

The Hybrid Course as Ritualized Pedagogical Space
by
Laura Younger

This short mosaic offers some particular guidelines for teaching composition and research skills in a hybrid or on-line format. The questions to consider at the end of each section may push your course development along. In some ways the hybrid format is ideal for teaching writing skills; writing and research have a highly-solitary component. We recognize this fact as researchers, but not always as teachers of research methodology. For optimal development, a student researcher and a writer requires a sense of audience as well as solitary writing time. The hybrid course works to fulfill both needs.

I am a Senior Lecturer in English at The Ohio State University--Newark Branch Campus. Last year, I co-piloted OSUN's first Hybrid Learning in Writing and Composition. I have published on-line articles with *The Digital Union* from OSU's Office of Learning Technology, and I have directed many training programs and teaching roundtables. To create a central faculty training instrument, I established a Hybrid Course wiki, which has become a collaborative effort in further development. Finally, I find that my work in diversity and my work in on-line programming coalesce nicely, and I am currently developing a training program for on-line institutional diversity training.

Please feel free to contact me at youngert.18@osu.edu.

Further information can be found at: <http://osu.academia.edu/LauraYounger/About>

THE ELEGANT MODEL OF HYBRID LEARNING

- Writing is full of chaos and uncertainty; your course modules do not have to be.
- Your experimental communications may be full of failures; your on-line course presentation does not have to be.
- Your writing instruction may be re-iterative and recursive; your classroom presentations do not have to be.
- Your standards for judging successful writing may seem harsh; your persona never has to be, and your persona will become transparent to you as you see yourself through a technologically-mediated lens.
- Making meaning motivates our students; our modules show them they aren't doing "busywork."
- We get paid to linger in the gardens of *our* areas of interest; our hybrid courses help students tend their *own* gardens.
- We are paid for the luxury of presenting ideas; our hybrid courses can help us share that sense of luxury with our students.
- We like to work on our own, finding our own convoluted pathways to understanding; hybrid courses give our students the space to find their *own* convoluted pathways--still within the safety of our guidance.
- We understand our material so well partially because we research and organize that material; hybrid courses give students more space to research and organize their own angles of interest.
- We crave an audience to listen to our ideas, finding a captive audience in our students; hybrid courses give our students equal access to the same sense of audience in on-line community forums.
- We are motivated by a sense of hierarchy; most of us hoping to move up some academic ladder; hybrid courses offer students the same opportunity to move up the ladder of witnessed performance.
- We are motivated by a quiet and abiding love of the ritualized space of creation; hybrid courses offer that same pure ritualized space, devoid of the personality conflicts with instructors, the distractions of classroom social dynamics, the pitfalls of pleasing or rebelling, and the struggles to get to an actual physical room on time.

If you were a student in your own hybrid course, which of these features would be most attractive to you?

Which feature would make you feel most motivated to continue on in the course?

Which feature would be most discouraging to you?

TO BEGIN WITH A MUSICAL ANALOGY:

- A hybrid course may start with an undercurrent of speed, electricity, and anticipatory foreshadowing as the curtain rises.
- This sense of flow, of anticipation, and of focus is yours, as an instructor, to be used and directed.
- Almost invariably, your students will experience a heightened sense of intellectual energy, coming largely from the unlimited resources their hybrid course offers.
- Then, as they begin to synthesize your course materials for themselves, their personal melody lines begin.
- As they develop their own melodies/arguments, they deepen their engagement, their insights, their ideas, and their analyses.
- Simply put, you can create some fields and offer some forums in the classroom with a hybrid format that you simply cannot offer any other way.

When do you feel that your traditional classroom is most energetically dead?

Most energetically alive?

THE HYBRID COURSE OFFERS FEATURES THAT THE TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM DOES NOT POSSESS.

- Ironically, the speed and the electrical buzz of technology can open a portal to the energetic silence and "un-impinged-upon" time needed for a student's creativity and exploratory impulses to unfold.
- The on-line component of your hybrid course will probably impact your face-to-face days in a positive manner. The structure, the inculcation of focal points, the combination of privacy and publicity that the student can find in the on-line component carry over into the classroom.
- The instructor has the ability to alter the colors and the sounds surrounding the writer. This can ameliorate the effects of the energetically-jagged surroundings that may surround a student. With the introduction of music, color, and images into the background of your class, you can take steps to offset our culture's more brutal sensory aspects. This generation of technologically-oriented individuals needs these gentler influences if research and artistry are to employ their sensitivities.
- Shy students will become more open with the security offered by their technological substrate.
- Students with disabilities have build-in accommodations in the hybrid format.
- The instructor can establish the rhythm of learning for students. This organized consistency is motivational. This organized rhythm of day-by-day modules offsets the tendency of many students to be committed to study at the beginning of a quarter and then to drop off toward the middle. The on-line organizing device (such as Carmen) serves as a guidepost and touch-point to which you can return students again and again.
- In the hybrid classroom, the ideas dominate in forums so neat and structured that very little room exists for personality conflicts.
- Students are set up to think (and write) before they speak, fostering a more considerate public dialogue.
- Bullies and con people become transparent—either they don't show up on the public discussion forums, or they show up in ways that are resounding and subject

to public censor. Communication becomes clearer and more ethical without the smokescreen of personality games, manipulations, and sub-textual obstructionism.

