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Review of PARS in Practice: More Resources and Strategies for Online Writing Instructors, Jessie Borgman and Casey McArdle, editors

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talk of a “material turn” in rhetoric and composition. The general idea is that writing studies scholars should do more to account for the role of material forces in the writing and thinking process. Wenger’s work is exemplary in this regard. Throughout *Yoga Minds* she foregrounds the active role of individual human bodies in the construction of knowledge. In doing so, she forcefully rejects the postmodern notion that bodies are simply vehicles via which cultural scripts are performed. Integrally, *contra* much so-called new materialism, she also insists on the reality and importance of the embodied self. As Wenger puts it, she refuses to allow the “I” to be dissolved either in discourse or “a vortex of intertextual materialities” (55). This is a quietly radical orientation. It posits a self that can stand in ethical relation with other selves yet maintain its fundamental integrity. I would suggest that this conception of social space has much to recommend it. It respects empirical reality as well as the phenomenological reality of everyday experience. To my knowledge, the consequences of Wenger’s body-centric individualism—and how it connects with and pushes against other work in feminist theory, materialist-oriented writing studies, and embodied rhetorics—has yet to be explored. I urge scholars to take up the challenge.



Borgman, Jessie, and Casey McArdle, editors. *PARS in Practice: More Resources and Strategies for Online Writing Instructors.* WAC Clearinghouse, University Press of Colorado, 2021. 384 pp.

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The charge that “we are all online writing instructors” should resonate with any composition instructor who has taught during the Covid-19 pandemic (Borgman and McArdle 3). This exigent universal truth gives rise to the compilation of this volume. The well-timed collection builds on Borgman and McArdle’s co-authored book *Personal, Accessible, Responsive, Strategic: Resources and Strategies for Online Writing Instructors*, which earned the 2020 Computers and Composition Distinguished Book Award and introduced the PARS approach to online writing instruction—Personal, Accessible, Responsive, Strategic. (Yes, it’s a golf metaphor for achieving the goal of shooting a *par* score.) The unique PARS framework provides a generative, systematic approach to creating and sustaining more effective and equitable online writing courses, and *PARS in Practice* builds on this landmark contribution with an even greater range of practical approaches that instructors, administrators, and scholars can use to develop their theories and practices of online writing instruction (OWI). As a graduate student who began a PhD program and became a first-year composition (FYC) instructor during the pandemic, the collection guided me to develop sound online teaching practices, and it reminded me to do well by my students in a time of crisis.

As Borgman and McArdle explain in their introduction, “PARS spans three layers: design, instruction, and administration,” and “when these layers are combined, they equal the user/student experience” (5). Much like the components of the PARS approach, these layers intersect and overlap productively throughout the 20 core chap-

ters of the book. This open-access resource functions as a handbook for online writing instructors: each section begins with a brief overview from the editors, and each chapter includes an abstract and list of relevant keywords. The book is an accessible addition to the OWI scholarship because the practice-oriented chapters share a “citation lite” writing style (8). While the chapters are theoretically sound and well-grounded in composition pedagogy scholarship, the authors forego lengthy literature reviews to center on their own contributions to the field, making for a personal reading experience. Each chapter forges a robust connection between OWI and PARS, demonstrating how well this heuristic works in practice.

The collection begins with Section I, “Design,” a compilation of five chapters that address the challenges of course design for administrators and instructors who make decisions about the content and layout of online writing courses. Although I began my teaching career by following a standardized FYC curriculum, I still had copious decisions to make about how to effectively design the layout and trajectory of the course. In other words, while the learning outcomes and major projects of my FYC courses had already been set, I had the responsibility to plan the day-to-day steps we would take to achieve those goals. Two of the most readily useful chapters in this section demonstrate how to choose appropriate online tools and organize meaningful group discussions. “Online Writing Instructors as Strategic Caddies: Reading Digital Landscapes and Selecting Online Learning Tools” by Kristy Liles Crawley models strategic course design by integrating the PARS approach with Jody Shipka’s statement of goals and choices (SOGC) as a framework for OWI (20). The adapted SOGC questions guide instructors to determine any online resource, platform, or “tool’s capabilities, audience, and contexts” and “weaknesses and strengths compared to others” to make strategic decisions about online learning resources (Crawley 20). Along with the keen use of digital tools, productive group discussions reflect a cornerstone of many effective online writing courses. In “The Literacy Load is Too Damn High! A PARS Approach to Cohort-Based Discussion,” Alex Sibbald promotes a PARS approach to online discussions that emphasizes quality over quantity. This persuasive chapter makes a strong argument for the effectiveness of “cohort-based discussions”—small-group discussions that occur regularly throughout a term—while leaving room for instructors to personalize the strategy to their own institutional and classroom contexts. During the pandemic, as I moved modalities from asynchronous online to hybrid synchronous to masked in-person classrooms, I continuously appreciated cohort-based discussions for generating productive conversations and meaningful relationships among students.

Section II, “Instruction,” covers perhaps the most important aspect of writing instruction—that our pedagogy itself should always aim to be personal, accessible, responsive, and strategic. Never has this rung truer than during the Covid-19 pandemic. Writing instructors who teach courses in any modality or environment can turn to these chapters for pedagogical strategies and instructional approaches. In “Finding the Sweet Spot: Strategic Course Design Using Videos,” Christine McClure and Cat Mahaffey further the argument that videos and video conferences make OWI more personal and effective. The authors develop specific strategies and best practices for creating videos for online courses with several detailed, visual step-by-step guides. This chapter offers a far more pedagogically sound resource for creating and adding videos to online courses

than the results from random Internet searches for tutorials that instructors might have relied on through sudden shifts to online instruction (as I did).

