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Beginning Novel Course

Hyram Brown

Design & Development Project Report
Instructional Psychology & Technology, Brigham Young University

Purpose

Cheri Earl teaches an in-person beginning novel writing course, ENGL 318R, at Brigham Young University. In late 2019, she approached me with concerns about the amount of students unable to register for the class due to class size restrictions. She had taught this course in the past in person and using a blog where she would post resources and provide forums for classwide discussions. She expressed a desire to utilize an online format for this course so students could have the option to participate in a creative writing experience without having to attend lectures in a physical classroom. Students would also only need to use one venue to access all course content and collaborate with one another in writing groups.

The purpose of this project was to increase student access to the ENGL 318R course by creating an online version of Cheri Earl's in-person ENGL 318R course that would allow Cheri to increase her capacity to teach by 25%. This was to be accomplished by:

1. Identifying areas that could be adjusted to her current lesson plans and teaching methods to make running the course more efficient online and potentially in-person as well (e.g., how and where students provide feedback, how and where Cheri provides feedback, and how instruction is delivered in the course);
2. Creating a small sample blended curriculum based on Cheri’s current lesson plans;
3. Testing this sample curriculum for 3 weeks during Cheri’s in-person course taught Winter 2020;
4. Evaluating the results of this test;
5. Creating an online version of Cheri’s in-person 14-week course, implementing the results of our test.

This online course also maintained the same course goals as her in-person course, which are (taken from Cheri’s Spring 2020 ENGL 318R course syllabus):
In the Beginning Novel course you will study both the theory and the practice of writing novels (young adult or adult), and you’ll learn to create and develop plot; setting; characters; story, character, and scene arcs; tension; and the novel’s major dramatic question from the first chapter to the end of the novel. You’ll also begin to identify and define your own distinct narrative voice and the fiction genre in which you choose to write.

Project Needs and Constraints

Learners and Environment

Through discussions with Cheri and observing her in-person course on multiple occasions, I was able to discern that the intended learners for this course were predominantly junior and senior BYU students studying English as a major, since ENGL 318R is a requirement for an undergraduate degree in English at BYU. However, many students who are not studying English but are simply interested in writing a novel or becoming novelists also take this course. Some of these students are just starting to write creatively while others have already written multiple novels, but all at least have an interest in creative writing. The learners must also have already completed ENGL 218: Creative Writing (or have had equivalent experience), as this course is a prerequisite to ENGL 318R, so the learners already have had some experience with studying creative writing.

Initially, we designed the course for students who were unable to register for the in-person ENGL 318R course. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and many in-person courses shifting online, the students who ended up taking the online course were those who would have taken the in-person course.

In order to participate in the pilot of the online course and to take the finished version of the online course, the learners needed to have access to a computer on which to type and access to the Internet. They also needed to have a Canvas account, at least a generic account to participate in the pilot, and a BYU account to take the actual course.

The instructor for the course also needed to have access to a computer and the Internet as well as the time necessary to facilitate an online course. This created the need for the course to be heavily student-run with minimal involvement of the instructor, since the pilot of the course was run during the Winter semester of 2020 when Cheri already had a full teaching load and since the goal of the course was to increase Cheri’s capacity to teach by 25%.

Needs

When Cheri’s in-person ENGL 318R course was originally piloted, there was a waitlist of approximately 60 students. After the first course, the waitlist was discontinued, but Cheri mentioned that students were asking to add the course up until the add/drop deadline. As stated by Cheri, “The course had a popular reputation when it was offered by GE and Honors. At that time, we advertised the class in the weekly Honors emails and with fliers we posted in the JKB, JFSB, and the Maeser Building.”
Due to the popularity of the course, Cheri wanted to provide an online venue so students who were unable to take the in-person course could have a similarly enriching experience online since, at the time of this project’s inception, there were no online ENGL 318R sections offered at BYU (the intervening COVID-19 pandemic has since changed this condition). Also, due to classroom size and Cheri’s current in-person course strategy of reading each student’s work every week, the maximum number of students that could feasibly be taught at a time was approximately 15.

**Constraints**

Cheri expected this online course would offer the same, or at least very similar, content as her in-person course. The description of this online course was essentially the same as the description of the in-person course, outlined as follows (taken from Cheri’s course syllabus):

In the Beginning Novel course you will study both the theory and the practice of writing novels (young adult or adult), and you’ll learn to create and develop plot; setting; characters; story, character, and scene arcs; tension; and the novel’s major dramatic question from the first chapter to the end of the novel. You’ll also begin to identify and define your own distinct narrative voice and the fiction genre in which you choose to write.

The core of the class is the writing workshop sessions where all students in the class will share their work with each other and the instructor and receive critique for revision. By the end of the semester, you will have 35-40 polished pages of prose or four complete chapters of your novel.

Cheri also discovered at the end of March, 2020 that she would be teaching a section of the ENGL 318R class during the Spring term of 2020 and, due to all classes for Spring 2020 being moved online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it became imperative that she have a fully online version of this course available. This introduced some new constraints:

1) This course would need to be ready by April 28, 2020, the start of Spring term. This shortened our timeline for course creation from March—June to March—April.
2) This course would be offered for-credit to BYU students.
3) The course would need to be shortened from 14 weeks to just seven weeks while retaining the same content and meeting the same learning objectives.

There were several categories of constraints, both inherent and added, to this project summarized below:

**Student Constraints**

This course was piloted through Canvas and other programs such as Google Drive (for writing sample submission and writing group critiques) and video conferencing tools such as Google Hangouts or Skype (for potential face-to-face meetings). Students were expected to have access to a computer and the Internet. Students were free to take the course wherever worked best for
them, but were encouraged to participate in a quiet place for online face-to-face meetings. They were required to accomplish weekly tasks, such as readings, writing assignments, and writing group critiques. This course included a workload equivalent to a three-credit university course (approximately 9 hours per week). However, students were not required to complete coursework in any specific physical location.

**Instructor Constraints**

The instructor needed to read students’ weekly writing submissions and provide feedback. The instructor also recorded video snippets explaining course material and uploaded these videos to the course. However, similar to the students, due to the online nature of the course, the instructor was free to conduct their work wherever was most convenient, as long as they had access to a computer, the internet, and a video recording device.

**Monetary and Time Constraints**

We designed and created the course without compensation, so budget was not a constraint. However, time was a constraint. We had to complete the course by the end of April, 2020 for it to be ready in time for students to take the course during Spring term, 2020.

