that students need a visual image of doing this in a respectful, nondisruptive manner. If they can use this support, a mini-lesson is a good way to do it.

The total time the mini-lesson takes should be brief (thus the name mini-lesson), because it is important for students to get short bursts of information, have the task or behavior modeled, practice it with guidance, and then begin to move toward independence. Below are the steps

and suggested language to use as a heuristic for a mini-lesson focused on one writing element. This mini-lesson structure is designed so that teachers can plug in any topic they deem appropriate for students so that the instruction is consistently presented. In the interest of showing, and not telling, however, an actual mini-lesson scenario is listed below. The structure for mini-lessons is summarized in Figure 2.2

Introduce the Task or Objective

"Today we are going to talk about how writers use their writer's notebook to come up with ideas for writing. This activity is a part of prewriting and is important because it prepares the writer the way that an athlete might stretch before competing in a sport or a chef might gather his ingredients before preparing a dish. Writers use their notebook to experiment with lots of ideas; sometimes we call these 'seeds' of ideas. When you have a number of seeds, it is great to look through them, to reread and see what you have written. Often one of them pops up as having the most potential for further writing. Sometimes none pop out dramatically, so writers just select one that they continue to work with. This is very low risk, and that what is great about it. If you begin writing with a seed and determine it isn't going anywhere, you can look back at your notebook and see what else is there."

Talk about How Students Get Started

"I have provided you each with a writer's notebook. For the rest of this week, we are going to begin class by writing about something that you saw recently, something you did recently, or something

First step	Introduce the task or objective.
Second step	Talk about how students get started.
Third step	Model the process for students.
Fourth step	Lead students in practicing the process.
Fifth step	Debrief the whole group.
Sixth step	Prepare students for the physical, cognitive, and social demands of working independently.

FIGURE 2.2. Mini-lesson template.

you wondered about recently. We are going to try to get several pages of writing for each entry. At the end of the week we will have many pages of writing that, ideally, will generate more ideas for our writing."

Model the Process for Students

You can choose to model on chart paper, an overhead, document camera, or the chalkboard. Some processes need to be physically acted out. You may consider a think-aloud, sharing with students what you are thinking as you write. Then you might reflect together on the modeling that has just occurred.

"I was thinking as I was coming into work this morning that this change in the weather bothers me much more than it did years ago. I think I am going to write about how that change might be indicative of other changes. [*Teacher writes.*] As I get older I know I am less flexible; even small alterations in my style throw me for a loop. Will I ever be able to roll with the punches as I used to. . . . [Teacher continues to think aloud and write for up to 5 minutes as students watch.] OK, students, what did you just see and hear me do?"

Lead Students in Practicing the Process

"OK, now I am going to have you open your writer's notebook and make a few quick entries. You don't have to write a lot about any one thing, and if you need a prompt I have provided you with a list inside your notebook." [For a list of prompts, see Chapter 4.]

Debrief the Whole Group

"What did it feel like to write in this way? What difficulties did you have? Let's remind ourselves why we might do this on a regular basis."

Prepare Students for the Physical, Cognitive, and Social Demands of Doing This Independently

"Now, often you are going to be working in your writer's notebook independently of the rest of the class. For instance during the writ-

ing workshop you may be waiting for me to come conference with you or waiting for a group of your peers to be ready to hold a peer response group. These are times to begin entries in your notebook, to look back at old ones, to see whether these are ripe for continuation. When you have moments that are not taken up by a writing project, this is where you turn. We will do some whole-group writing in our notebooks, and I will sometimes also ask you to make entries outside of this class. Today, however, I want you to think of using it as writing practice when other writing you are doing is put on hold as you wait for others. Let's try it. Here is the scenario: You are doing some writing and come to the point where you just don't know where else to go. You see that there is a sign-up sheet for a peer editing group with one other name on it. Because you know that you must have four students to make a group, you put your name on and return to your desk to wait. As you wait, you pull out your writer's notebook and begin writing or rereading past entries. When you note that other students are ready for the peer response group, you finish the point or sentence you are on, put your notebook away, and begin working on the piece you wanted feedback on in order to continue to improve. This is the correct way to use a writer's notebook. What are some of the things you expect would not be appropriate? [Teacher lists these—e.g., looking at someone's notebook without permission, taking it home and not bringing it back, doing other homework while waiting to go to the peer group, bothering other students who are writing, discussing nonwriting concerns with peers.]"