- The standards of your course can be enforced by your technological avatar, if you will. In other words, you can be kind while you let the technology set the boundaries around poor performances.
- As a student, the specter of your aloneness is breathing down your neck in ways that are immensely inspiring. All of the participants in a hybrid course become Pascal's man alone in a room, at some point in their intellectual endeavors.

*Which of these features sounds most attractive to you as an instructor?
Why?*

PRAGMATIC ADVANTAGES OF HYBRID LEARNING

- Reduction of carbon footprint
- Greater accessibility
- Fosters independent learning
- Potentially asks greater creativity from instructor
- Asks that instructor simultaneously become a learner
- Potential reduction of cost for student
- Potential for more ethical communication/behavior
- Fosters greater course organization

Of these advantages, which one seems most pressing at this point in your teaching career?

THESE FEATURES ARE NOT INTRINSIC FEATURES OF THE HYBRID STRUCTURE, BUT THEY ARE EXPLOITABLE POTENTIALS:

- Under the direction of your structuring hand, your students may be more organized. The day-by-day scaffolding that you model as you introduce material may become a model for student research and writing.
- The computer becomes the brain's prosthetic for the management of chaos, not an attention-scattering evil. Used skillfully, our technology will greatly enhance the sort of analysis we are looking for in student research. Students spend less time fruitlessly attempting to find resources, and more time analyzing the resources the course calls for.
- Notions of leadership become fluid in this format, with the material (and interwoven written voices) occupying the central authoritative spotlight.
- The virtual space of the hybrid modules offers consistency and structure. When the bowl of creativity is strong, the soup can be hot. With a governing structure, a student can allow his/her research to yield unpredictable and insightful results.
- The practice of returning to this organized on-line space will foster integrity-based intellectual engagement; daily interaction with the material (like daily physical exercise) is the key to creative progress.
- Students will have a clear vision of where they have been, and more than a hint of where they are going. Moreover, they will be able to ask questions about why they taking the course of action in front of them. This will lead to greater student intellectual investment, as well as a sense that they are at the steering wheel of their own learning.
- The instructor can select the pace of the classroom presentation, and then allow the student to repeat the presentation at his/her own pace.
- An instructor can increase the professionalism of class presentations, and ask for greater student professionalism in return. The surface of a hybrid course is highly-polished and thus a good starting place for the work we ask of students.

Which of these features do you feel your traditional classroom most needs?

How would you feel more enthusiastic if your classroom possessed such a feature?

ADVANTAGES OF THE HYBRID FORMAT FOR FACE-TO-FACE CLASS DAYS

- Students may become more engaged *within* class, because they have to have finished the work *before* class.
- You can make your work in class more efficient, because everyone's preparation has been planned and posted before class.
- In a blended learning format, students prepare for face-to-face time during their on-line time---and anticipate the needs they have from you as an instructor.
- Then, on-line, they prove that they have accomplished the learning objectives through your assessment tools.

Where do you tend to waste the most time and become the most disorganized as an instructor in your traditional teaching?

SUBTLETIES TO REMEMBER AS YOU BEGIN YOUR HYBRID COURSE:

- Under the direction of your structuring hand, your students will be more organized.
- The computer becomes the brain's prosthetic for the management of chaos, not an attention-scattering evil. Used skillfully, our technology will enable the sort of analysis we are looking for in student research.
- Notions of leadership become fluid in this format, with the material (and interwoven written voices) occupying the spotlight.
- Virtual space offers consistency and structure. When the bowl of creativity is strong, the soup can be hot. With a governing structure, a student can allow his/her research to be uncontrolled and unpredictable.
- The practice of returning to this organized on-line space will foster integrity-based writing practices.
- Students will have a scaffolded perception of the material---with a clear vision of where they have been, and more than a hint of where they are going. Moreover, they will be able to ask questions about why they taking the course of action in front of them.
- The instructor can select the pace of the classroom presentation, and then allow the student to repeat the presentation at their own pace.
- An instructor can polish the professionalism class presentations, and ask for greater student professionalism in return. The surface of a hybrid course is highly polished, and thus a good starting place for the work we ask of students.

What methods will you use to get students in the "right mind space" to begin their hybrid endeavor?

What will you say to reassure them?

What will you do to give them a sense of both the intensity and the adventure of a hybrid course?