**COVID-19**

Cheri knew that she would be teaching a section of ENGL 318R during Spring term of 2020, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, she was surprised by having to teach this section online. This required us to expedite the creation of this online ENGL 318R course by a few months. Fortunately, we already were planning on creating this course in an online format, but due to the new timeline, we had to create the course much faster than anticipated. We also had to compromise a few aspects of the course due to this expedited timeline (e.g., a more robust visual design and the use of more Canvas plugins)

**Other Constraints**

Some additional constraints inherent to the online nature of this course included: a lack of in-person communication and the instructor being unable to spend as much one-on-one time with the students. We accommodated for these constraints by requiring the students to participate in weekly writing groups as well as weekly classwide discussions with the instructor. Even though the students were still unable to get as much one-on-one interaction with the instructor in this online course, Cheri used these weekly classwide discussions to answer questions, provide instructions, and resolve concerns.

**Product Description**

The product created was a 7-week online version of the Beginning Novel course ENGL 318R offered at BYU. Each week contained one or more of the following types of modules:

4) short-response prompts designed to spark inspiration and creativity,
5) reading assignments,
6) short writing assignments based on a topic covered in the weekly instruction, 
7) virtual meet-ups with a writing group, 
8) work on their own personal novel, and 
9) whole-class discussions on the students' writing.

Since the course was based on an existing course that had been taught numerous times and offered for credit at BYU, we had confidence that the course material was instructionally sound and effective. Therefore, we tried to keep the course we created as similar to the in-person course as possible while making adjustments for the shortened time frame of the Spring term as well as the new online environment in which the course was to be offered.

We created the project swiftly and nimbly, making sure it was completed in time to launch by Spring term 2020. We also made sure to incorporate writing groups, creating folders in Google Drive for the students to submit and share their writing submissions so they could read and leave feedback on one another's work. This was an important design decision based on research from my front-end analysis on effective strategies for teaching this type of course. More information can be found in the Annotated Bibliography section of the appendix.

Here are a few screenshots from the finished course:

- When the learners first arrived in the course, they arrived at this landing page (the home image link has broken since the course was completed). It provided an introduction of the course and an explanation of what students could expect from assignments and from one another.

Fig. 1. Landing page
The next main page the learners utilized was the Modules page. Here, they could access their assignments and upcoming activities. There were two modules per week, and students could see each module's content in chronological order on this page.

![Modules page](image)

Fig. 2. Modules page

Additional pages can be seen in greater detail in the “Actual Product” section of the Appendix.

**Summary of Product**

The product that was created consisted of a seven-week, 14-module Canvas course based on Cheri’s original lesson plans, which can be found [here](#). The class met twice a week—as a class the first meeting of the week for a video lecture with the instructor on writing topics such as character, voice, and plot and in writing groups (preferably via video chat) on the second meeting of the week to critique their weekly work. The course included the following assignments (a full syllabus of the course can be found [here](#)):

- 1 point each: 11 short writing drills to be completed at the beginning of most class sessions
- 10 points each: 5 books to be read (*Peace Like a River*, *Of Mice and Men*, *The Road*, *Bird by Bird*, and *Making Shapely Fiction*)
- 3 points each: Seven weekly writing logs (at least 2,000 words a week were to have been written)
- 1 point each: Nine 300-word writing assignments to be critiqued in writing groups
- 5 points each: Two chapters of their novel to be critiqued by the class in two round-robin workshops
- 10 points: A third chapter of their novels to be critiqued by the class in a round-robin workshop that functioned as the final exam

Students were divided into writing groups consisting of three to four students each that met once a week to discuss their writing. Students were expected to post their 300-word writing assignments to Google Drive through the Google Drive Canvas plugin so their fellow writing group members could access, read, and leave comments on their work. Students were also expected to have left these comments prior to meeting as a group.

Since this course was conducted entirely online and physical space for students was no longer an issue, the amount of students that could enroll in the course was not limited to classroom size.
Most assignments were also pass/fail, and the students provided each other with the majority of the feedback on their work, so the amount of reading done by the instructor each week was minimal. The instructor’s main roles were to deliver lectures on writing topics once a week, answer students’ questions, join writing groups for brief intervals as often as time permitted, facilitate whole-class round-robin workshops, and make sure each assignment was graded. These conditions were already in place in the in-person course and translated directly into the online course.

**Design Model and Evolution**

Constructivism and Collaboration were foundational principles in the online design of this course (for additional details, see the Annotated Bibliography section of the appendix).

- **Constructivism**: In line with the quote, “creative writing is largely or even solely an individual pursuit, and that inspiration not education drives creativity” (Swander & Cantrell, 2007), students were encouraged, in class discussions and through writing prompts, to reflect on the world around them and put their thoughts and feelings into writing. This allowed them not only to create prose, but also to construct new thoughts and ideas as they put their feelings into words.

- **Collaboration**: Nearly every piece of literature consulted during the design phase of this process emphasized the importance of writing groups in a creative writing learning experience. Writing groups allowed students the opportunity to learn collaboratively, both from discussing their own work and the work of the other members of their group. This allowed the students to help one another progress by providing them with the opportunity to point out strengths and weaknesses in one another’s writing. Then, in the week leading up to the proceeding writing group, students were able to hone these strengths and weaknesses and discuss their progress in the next writing group.

In addition to these principles, Merrill’s First Principles of Instruction provide a model for building this course. Each principle and how it was utilized in the course is outlined below:

1. **Problem**
   Students lacked an organized place where they could hone their creative writing skills in a disciplined way that allowed them to give and receive feedback from their peers and an instructor/mentor. They also were unfamiliar with the fundamentals of writing and publishing as they continued their work as creative writers.

2. **Activation**
   Students already had previous creative writing experience prior to taking this course, and this experience was drawn upon through the prerequisites for the course being prior creative writing English courses, explicit questions in class discussions, work in writing groups, and through reflection questions at the beginning of each lesson.

3. **Demonstration**
   Students read examples of literature that exemplified the principles taught in the course. They also completed activities, such as taking quizzes and watching videos, that demonstrated the principles taught in the course.
4. **Application**
Students produced and submitted weekly writing samples based on a weekly writing prompt to their writing group. They received and offered critiques on these samples.

5. **Integration**
Students worked on their own personal novels in addition to their weekly writing samples. They submitted a final document of the first three chapters (or equivalent length of roughly 35-40 pages) of a novel for critique and evaluation by the instructor. Students were encouraged to continue writing and meeting with their writing group even after the course was finished.

To incorporate the above theories and principles, we organized the course in the following manner:

![Diagram of course flow](image)

- The landing page established the course as a solution to the problem explained above. It established expectations and provided information on what students should expect from and during the course. This was an entirely new piece added to what was present in Cheri’s original in-person course.
- Students were able to access all assignments via the Module Page and/or the Assignments Page. Upon clicking into an assignment, the learners were met with instructions and explanations that outlined what was expected in the assignment as well as provided prompts to activate prior knowledge and any links or examples of literary work that demonstrated the principles touched upon in the assignment. These assignments were grounded in constructivism, encouraging students to examine their previous and current experiences and take those experiences, mix them with the principles from the course, and create new reflections and thoughts in the form of creative writing.
● The Short Writing Assignments were taken from Cheri’s in-person course as a way for students to apply what they learned. Additional assignments were added based on students’ feedback from the pilot, and other assignments were reworked to better fit in the online course.