Another significant addition to the collection is “Designing a More Equitable Scorecard: Grading Contracts and Online Writing Instruction.” Angela Lafen and Mikenna Sims demonstrate a PARS approach to labor-based grading contracts and antiracist assessment practices. They astutely identify challenges with implementing labor-based grading contracts, such as student perceptions and LMS barriers, while suggesting ways to develop responsive grading contracts in online writing classrooms (122). Their chapter includes references to many additional grading resources and strategically presents a road map for how instructors can use labor-based grading contracts in their writing courses (133-139).

Section III: “Administration” includes five chapters that, most relevant to writing program administrators, focus on the larger pictures, goals, and outcomes of OWI. One of the most interesting chapters, “Create, Support, and Facilitate Personal Online Writing Courses in Online Writing Programs,” draws on focus group research to explore how instructors and administrators can forge strong personal connection in online spaces (Thomas et al.). Based on their research, the authors offer practical tips for building rapport, strengthening personal connections with students, and developing community in online courses. Four appendices provide practical tips and anecdotal experiences from the authors (203-207). Jason Snart’s contribution, “Online Writing Instructors as Web Designers: Tapping into Existing Expertise,” explores the professional development challenge of guiding online writing instructors to think of themselves as instructional designers.

The final section on “User Experience (UX)” faces the daunting task of integrating the three layers of design, instruction, and administration in the PARS approach, and delivers on this goal. A highlight, “The Bottom End; Transposing Online Bass Lessons to Online Writing Instruction” by Dylan “Too Fresh” Retzinger, promotes a UX-driven PARS approach to the instruction, design, and administration of online writing courses. Retzinger emphasizes that UX “means being critically and culturally aware of the experiences that shape us as instructors and researchers” (278). Consistent with the approach to perceiving students as users, Joseph Bartolotta develops a framework instructors can use to test their courses’ usability, or “the extent to which your students are able to complete the goals you have created for your online writing courses” (305). He suggests that instructors should first model his task-based usability testing approach and then subsequently develop their own usability practices for their classrooms. Both chapters speak toward the future—toward a “new” normal in which instructors adapt their online teaching practices to meet the needs of a face-to-face classroom (instead of the other way around). The guidance to follow the strategies but then personalize and expand them also reflects the goal of many chapters in this collection.

PARS in Practice is one of the most practical recent additions to writing pedagogy scholarship, and online writing instructors will find it immediately useful. As Borgman and McArdle conclude, this book can serve as a personal impetus for action and inspiration. For me, becoming an instructor during the Covid-19 pandemic meant becoming an *online* instructor—a role I only stepped into with the help of close colleagues and the guidance of foundational pedagogical texts, like this one. By the time I finished read-

ing the book, I had already started to follow some of the advice and suggestions in my hybrid first-year composition course, with even more ideas for designing my course next semester. I realized how to enact my teaching philosophy in practice, transforming my commitment to equitable assessment into implementing grading contracts, and aligning my empathetic approach to online instruction through a focus on the student-user experience. *PARS in Practice* promises to meet you where you are in your OWI journey and help you grow and learn, for the benefit of yourself and your students. The only thing this book needs is you.



Miller, Richard E. *On the End of Privacy: Dissolving Boundaries in a Screen-Centric World*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019. 256 pp.

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Although I no longer grade student papers, I work closely with students and my faculty colleagues in support of the online learning environment. Need some advice about how to design your online course to increase student engagement? Need to know what the institution's rules are as they relate to online teaching? Yes, I'm that person: accessibility laws, copyright laws, college policy, how to get this photocopied article into the learning management system, where to click to do this or that. As faculty coordinator of distance education, I aim to make the online learning experience not only legal for the institution but an actual learning experience that's worthy of our students. I work with students to understand and improve their digital experience and with faculty to help them understand and employ 21st-century tools in the online environment. My job is as much strategic as it is practical, counselor as much as it is coach.

Colleagues lately have flooded me with complaints about students not "engaging" with the learning materials that have been placed so painstakingly and thoroughly in the learning management system (in our case, Canvas). Students, on the other hand, vent their frustration at how hard it is to find their assignments and relevant information. And sitting squarely in the middle, I see both sides: the faculty compulsion to add more and more content and expectations to their online courses, yet the student overload with the layered, confusing, and multiplicitous digital learning environment. Even best practices in online education, however, may not be enough for students who are overwhelmed with life or only one broken screen or one lost wifi service away from dropping out...or worse. And although Miller's *End of Privacy* seemed at first glance to be about something else entirely, I found it to be a helpful prism through which this challenge of student engagement in the online learning environment can be examined.

In 2010, Miller launched himself into a 7-year journey down the rabbit hole and into an exclusively digitally mediated world, a paper celibacy, in order to "take a break from academic writing" (xi). But what begins as a seemingly innocuous pattern interrupt—like a refreshing afternoon walk in a day of committee work drudgery—ends up as an exercise in human curiosity and academic work resulting in this book. It is an insight-