A STUDENT IN A HYBRID COURSE:

- Must be comfortable with technology and eager to experiment with new technological forums.
- Must be a self-directed self-starter: The on-line learning component is (in part) a solitary activity.
- Must be aggressive, tenacious and determined enough to engage in a daily intellectual practice.
- Must know that the goal of education is to increase one's intellectual capacity. You are often on your own, and if you want to, and your opportunity to learn is unlimited.
- In a hybrid course, the student cannot always expect the "carrot" of a cajoling instructor or the "stick" of the professorial glare!
- Must be organized. Your results will be disastrous if you tend to lose important documents, procrastinate, or possess poor listening skills. Furthermore, you need well-developed focus and concentration.

- Must be honest: in the world of technology, all is transparent. If you don't understand something about an assignment, there is nothing to hide behind. Actually, you can't hide in this class for any reason, because the discussion board demands accountability. One either shows up with your ideas or "doesn't bring any dish to the potluck." For my part, I will be very clear about the assignments and the time tables.
- Must be professional. Any untoward attitudes and language will echo resoundingly across our discussion board and have the capacity to shut other people's voices down. Cyberbullies need not apply.
- Must find a consistent rhythmic approach to the class. The instructor will provide a detailed discussion of each assignment on the online course management site. The student is responsible for keeping up with that site.
- Must be familiar with Microsoft's Word or Adobe Acrobat to create documents.
- Must use an e-mail program that allows students to send attachments.
- Must be familiar with using a browser such as Netscape or Internet Explorer.
- Must be familiar with the on-line resources offered by the library.
- Must be patient: instructors will answer e-mails, but there may be a lapse time.

What characteristics might a student exhibit when they are not well-suited for an online course?

How will you recognize a good hybrid audience member?

How will you foster an ideal hybrid audience member in the first week of classes?

WHO IS THE IDEAL HYBRID COURSE INSTRUCTOR?

A good hybrid instructor is experimental.

Remembers that hybrid technology is just another cup in the cupboard of learning strategies.

- Is comfortable with technology and pre-course structural planning
- Is committed to retaining students in course
- Has a deep involvement/investment with course material
- Has a diverse knowledge base.
- Is organized: The modular format of the course demands organizational vigilance
- Is respectful in online response, as well as face to face interactions. Follows "Netiquette" protocols and expects that those protocols will be followed in return.
- Grades assignments promptly. Returns a major assignment to students before another major assignment is due.
- Appears to be sympathetic when confronting student technological problems--but expects students to work around these problems. There is a rigorous absolutism about the grading in hybrid courses.
- Makes every effort to foster an online experience that is successful and enjoyable for everyone.

In what aspect of your life are you most technologically astute?

In what aspect of your life are you the most afraid of technology?

Why might it be a relief to have your "technological avatar" enforce some of the course guidelines for you?

IF YOU HAVE CONSIDERED SOME OF THE ADVANTAGES, AND YOU FIND THE HYBRID COURSE STRUCTURE PROMISING, TAKE THE FIRST STEP.

As you begin, what is your largest trepidation?

THE FIRST STEPS IN THE CREATION OF YOUR HYBRID COURSE:

- Depends on dividing your traditional course up into modules. This will be time-consuming, so start early.
- Your modules consist of a day-by-day breakdown of your scheduled activities. That means your entire course will be planned before you walk in on the first day.
- You will then place these modules onto your online organization site (your course management tool such as Carmen).

- Here is the strongest cautionary note I can offer about the on-line component of a hybrid course: *There is no opportunity for "last minute planning."*
- When the curtain opens, your plan is in place, and each day folds elegantly into the next because of the modules you have constructed.

What worries you the most about needing to plan this far ahead?

What seems the most unnatural feature of designing a course to be this scripted?

What advantages can you see to having your course pre-planned?

IN SHORT, AFTER YOU HAVE SURVEYED THE INFORMATION YOU ARE PLANNING TO PRESENT,

- Create one folder per week of your semester. You will place the files containing the lessons for each day of the week, audio and visual files for any given day, and any notes or presentations you have made.
- Create files containing the contents of each day's material.
- Upload those files onto your online course management site.
- These file/modules may contain lecture notes, hotlinks to websites we access in class, and audio and visual files you have created.

Meanwhile, what aspect of your course will you find difficult to organize at this time of your course's conception?

How can you begin to break that material down into steps?

THE COURSE MANAGEMENT WEBSITE ALSO SERVES AS "RITUALIZED SPACE."

- Organize a clear sequence of activities on your course management website, and return to those activities again and again.
- Your course's consistent and trustworthy framework will model the tenacious dedication and structure building all learning requires.
- The deadlines you devise will model real-world work requirements—at the same time retaining the flexibility to meet the needs of your students.
- The consideration you give of your own needs for response time will keep you on schedule.
- Your structured feedback, and even automated feedback for quizzes, will allow you to grade efficiently and objectively.
- Use a rubric: The gradebook portion of your course management site may include a grading rubric. If not, it's easy to devise one. The rubric may be particularly helpful in humanities courses where charges of subjectivity abound.