● Short Writing Drills were a new addition to the online course. These brief writing prompts provided students with additional opportunities to apply what they learned in a way that got them thinking constructively, creatively, and quickly.

● The students also discussed the Writing Group Assignments collaboratively in their writing groups, providing one another with critique and feedback as to how well the class topics were showing up in their work.

● The Writing and Production Log was a chance for students to record that they were integrating their learning into their own personal novels. Adding on to this, the Round Robin Workshops were opportunities to share what they wrote and reported on during these weekly logs with one another and get feedback from the class and the instructor.

Planning

I started the project by meeting with Cheri to discuss the course, how it was taught in an in-person setting, and how she hoped it would function in an online environment. I also attended a few of her in-person class sessions to observe how the course content was being taught, how students responded to the material, and how the students interacted with the professor and with each other. She expressed the desire to maintain as much of the original course in the online version as possible, while only making necessary changes to account for the online setting.

Sample from my notes:

- Take a quiz and discuss it (talk about the spirituality and the central conflict in the book Peace Like a River)
  - How did you feel when Jeremiah started working with the FBI agent
  - This conversation flowed and evolved, lasting about 45 minutes
  - This conversation led to a review about a previous lesson
- Dive into the lesson plan after this conversation
  - *See the lesson plans on Google Drive
- How can we recreate the dialogue between the students and the teacher that drives the lesson?
- Cheri stays after to answer students’ questions and talk. Again, how can we recreate this?
- Cheri says that she doesn’t get to go over pacing as much as she would like in this course

Sample from Cheri’s in-person lesson plans:
Week One (January 8): Plot

Writing Assignment for next week

Writing Assignment #1 (January 15): Write your plot in three sentences and a strong story opening (no more than 500 words). Bring copies for four people including yourself, and upload a copy for the instructor in the shared Google Doc folder.

Intro Course: Review Syllabus (include no exceptions to rules, my office hours, etc.), intro texts, intro blog.

Writing Instruction (from notes on the Portable MFA): Writing from your life, story structure and plot

1. Raising questions, the MDQ, classical story structure, i.e., beginning, middle, end or Act I, II, III.
2. Plot elements: Motivation, choices, change (E.M. Forester: Plot is motivation); the engine of these plot elements is conflict

Reading Instruction: Discuss, What makes a good book? *Refer to notes on Preface to the Lyrical Ballads. Why is To Kill a Mockingbird influential to writers? Why is Of Mice and Men a timeless classic? Is it? *Don’t give away the ending.

Pilot

We ran a three-week pilot with Cheri’s in-person ENGL 218 course to test out the online functionality and a few of the features of the course, including writing groups. This pilot consisted of the first three modules of the course, “Plot;” “More on Plot; Story Opening Strategies, Story Arcs and Pacing;” and “Character and Point of View.”

Sample module from pilot:

Fig. 5. Pilot module
Final Course

The final course was planned to be a semester-length course (~14 weeks). Once the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the expedition of the project, the course was adjusted into a term-length course (~7 weeks). However, even though the length of the course was shortened, the same amount of material still needed to be covered. We used the material we created for the pilot, adjusting for the shortened time-frame, and added the remaining modules, converting them from Cheri's in-person modules.

Sample module from final course:

Evolution of Design

This project started off as a transformation of an existing in-person, semester-length course into an online course that would cover the same material within the same time frame and be available without credit to anyone who wanted to take the course. However, once the COVID-19 pandemic hit, these plans changed. A for-credit online course that would run for seven weeks was needed within roughly two months, which is what was designed and created. Throughout the design and implementation of this project, we followed the above-mentioned theories. However, we had to make some compromises. We were not able to include as many Activation, Demonstration, and Application exercises as we originally intended. Integration of the course content was still present but was condensed, as students needed to work twice as fast to complete their final novel chapters. Students would also not have as much time with their writing groups to get to know one another and develop lasting habits of critiquing and receiving critiques.

However, since students were not to have as much time with the course content as originally planned, and since our design timeframe was drastically shortened, as a part of the course design, students were encouraged to draw deeply from their past experiences in their reflections. This provided students with a well from which to draw for their writing assignments as well as a way for us as designers to encourage students to build connections with the course content.
without having to explicitly call them out through examples and scenarios. This saved us time during the design phase and encouraged students to construct personal relevance for what was taught.

**Product Implementation**

In order to be successful in this online course, students needed access to a computer with high-speed Internet access and a webcam. They also needed a Google account with access to Google Drive, as that was where the students uploaded their writing samples for their writing groups to critique.

We piloted the course with a small group of students during the fall semester of 2019. The students consisted mostly of current students enrolled in Cheri’s ENGL 218 class who intended to take ENGL 318R at a later date, but two of Cheri’s adult children participated as well. All participants had a background in creative writing. Cheri explained the pilot to her students during class and to her children over the phone.

The official online ENGL 318R course was built during Winter semester of 2020 and implemented during Spring term of the same year. Around 15 students originally signed up, but only around 10 of them stayed enrolled in the course for the entire term. The course ran smoothly, with the students having positive reactions and comments. The student met officially twice a week—as a class the first meeting for a video lecture with the instructor and on their own in their writing groups during the second meeting to critique their work so far that week. For additional information, see the [Implementation Instruments section](#).

**Assessment and Evaluation**

The learning outcomes of this course were:

1. highlight the differences between literary and non-literary fiction using real-world examples, and model the characteristics of literary fiction in their own work;
2. weave substantial ideas about the human condition into artful and compelling prose, defining their own distinct narrative voice in written words;
3. Choose a specific genre in which they want to write, identify literary works of that genre, and produce writing in that genre;
4. join and form writing groups;
   a. Seek out alpha readers (other writers)
   b. Seek out beta readers (readers for pleasure)
5. learn how to submit their work for publication.

To achieve these goals, students completed weekly writing drills and short assignments based on the weekly lesson topics. Students kept and were graded on keeping a weekly writing log. Students also submitted the first three chapters of their novels as part of the final exam.
In order to assess these outcomes, Cheri used a rubric to gauge students’ performance on their writing assignments. We also conducted a survey at the end of the course to see how well the students felt the course helped them in their writing goals and performance. Generally, the feedback was positive, with the students mentioning that the course was beneficial and helped them in their writing. Full results of this survey can be found in the Evaluation Instruments section of the appendix.

Criteria

Cheri Earl was the client and stakeholder to whom evaluation data was provided. Due to the rapid nature of the project and the expedited schedule we were on due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Cheri’s main concern was getting the course ready to be launched by Spring term of 2020 in a manner that allowed her students access to an online version of her ENGL 318R course that met the same learning objectives as her in-person course.