This mini-lesson is not the end of the discussion/modeling/practice on using a writer's notebook. Mini-lessons are not intended as the sole instruction in anything. They are little bursts of instruction that may be repeated to students in individual or small-group conversations or in future whole-group instruction. At times you may notice that students are not participating in one part of writing workshop as they once did, or they are disrupting other students. This would be a time for a tune-up mini-lesson reinforcing appropriate and inappropriate behaviors when engaging in this structure. When you are ready to introduce editing, revision, feedback, and publishing you may do similarly structured lessons. Mini-lessons such as this one are designed to help students gain insight on how writers work and to observe a more expert writer engaged in that process. These strategies also help to establish good habits that can be sustained throughout the year. Chap-

ter 5 offers further ideas for mini-lessons related to specific qualities of writing. This structure for mini-lessons is based on the gradual-release model introduced by Pearson and Gallagher (1983).

The gradual-release model requires that you demonstrate a process by cognitively and/or physically modeling it for your students. You then guide students in the practice and ask them to reflect on what they have done. Finally, you set up opportunities for practice that will become increasingly independent.

A template for mini-lessons is important for classroom structure and for teacher ease. Students are introduced to the structure so that it is transparent. You and your students adhere to a predictable structure for mini-lessons, and teachers need not reinvent the wheel every time they share a mini-lesson with students.

These kinds of process mini-lessons occupy much of the first month as students learn about the writing workshop. Once students understand and have practiced some of the basic practices and understandings, content-focused mini-lessons are introduced. These can follow the same pattern as the process mini-lessons but might focus on adding details, organizing writing, or combining sentences to increase writing fluency. Teachers generally use their students' writing to determine what aspects of instruction would be most beneficial. Sometimes you might differentiate these lessons by pulling a portion of the class and working with them on one concept for which not everyone is ready. It is important to note that a mini-lesson offers no magic. Any task that is challenging enough for students that it requires a mini-lesson will probably require more than one. Each mini-lesson need not be unique, and teachers may decide to focus on just a few concepts for a period of weeks or months. A full discussion of grammar mini-lessons appears in Chapter 9.

Scaffolding Student Collaboration

Students spend a great deal of their time in writing workshop conferring with one another or with you. This presents two interrelated management concerns—students must be able to work together productively, and they must do so without your watchful eye, as you will likely be busy in conference with one of their peers. Nobody believes that adolescents will attend to their schoolwork 100% of the time without significant instruction in strategies for staying on task. It will be necessary for you to model appropriate behavior, discuss inappropriate

behavior, manufacture scenarios in which students must decide how to handle disruptions, and in some cases work out a system for tracking levels of productive participation. You may want to give points for every day that students meet a level of productivity, or simply deduct points or lower grades when students are off task. It may take experimentation to determine what works. You may want to consider using a log like the one provided in Figure 2.3 to help you track and record student locations and behaviors.

This weekly log can help you monitor where students are in the process and easily see whether they are at the appropriate location. You might ask students to fill out the "location" and "activities" column, perhaps on a piece of chart paper or a whiteboard, and then you can note absences and areas for concern. For example Amanda marked herself at her own desk coming up with ideas, yet when her teacher looked up she found her to be otherwise engaged. Recording documents of this type can be helpful because they track students' progress through the process. Even if Amanda's teacher were unaware that she was off track (because, for example, she was sitting at her desk quietly doing nothing), she could immediately note that a whole week is too long to be coming up with ideas. Her knowledge of Amanda and her work habits would suggest to her whether Amanda might be really stuck, in

Student	**Week of** 2/14	**Location(s)**	**Activities**	**Assessment**
Megan		Desk Peer review table	Drafting Feedback	OK
Tori	Absent Monday	Desk	Planning	
Jake		Teacher desk Editing table	Conference	OK
Rhianna		Computer lab Other student desk	Drafting Buddy response	OK
Jorge		Peer review table Desk	Feedback Revision	OK
Amanda		Desk	Coming up with ideas	✓ Unacceptable
Stephen		Computer lab	Final draft Publishing	OK

FIGURE 2.3. Sample student tracking form.

which case she may need some teacher support, or whether she is using her time unwisely.

Regardless of how teachers prepare students for participation, this is not an element that can be skipped. Careful planning of management and practicing of desirable behaviors will ensure the best chance for successful writing workshops.