In your traditional courses, how do you tend to treat students who start getting behind in a course?

What do you do when a particular student's approach seems chaotic or haphazard?

How could the course-management website give you a new tool for managing these first two scenarios?

SO, WHAT INGREDIENTS DO YOU ACTUALLY PUT INTO YOUR HYBRID COURSE?

Here are a few initial ideas:

- Podcasts—both downloaded podcasts and ones you have created
- YouTube videos—YouTube keeps you safe from copyright infringement
- Pieces of text as PDF files
- E-books
- Videos you have created
- Little pieces of Screen Capture Video
- Lecture Notes
- Websites

Which one of these resources sounds easiest to create or access?

Which one sounds most difficult?

A GOOD ON-LINE COURSE WILL PRESENT THE INFORMATION THROUGH A VARIETY OF APPROACHES, AND SOMETIMES PUTTING YOUR MATERIAL INTO A NEW FORMAT WILL ALLOW YOU TO SEE IT DIFFERENTLY. YOUR INNOVATION MAY LEAD TO GREATER INSIGHTS INTO YOUR OWN AREA OF INTELLECTUAL INQUIRY.

What area of your specialty would you like to see through a new lens?

VIDEOS:

- Creating a small video of yourself addressing your class is an excellent way to offset any "robotic" atmosphere associated with on-line learning. You can create an environment of warmth and a sense of personal contact by simply creating a short video of yourself.
- Alternately, you can create a video of yourself as you write on a whiteboard. This gives a sort of "classroom ambiance" to an on-line lesson.
- You can tape yourself in conversation with someone else, in casual conversational or a more formal interview format.
- You can even videotape yourself doing the activity that you yourself are teaching. Asking students to write with you for five minutes (while you show yourself writing to soft music in the background, for example) is an interesting way to "be there and not be there" at the same time.

When you think about making a video of yourself, what aspect of your demeanor makes you most uncomfortable?

How do you plan on offsetting, covering up, or even using that aspect of your persona?

HOW TO MANAGE TIME AND EXPECTATIONS AS AN INSTRUCTOR:

Devising an on-line course will require a large expenditure of time upfront.

The course may take on a sort of mechanized life of its own pacing as the modules begin to unfold.

Begin early, allow yourself time to experiment with the technology.

You need a thirty-day class plan before you walk in on the first day.

Experiment with moving your notion of yourself from "instructor" to "facilitator."

- Get your lectures done ahead of time---especially if your technology is complicated.
- The more that you can get your particular "trademark" and your face out there into virtual space, the better.
- The more visually interesting and varied a course is, the more engaged students will be.
- Clearly articulated expectations are more important in a hybrid course than in a face-to-face course.
- If students feel there are no standards, they will feel as if they can hide behind the technological cloak of invisibility.
- In reality, hybrid courses demand more presence, consistency, and dedication from the student, because of the inexorable nature of the unfolding module format.
- You have to write everything down for the student. Furthermore, you have to be consistent in the way that you label your assignments.
- You are going to have to change something in your class structure; you can count of that fact...
- There *will* be technical difficulties...
- You need to be fore-prepared for the progress of the course to go vastly awry.

*What justifications will you use to try to put off the preparation of your on-line course?
What dangers do you run if you succeed in justifying your procrastination to yourself?
What motivation do you have to assemble every bit of your course before you walk in the first day?*

THINK ABOUT HYBRID AUDIENCE EXPECTATIONS:

- Provide firm deadlines for assignment, but provide a window for submission. Online students often need flex scheduling.
- Pay attention to the needs of working students and parents; remember that some students won't be available for a 6:00 pm deadline.
- Students will expect relatively rapid feedback on their papers; the online world moves at a slightly faster pace.
- Students will expect clarity of grading; your online persona sometimes does not allow you much critical nuance.
- Consider the use of grading rubrics to demonstrate that your grades are assigned with relative objectivity and consistency.
- If there is a way to provide automatic feedback (on quizzes for example), choose that option.
- Ask how you can provide feedback that is reasonable for you and your students. Can you think of ways to give feedback through pre-established written comments, grading rubrics, or audio files?
- Students need a taste of the class in the first week, so they can drop it if they don't like it.
- Students should know that there are helpful resources everywhere, including omnipresent Wi-Fi at many restaurants and coffeehouses.
- You need to run a tech check in the class drop zone. In this way, you can see if all of the students are comfortable with your various technological approaches.

When students become frustrated with you for seeming "distant" or unavailable, what will you do to soothe their frustration?

What steps will you take to make sure students know you are "there" and "present," even when they cannot see you?