We used the following criteria to gauge whether we designed an effective course:

1. Is the workload in this course manageable compared to other 300-level courses?
2. Is the quality of the students’ work comparable to the quality of their work in in-person ENGL 318 courses?
3. Do the students feel that they are participating in a valuable experience throughout this course and improving in the ways they hoped to improve?

We measured the criteria by periodic check-ins with the students, both formal and informal, asking questions such as, “How manageable is the workload in this course compared to other courses?,” and “What could be done to improve this course?” We also were able to compare the quality of the students’ work by subjective comparison to the work done by students in prior in-person sections of the course.

Procedures

Formative

I attended two of Cheri’s in-person classes to observe her teaching style, the contents of the course, how the students engaged with one another and the professor, and what course material was being presented. I took notes during these observations, and I debriefed with Cheri after each observation about what I noticed and what we thought would translate well into an online course. I also reviewed the syllabus and all of Cheri’s lesson plans for the course to see what needed to be taught and how it would be presented.

After a few months of planning and discussion with Cheri, we developed a 3-week pilot of an online course containing the first three modules of her in-person course adapted to an online style. We ran this pilot of the course to see how well students were able to engage with the course and to identify areas of success as well as areas of improvement. We conducted a survey with the student participants at the conclusion of the pilot to gather their feedback on what was successful and what needed to be improved.
We took what we learned from the pilot and began developing the full version of the online course, expedited by the COVID-19 pandemic. Once the course was developed and running, Cheri conducted informal, oral surveys of her students during classwide discussions to discuss what was going well and what they would like to see improved. One of the largest concerns shared by students was the large amount of work in the course and the seven-week timeline provided to accomplish it. Based on these surveys, we adjusted the amounts and scoring of the activities.

**Summative**

We also conducted a formal survey at the end of the course. We conducted this survey as a discussion in Canvas, and it was distributed to the students after the final exam. This information was to be used by Cheri in revising the course and making it even more effective for future students.

**Evidence**

**Formative**

We received mainly positive feedback from the post-pilot survey. Some general trends showed that the students, though they generally preferred in-class instruction, did prefer some aspects of the online course over the in-person aspects. For example, many students remarked that they preferred providing and receiving feedback digitally as opposed to in-person. One student wrote, “...sometimes it is harder to give feedback face to face because you want to be nicer.”

Some other trends we saw post-pilot were a great respect for Cheri’s teaching style, a desire to take the full version of the course, an appreciation of the short writing assignments, some confusion as to how the course was organized, and a disdain for pre-recorded lectures. We tried to address the negative feedback in our design of the full course by removing pre-recorded lectures and taking extra care in how the course was organized.

**Summative**

Again we received mainly positive remarks at the conclusion of the full course. A major trend was an appreciation of the writing assignments and of the readings. Many students who responded to the survey remarked that they enjoyed the writing assignments and wished there were even more of them.

Some other trends included a desire for more breaks during class time and spacing out the assignments a bit more.

**Outcomes**

I worked very closely with Cheri throughout the entirety of the design, from inception to completion. We worked together in deciding what would go into the course and building the course in Canvas. She was aware of and approved each step of the process.
Some major indicators that the project was a success were:

- The fact that the course was finished in time for Cheri to facilitate it during the Spring term of 2020. We did not have much time to build the course before the term started, but it was finished, and the students were able to take the full course for credit.
- Cheri’s statement that she could comfortably teach up to 20 students in the online ENGL 318R course, a 33% increase from the usual 15 students enrolled in the class.
- Students’ positive responses to both the pilot and full course. Some quotes from students after finishing the pilot included:

  “. . . Make it a 14-week course, ASAP. I need it.”

  “[The pilot] was very motivating. I made great progress on writing my novel while I was engaged in the class. My productivity has really dropped off since the class ended. So, the class is a motivator. If the class was a full class and repeatable, I’d just keep taking it until my novel was finished. It's truly helpful.”

Based on the above quotes, we feel that our design was beneficial to students, and while we cannot say that the above quotes demonstrate feelings of all students, nor are they directly relatable to the full course we designed, they do provide some insight into the successful nature of the course and the material within said course.

After the conclusion of the course, Cheri said:

  “Thank you for all your help . . . Couldn’t have done it without you. You’ll see from the student responses that the course design worked well. No complaints about the format.”

**Design Knowledge and Critique**

This project fell at an interesting time, as COVID-19 struck right before the project was to begin in earnest and all classes at BYU were moved online. Fortunately, we were already planning on crafting an online course, but this unforeseen event required some adjustments to the project. We were originally only planning on creating the course during Spring term of 2020, but instead, we had to have the course ready to launch by Spring term of 2020, and then actually launch it during the term. We had to expedite our production process by approximately two months, as well as increase our scope to conduct a launch of the course.

A strength of the design of this particular project was that we implemented a shortened, simplified pilot version of the course during the design phase with Cheri’s actual students to get their feedback and see what worked and what didn’t. This made the production process go smoothly, since we already had a few online modules built and had a firm grasp of how to improve the course based on the feedback from the students. When our production process was significantly expedited timewise, we were prepared with both content and feedback based on prior experience with the pilot. User testing not only helped us create a more informed and useful product, but it also allowed us to adapt under changing circumstances.
This experience taught us the importance of creating a flexible design that can easily be adjusted as circumstances change. Circumstances will almost always change during both the design phase and production phase of a project, and as a designer, one must be ready to adapt to whatever those changes might be, whether they entail a change in timeline, budget, scope, audience, etc. One must be prepared to adjust at any point and without any warning. Wherever possible, flexibility should be built into the design to allow for this adaptation and to prevent unnecessary do-overs when new constraints arise or current constraints turn out to be more difficult than expected. I found there are a few ways that can help one do this more effectively:

1. Try to avoid becoming personally attached to your design. Focus first on the needs of your learners, your stakeholders, and your clients.

2. Plan for roadblocks. Ask yourself questions such as: If I had to switch authoring tools partway through the creation of the product, what would have to change with the design? If part of the budget were cut, how could I add efficiencies into my work? If my timeline was shortened, how would I prioritize the various pieces of the project? Hopefully these roadblocks won’t arise, but they might, so plan ahead for eventualities. The COVID-19 pandemic forced us to work faster than we had anticipated and to compromise a few aspects of the original design, but this in turn forced us to reevaluate the project and reconsider what would truly be the best product to meet the needs of the learners. We ended up creating a better end product that was able to accomplish goals, such as being offered for university credit, that were beyond our original scope and expectations.