Scheduling and Sequencing the Writing Workshop

In the chapters that follow, we explore how the writing workshop can coexist with and complement other forms of writing instruction. For now it is enough to say that a minimum amount of time dedicated entirely to the writing workshop is required for long-term effect on student writing. Because high school writing/language arts/English classes typically span only one period, it is recommended that at least 2 of the 5 days that the course meets should be devoted to the writing workshop. Many teachers spend 3 or even 4 days and find that works best for them. Novice teachers are wise to ease into this more slowly to explore the benefits of the writing workshop and also what it doesn't do. You should plan to spend 40 minutes per session on the writing workshop; thus high school classes that aren't in large blocks of time will likely do very little else on writing workshop days. While many teachers select 2 or 3 days a week to do the writing workshop for the entire quarter, semester, or year, others prefer to do the workshop every day for a period of time, say 3 weeks, and then focus on other aspects of literacy, perhaps even including genres of writing that are more efficiently taught in a context other than the writing workshop (e.g., standardized test writing) for another chunk of time. In this model, students participate in the workshop for a period of weeks, then use those skills to enhance other literacy activities, in turn using skills from those other literacy activities to fold back into the writing workshop when it starts up again.

For example you might begin with students writing a narrative, expository, or argumentative paper, instructing them as they go through the stages of the writing process. If students do this each time the course meets for 2 or 3 weeks, many of the students will have produced a finished draft ready for publication by the end of that time. The next 2- or 3-week chunk might be devoted to a specialized genre of writing, high-stakes test taking for example, that doesn't lend itself

as comfortably to the writing workshop. *How's It Done: Teacher's Planning Books* allows you to look into the plan books of two teachers who organize the writing workshop a bit differently.

You might wonder why teachers often engage students in the writing workshop for only a portion of class time in a week or month. The writing workshop will improve student writing as represented on many different measures, high-stakes tests among them. The process of collaboration that is characteristic of the writing workshop will improve student understanding of how to write, but it isn't useful in all situations. During ACT tests, students will not be allowed to ask peers to give them feedback on their writing. We must give them practice in this kind of writing, because it holds an important position in higher education and in many work situations. Again, the skills learned in the writing workshop—deliberate and thoughtful planning, effortful prewriting, revision, editing, audience awareness—should greatly and positively influence the way that students operate in all writing contexts, but students must have practice using them in compressed situations. The writing workshop slows down the writing process, helps novice writers to understand all that goes in to productive writing, and continues to help even skillful writers by providing a community, an audience, and a workspace. It shouldn't be thought of as a minor league that one graduates out of. It should be thought of as a crucial element of learning to write.

Materials Needed for the Writing Workshop

Teachers eager to implement the writing workshop often ask, "What do I need?" They are accustomed to a new curriculum coming with professionally published materials. One of the advantages of the writing workshop is that it needs no predeveloped materials that have to be purchased from a publisher. There is no need for student textbooks or workbooks. What students do need is some version of a writer's notebook, where they can journal, keep notes, and sometimes begin first drafts; one file to keep work in progress; and one file to keep work that they consider finished. Before beginning your work in the writing workshop, you will want to gather together those important materials.

Teachers who elect to have students draft on computers, and I encourage that if at all possible, will need to have students bring a flash drive if they are unable, or you do not want them to, save work to a school or district network or other repository. It is worth looking into

How's It Done?: Teachers' Planning Books

Mr. S spends 2 days per week doing writing workshop and 3 days per week working on writing that he considers more teacher directed. While Monday and Tuesday are workshop days, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday resemble a more traditional composition class. Mr. S has students working on a big paper during the writing workshop and smaller pieces that he explicitly instructs during the end-of-the-week activities. Ms. B elects to do the writing workshop every day for a period of weeks and then focus an entire week on another genre of writing that isn't what she calls "workshoppable." Here are their plan books.

Mr. S's Plans

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Writing workshop	Writing workshop	Timed writing	Work with thesis writing	Work with thesis writing

Ms. B's Plans

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Writing workshop	Writing workshop	Writing workshop	Writing workshop	Writing workshop
Same	Same	Same	Same	Same
Same	Same	Same	Same	Same
Test-taking writing	Test-taking writing	Test-taking writing	Test-taking writing	Test-taking writing

tools such as Google Docs (*documents.google.com*) if you wish students to save their work in a Web-based environment. With free tools such as this one, students can post drafts that can be accessed by themselves, by you, or by other students (by invitation). Their work is not accessible to anyone except the "collaborators" whom the writers invite to view their work. This can be an effective tool not just for storage but also for peer feedback. Using technologies such as this one to support group and teacher feedback on student writing is discussed in Chapters 7 and 8.

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