3. Develop a strong relationship of trust with your client and stakeholders. In working with Cheri, I found that listening and truly putting her and her students’ needs first allowed us to be more open with our thoughts and ideas for the design. Having the same goal allowed us to be candid and realistic, and it gave us a framework for building conversations. When compromises need to be made during design and/or production, having a relationship like this will help you both be honest with one another and be willing to work together to make difficult decisions without getting frustrated.
Appendix

Actual Product

Fig. 3. Diagram of course flow

Landing Page: When the learners first arrived in the course, this was the page they saw (the home image link has broken since the course was completed). It provided an introduction of the course and an explanation of what students could expect from assignments and from one another. The landing page established the course as a solution to the problem that students lacked an organized place where they could hone their creative writing skills in a disciplined way that allowed them to give and receive feedback from their peers and an instructor/mentor. They also were unfamiliar with the fundamentals of writing and publishing as they continued their work as creative writers. The landing page established expectations and provided information on what students should expect from and during the course.
Module Page: This was the main page students would access to see their assignments and upcoming activities. There were two modules per week, and students could see each module's content in order on this page. Students were able to access all assignments via the Module Page, a feature not present in the in-person course. This allowed the students to better prepare for upcoming assignments and see how everything fit together holistically.
Assignments Page: Another main page the students frequented was the module page. This page allowed students to view all assignments organized by assignment type. Like the Modules Page, learners could see all assignments on this page, but this page had the added benefit of being a quick and easy way to see how many activities of a specific type had been completed and how many were coming up.

![Assignments page](image)

**Fig. 7. Assignments page**

Short Writing Assignment: Students completed nine of these types of assignments during the course. These assignments corresponded to the weekly topics of discussion and provided the students with opportunities to practice integrating what they were learning into their writing. Upon clicking into an assignment, the learners were met with instructions and explanations that outlined what was expected in the assignment as well as provided prompts to activate prior knowledge and any links or examples of literary work that demonstrated the principles touched upon in the assignment. These assignments were grounded in constructivism, encouraging students to examine their previous and current experiences and take those experiences, mix them with the principles from the course, and create new reflections and thoughts in the form of creative writing.
Short Writing Drill: Students typically had two or three of these assignments each week, each one designed to take approximately five minutes to complete and many of which were optional. Based on feedback from the pilot, we added more of these than we had originally planned, since students responded favorably to them and, due to their ability to get students thinking constructively quickly, requested more be added. Learners could earn extra credit points for completing the optional drills. These writing drills were designed to be fast-paced opportunities for students to activate their creativity and prepare themselves for their own writing, whether that be working on their writing logs or on their submitted writing assignments.

Round robin workshop: Students participated in three of these workshops throughout the course. These collaborative workshops provided students opportunities to work with other students outside their regular writing groups in critiquing and workshopping their writing, gaining additional opportunities to see and point out how the principles being taught were or were not
being applied in their fellow students' writing and having their classmates do the same for their writing.

**Fig. 10. Round robin workshop**

Writing Group Assignment: Each week, students would meet as a collaborative group to discuss their writing. This was a crucial opportunity for students to apply and integrate what they had learned in discussions with their classmates in both giving and receiving critiques. One of the major themes across the different pieces of literature I reviewed while helping design this course emphasized the importance of writing groups, so we made sure they were a major feature of this course, especially since the online nature of the course limited students’ other interactions with one another throughout the course.
Writing and Production Log: This is where students would go to submit their weekly writing logs. This requirement helped students to maintain steady progress on their personal novels outside the other writing requirements in the course. This was an important part of ensuring that students consistently integrated their knowledge learned in class into their personal writing.

![Writing and Production Log for Week 1](image)

**Product Walkthrough**

Here is a brief video walkthrough of the online ENGL 318R course.

**Learner Analysis**

- **Learner characteristics**

  Through discussions with Cheri and observing her in-person course on multiple occasions, I was able to discern that the intended learners were BYU students, mainly juniors and seniors or other students taking 300-level classes. The learners wanted to improve their creative writing skills. Many wanted to be published novelists, and most of them were hoping to join a writing group to receive feedback from other serious writers in addition to providing feedback to others. They also wanted to learn more about the process of creating a novel.

  Also, initially, the students this course was designed for were students who were not able to enroll in Cheri’s in-person beginning novel course. They wanted to take the course, but it filled up too quickly. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic forcing the traditionally in-person ENGL 318-R course online, the students who ended up taking the course were students who did not have an in-person option in the first place.
Whether or not all students had taken an online course, they all needed to at least be familiar with the concept. To accommodate for all potential students, however, we designed the course using an easy to navigate module system (more detail can be seen in the Design Representation/Prototypes section).

- **Resources the learners have**

In order to take this online course, learners needed to have access to a computer. Since the intended audience consisted of BYU students, it was assumed that most, if not all, of the learners had access to a computer either at home or on campus.

Students needed to have approximately nine hours per week to dedicate to this course.

- **Learners’ level of training**

Students varied widely in their levels of creative writing training. Some were just beginning to write creatively while others had written one or more complete novels. However, all students, whether they completed drafts of novels or not, had at least some experience with creative writing, whether that experience was with short stories, poems, novels, or a combination. Also, many students had prior experience working in writing groups; however, many of these groups were casual groups. In summary, it was expected that students had taken ENGL 218 at BYU, or had equivalent experience. Since this course was a beginning novel writing course, we narrowed our scope of instruction to pertain to students who were looking to learn the basics of writing their first or second novel.

**Environmental Analysis**

Due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, this course was offered entirely online. Because of this online setting, students were restricted in the ways they were able to communicate. Normally, in Cheri’s in-person course, students are able to break up into groups, share hard copies of their work, write feedback on the physical papers, and communicate their thoughts face-to-face. However, all this had to be moved to an online format (Canvas, Google Drive, and Zoom). Some conveniences were lost this way, such as the ease of handing another student one’s writing in person and the other student immediately being able to start reading and writing feedback; however, other conveniences were introduced, such as not needing to print any work and being able to log in to class from one’s preferred location.

Students were expected to have access to a computer and the Internet. Students were free to take the course wherever worked best for them, but they were encouraged to participate in a quiet place for online face-to-face meetings. They were required to accomplish weekly tasks, such as readings, writing assignments, and writing group critiques. This course included a workload equivalent to a three-credit university course (approximately 9 hours per week). However, students were not required to complete coursework in any specific physical location.
Consulting Products/Precedent

The Beginning Novel online course was based on an existing in-person creative writing course taught by Cheri Earl of the Brigham Young University English Department. To design this online version of the course, I consulted Cheri’s lesson plans (which can be found here) in addition to other creative writing courses, both in-person and online.

Prior to this project, Cheri began most class sessions by having the students break into groups to read and discuss one another’s weekly writing submissions (approximately 500 words). She would read each student's submission and provide written feedback. After this group discussion, she conducted a classwide lecture and discussion on a creative writing topic, such as plot, character, setting, etc. She used the whiteboard to take notes and write important thoughts for the students to consider. She also gave the students occasional quizzes that were incorporated into the final grade.

Four times a semester (including on the day of the final exam), the students worked together as a class to workshop all students’ chapter-length submissions. They spent 10 minutes reading and critiquing each submission. Students were also required to submit, at the end of the semester, a final document containing these four chapters. This submission served as the final exam, and Cheri read, critiqued, and graded each piece.

Since the scope of this project was converting Cheri’s in-person class into an online format, we strove to maintain the essence of the course by incorporating the above mentioned features as much as feasible in an online setting.

I also consulted Brandon Sanderson’s ENGL 318R and ENGL 321R creative writing classes, both of which I have taken. Sanderson is a New York Times bestselling author who has written books such as Elantris, The Way of Kings, and Mistborn. ENGL 321R is a lecture class in which Sanderson teaches a weekly lesson on a principle of writing and/or the writing industry. He covers topics including world building, character creation, setting, publishing, and more. He does this by providing verbal explanations, writing notes and occasional diagrams on the board, and answering students’ questions. However, Sanderson gave no writing assignments in his ENGL 321R course, and the online Beginning Novel class we designed included writing assignments so students were able to regularly practice what they learned in class and gain experience writing using various styles.

Sanderson’s ENGL 318R class, however, consists of a series of weekly writing workshops. The 15 students in the class were divided into three groups of five members each, and each week, every member of a writing group submitted 1,000-2,000 words of new prose to be critiqued by the other members of the group outside of class throughout the week. Each writing group operated independently, and the members of the group were allowed to give the feedback they saw fit. They were verbally encouraged by Sanderson to avoid giving critiques that dictated story; however, they were allowed to provide whatever other critiques they felt would be constructive. Every Thursday evening, the writing groups met in person and discussed their critiques face-to-face, and Sanderson would rotate joining each group on a week-to-week basis.
From this consultation, I learned that writing groups are essential in a beginning novel course. The feedback one can get from fellow writers during these group discussions is vital to both students’ progress and their understanding of the course material. Discussing; either in-person, virtually, or both; allows all parties involved in the conversation to brainstorm ideas and build off of one another’s thoughts, applying what they’ve learned in real time. I also learned that assignments outside continual work on one’s novel can be beneficial, but are not necessary for students’ progress. However, if assignments are to be given, they should be rooted in writing and offer students opportunities to practice what they are learning during classwide discussions.

The online submission and critiquing process and the occasional critiques from the professor were two aspects that transferred well to the online course we designed due to the ease of submission and commenting on submissions in an online setting using tools such as forums or Google Drive. Encouraging the students to meet face-to-face often and discuss their work was valuable, but not required like the weekly online writing sample critiques, for Cheri’s online class as well. Since this was an online course, face-to-face meetings were not mandated. Possible tools that we considered to be used to facilitate these face-to-face meetings were Skype, Google Hangouts, other virtual conferencing programs, or in-person meetings, which could be incorporated into the course using the LTI tools integration in Canvas.

I also consulted the syllabi of a number of online creative writing courses offered through Stanford University (which can be found in full text here). Following is a brief analysis of these syllabi:

- **Course title: Writing Short Stories for Publications**

  This course utilizes a workshop format in which students critique each other’s work on a weekly basis. The course is also broken up in a week-by-week manner, with each a different topic (such as voice, setting, plot, etc.) being covered each week. Both of these aspects of the course were utilized in the designed course.

- **Course title: Fiction Writing: Using Real Life to Create Authentic Stories**

  Similar to the Writing Short Stories for publication course, this course is broken up into weekly topics. Also, this course utilizes weekly Zoom meetings. Virtual meetings like these weekly Zoom meetings were scheduled into the designed course.

- **Course title: Good Things in Small Packages: The Art of the Short Story**

  This course also utilizes weekly Zoom meetings, a new topic of discussion every week, and the implementation of writing workshops. However, these workshops involve the entire class providing feedback to one student. Similar classwide critique sessions were implemented in our course in the form of three round robin workshops. We also implemented writing groups of at least four people in the designed course.

- **Course title: Storytelling: Great Out Loud, Great On The Page**
This course, once again utilizes Zoom meetings. However, a unique aspect of this course that I did not notice in the other courses in this section was an emphasis on looking inward for inspiration in creative writing. While this was not the focus of the course we designed, it is a valuable skill that was at least touched upon in the course.

- Course title: Fiction Writing: Inhabiting Character

This course also utilizes classwide critique sessions during the last half of the course, as well as zoom meetings. However, this course utilizes optional Zoom meetings.

Implications:

The implications the study of the above syllabi had on this course are summarized below:

- Writing groups were incorporated into the course, and students workshopped one another’s writing on a weekly basis.
- Each week, a new creative writing topic was addressed. Writing assignments, resources, and class discussions were grounded in this topic.
- Students were encouraged to meet, on occasion, either in person or via video conferencing to build comradery and to give each other feedback face-to-face.

Task Analysis and Learning Outcomes

Task Analysis

Every author writes their books differently. However, there are certain steps that must be taken in order to be successful in creating a manuscript fit to submit to editors or agents. These steps were key guidances for the content in the course and how it was delivered. To create and submit a novel manuscript to an editor or agent for consideration, an author needs to do the following (list generated based on hearing published authors; including Brandon Sanderson, Brandon Mull, Chad Morris, and Tyler Whitesides; speak on their writing processes):

1. Gets an idea for a story.
   a. Ideas often come from asking the question, “What if?” and brainstorming possible answers. They can also come from observing the world around oneself, having dreams, imagining alternate plots to other stories, and having spontaneous thoughts, among many other ways that could not all be listed here.

2. Plans the novel.
   a. Some authors heavily outline their stories (Brandon Sanderson writes 10,000 words of outline for every 100,000 words of prose), some write simple outlines, other authors simply start writing and see where the story flows, and others outline certain aspects of their stories (e.g., the plot) and discover other aspects (e.g., the characters) as they write.

3. Drafts the novel, either from the beginning of the story or somewhere else depending on personal preference.
a. This is often done without taking time to go back and rework portions of the manuscript.

4. **Revises the draft.**
   a. This can involve writing the entire manuscript over from scratch or rewriting portions of the manuscript to make the story flow better and to add emotional impact.

5. **Submits manuscript to alpha readers (i.e., peers who share a similar writing background) and elicits feedback.**

6. **Implements feedback from alpha readers.**

7. **Submits manuscript to beta readers (i.e., people who would classify themselves as interested parties in reading the published novel but who may not have a background in creative writing) and elicits feedback.**

8. **Implements feedback from beta readers.**

9. **Writes story pitches, synopses, and/or query letters.**

10. **Finds editors’ and agents’ contact information.**
   a. This is done by getting recommendations from other authors, looking in books that the author feels are similar to their own to find the editor and/or agent names and conducting Internet searches to find their contact information, searching through databases of agents and editors online, or networking at writing conferences and speaking with agents and editors in person.

11. **Pitches their story to editors and/or agents in person or submits a query letter and supplemental materials (e.g., a synopsis or small portions of the manuscript) via email.**

12. **If the editor or agent is interested, they will request a full manuscript, and the author provides what is requested.**

*Steps 1-4 in the above list were weekly topics taught in the designed course.
*Steps 5-6 were completed during writing group sessions
*Steps 7-12 were also discussed during weekly classwide discussions

**Learning Outcomes**

**Pre-Requisite Skills**

Students were not taught these skills in the online course. They were expected to already have acquired these skills in other courses or from equivalent writing experience:

Prior to taking this class, students will:

- Understand and use grammar and punctuation rules properly
- Have at least a basic understanding of the elements of fiction (plot, setting, character, etc.)
- Demonstrate care with language, feeling for form, and attention to detail

**Skills taught in the Beginning Novel class**

These tasks came directly from Cheri and were the focus of the course. I have indicated how these skills align with the Task Analysis outlined above:

Students will:

1. highlight the differences between literary and non-literary fiction using real-world examples, and model the characteristics of literary fiction in their own work (Task Analysis step 1);
2. weave substantial ideas about the human condition into artful and compelling prose, defining their own distinct narrative voice in written words (Task Analysis steps 2-3);

3. Choose a specific genre in which they want to write, identify literary works of that genre, and produce writing in that genre (Task Analysis steps 1-4);

4. join and form writing groups;
   a. Seek out alpha readers (other writers) (Task Analysis steps 5-6)
   b. Seek out beta readers (readers for pleasure) (Task Analysis steps 7-8)

5. learn how to submit their work for publication (Task Analysis steps 9-12).

Outside scope of course
(These advanced skills may be mentioned, but they were not explained in detail in the Beginning Novel course):

Students will:
- Copy edit
- Content edit
- Prepare pitches
  - Short- and long-form
- Write query letters
- Write manuscript synopses

Annotated Bibliography

1. Domain knowledge important to understand when teaching your topic

Most of the articles in this section discuss the importance of writing groups and peer feedback. Teacher feedback is important as well, but it offers a different perspective than peer feedback. Writing groups can be effectively implemented online—the online setting allows for easy sharing and critiquing of documents. One article discussed that students should focus on giving their peers positive feedback as opposed to true criticism, particularly during the early phases of the students' writing careers. However, the authors of the other articles did not discuss this topic in the same amount of detail. Instead they argued that honest critiques and specific, constructive criticism can be just as, if not more, valuable than positive, comments meant simply to compliment.

      i. This article was written by Birch of the University of Toronto. She conducted a study concerning adolescents who upload writing for critique to social media forums designed for this purpose. The audience for these adolescents’ writing consists of other writers. The author discusses how teacher and peer feedback are considered different from one another and useful for different reasons—teachers provide professional, sophisticated, and judgmental feedback, while students provide more personalized and timely feedback. Some people prefer the feedback from their peers over
that from teachers; therefore, they turn to online writing forums to get that feedback. The author also discusses a particular online forum, *Critique Circle*: how it works, its benefits, and its history. All the participants in the author’s study were members of *Critique Circle*, and they submit writing to get serious critiques, not to feel good. The author also ranked, through a graph, different types of feedback by importance. This piece of information could be useful in explaining the types of critiques students should give in an online beginning novel writing course. The author explains that these online forums encourage informal learning.

   i. Koehler addresses the question, how “creative writing . . . engages with, understands, responds to, and thrives in an age of digital writing.” He discusses the sensory advances technology has undergone as far as aural and visual experiences, and he suggests that creative writing in this digital age should utilize these sensory experiences in addition to words on a page or a screen. In other words, he encourages the mixing of media. The author expresses the belief that those in academia should embrace the new digital age and all it brings, and they should encourage its exploration in students’ creative writing.

   i. The authors from Grand Valley State University argue that peer reviewers should spend more time writing specific, technique-based, positive comments to bolster the other students’ confidence and that student writers need to be taught how to better implement advice given. They came to this conclusion through interviews with professors concerning how they wanted their students to respond to each other in writing critiques, observing five writing workshops of varying academic levels, and surveying students in these workshops about the critiques they gave and received. Their results showed that specific, technique-based critiques were more useful to student writers than vague, reaction-based comments.

   i. The author of this article was a world-renowned novelist and modernist. She describes one of the issues with the contemporary writing of her time: failure to create good characters. She spends the majority of her time in this article examining the writing and philosophies of multiple authors, and how they effectively and ineffectively created characters. One way she does this is by discussing one “Mrs. Brown”--a stranger she saw on a train--and how these authors would describe her and use her character in their writing, if at all. She goes on to explain how writers must not simply describe settings and facts and expect characters to grow from them, but that characters must be present, and human nature must be explored in order to create engaging literature.
2. *Learning theories and instructional strategies on which you will rely*

The authors of these articles discuss how important it is for creative writing to be taught in collaborative, constructivist settings. They also stress the importance of students having opportunities to reflect on the writing process itself, asking themselves questions such as what works, why it works, and how their writing processes could be improved. A common theme throughout the articles was that creative writing is a difficult subject to classify as truly academic. There is so much individualism, creativity, and subjectivity in creative writing that it is difficult to teach all students a common curriculum. However, there are practices, such as reflection and writing groups, that seem to benefit all creative writers, and creative writing is best improved in collaborative settings.

   i. The authors of this study are directors of the National Writing Project. They conducted a survey of 2,462 Advanced Placement and National Writing Project teachers, and they found that these teachers see digital technologies such as cell phones, texting, social networks, and the Internet as shaping students' writing. The teachers also view these digital technologies as “helpful tools for teaching writing.” For example, the authors found that a majority of teachers feel that digital technologies “allow students to share their work with a wider and more varied audience,” “encourage greater collaboration among students,” and “encourage student creativity and personal expression.” However, the teachers also feel that these digital technologies do cause some problems, such as blurring the lines between formal and informal writing, driving students to write carelessly, and making students more likely to put less effort in their writing.

   i. The authors discuss two main types of exegetical practices: First Order Journal Work (essentially a diary kept by a writer) and Second Order Journal Work (a reflection on the writing process itself). They seem to think that Second Order Journal Work is more valuable in the academic world of creative writing. The authors discuss how students interested in solely creative writing (i.e., they do not want to pursue writing as an academic career) often produce First Order exegeses, while those students interested in a more academic track of writing are able to write exegeses that follow more of a Second Order pattern. The authors encourage writers to conduct Second Order Journal Work, for it helps writers to think critically about the writing process itself as opposed to simply thinking about life as a writer.

i. The authors discuss the history of creative writing in academe, particularly the impact Paul Engle had on bringing creative writing to universities through his work with the Iowa Writers' Workshop MFA program. The authors then briefly discuss Engle’s pedagogical model, including forming writing workshops of no more than 15 participants and the giving of “tough” criticism of one another’s work. They also discuss additional creative writing pedagogy, including the theories “that talent is inherent and essential, that creative writing is largely or even solely an individual pursuit, and that inspiration not education drives creativity.” They discuss the difficult balance between keeping creative writing flexible, subjective, and individual while still attempting to teach it as a subject on the university level. One important way this is achieved is through reading and studying literary works. They also, like many of the authors of other articles in this bibliography, discuss the importance of writing workshops.


i. The authors; from the University of California, Los Angeles; discuss three main questions: “What instructional tools and pedagogical practices are being utilized in MOOCs?,” “How are new digital and networked technologies impacting the delivery of MOOCs?,” and “To what extent are MOOCs able to provide a space for critical inquiry and active student engagement in the learning process?” They respond by writing that collaborative theories such as constructivism and social learning were traditionally large influencers of MOOCs, since these theories emphasize “a strong sense of community” which is instrumental in a large-scale online course being engaging. They also discuss how digital discussion boards are often used in MOOCs to encourage a sense of community; however, these boards often seem contrived, and students do not always engage in meaningful conversations in these discussion boards. Lastly, the authors discuss that MOOCs are turning away from constructivist ideals and moving more toward objectivist ideals, which may be good for some subjects such as math and science. However, for more collaborative subjects, designers must make extra efforts to incorporate constructivist methodologies into the courses they design.

3. **Design approaches that will help you accomplish your work**

The articles in this section discuss the importance of writing groups. I was sure to include writing groups in the online creative writing course I helped design. Because of reading these articles, I also believed it was important to design this course as a series of different learning activities and give students many opportunities for collaboration. The use of
video was also helpful in this course to deliver course content. This course needed to provide students with feelings of control, competency, and collaboration.

   i. In this article, Bawa explores some reasons why, despite the growing popularity of online learning, retention rates are low and decreasing in online course enrollment. One of these reasons is that online courses do not always take into consideration, to a proper level, self-determination theory’s prescription of three needs: “a sense of control, feelings of competency for tasks, and a sense of inclusion or affiliation with others.” Another reason many students leave online courses prematurely is the fact that they feel that online courses may be easier and less work than face-to-face courses; however, when online courses are, in fact, not less work, students often drop out due to the mix of difficulty and the increased level of personal responsibility for learning required in an online setting. The author also expresses the need for instructional designers to not assume that the learners in online courses they design, as well as the teachers of the courses, are comfortable with technology, and to design accordingly.

   i. According to the authors, it is helpful to view creating an online course as “constructing a series of learning environments and activities.” The authors also discuss the benefits of a professor working with an instructional designer in the creation of online courses. They conclude their article by discussing four questions that are important to keep in mind when developing an online course: (1) “What is the best use of the faculty member, an expensive institutional resource?” (2) “Do we have a process for strategically investing in course development?” (3) “Do we confuse providing content with creating a learning environment or delivering a course?” and (4) “What is the return we hope to see from our investment in course development?”

   i. As in many of the articles in this bibliography, the authors of this article discuss how writers actively involved in writing groups where they give and receive feedback express that their experiences in these groups help them grow and improve as writers. A large percent of students in this study stated that using blogs to post their writing and critique others’ writing online improved their ability to give and receive feedback. Due to the flexible nature of online posts, many students can critique the same paper at the same time and comment on one another’s posts. This, in conjunction with the timeliness of online feedback, led to the students’ positive reactions to using blogs.

i. The authors of this article have significant experience in educational research, and three of the four authors are professors. They have found that 100% of surveyed professors consider student engagement a challenge while teaching online. To help increase student engagement, the authors discuss important points to keep in mind while designing an online course, including the significance of interdisciplinary collaboration, the importance of discussions, creating a community of learning, and the effective use of assessments (including summative assessments, formative assessments, and polls). The authors also offer suggestions as to features that can be built into an online course to help increase student engagement, such as video conferencing and a welcome page.

**Design Specifications**

The course contained 14 bi-weekly modules that were built in Canvas. Throughout these modules, student completed the following:

- The reading of three required novels (*The Road, Peace Like a River, and Of Mice and Men*)
- The reading of two additional required texts (*Bird by Bird, and Making Shapely Fiction*)
- Writing 30-35 pages of their personal novel manuscript broken up into 2000 word writing assignments each week.
- Weekly small group writing workshops
- 9 300-word writing assignments in addition to their weekly work on their novels
- 11 short writing drills
- 2 round-robin style classwide writing workshops
- 1 additional round-robin style classwide writing workshop that served as the final exam

Each writing group was assigned a Google Drive folder that they could use to upload their work. They were encouraged, in their feedback, to not be prescriptive about their peer’s story content but instead to answer questions such as:

- What was effective in your peer’s writing? Why?
- What was not effective in your peer’s writing? Why?

Constructivism and Collaboration were foundational principles in the online design of this course.

- **Constructivism:** In line with the quote, “creative writing is largely or even solely an individual pursuit, and that inspiration not education drives creativity” (Swander & Cantrell, 2007), students were encouraged, in class discussions and through writing prompts, to reflect on the world around them and put their thoughts and feelings into writing. This allowed them not only to create prose, but also to construct new thoughts and ideas as they put their feelings into words.

- **Collaboration:** Nearly every piece of literature consulted during the design phase of this process emphasized the importance of writing groups in a creative writing learning
experience. Writing groups allowed students the opportunity to learn collaboratively, both from discussing their own work and the work of the other members of their group. This allowed the students to help one another progress by providing them with the opportunity to point out strengths and weaknesses in one another’s writing. Then, in the week leading up to the proceeding writing group, students were able to hone these strengths and weaknesses and discuss their progress in the next writing group.

Merrill’s First Principles of Instruction were used as a formula for building this course. Each principle and how it was utilized in the course is outlined below:

1. **Problem**
   Students lacked an organized place where they could hone their creative writing skills in a disciplined way that allowed them to give and receive feedback from their peers and an instructor/mentor. They also were unfamiliar with the fundamentals of writing and publishing as they continued their work as creative writers.

2. **Activation**
   Students already had previous creative writing experience prior to taking this course, and this experience was drawn upon through the prerequisites for the course being prior creative writing English courses, explicit questions in class discussions, work in writing groups, and through reflection questions at the beginning of each lesson.

3. **Demonstration**
   Students read examples of literature that exemplified the principles taught in the course. They also completed activities, such as taking quizzes and watching videos, that demonstrated the principles taught in the course.

4. **Application**
   Students produced and submitted weekly writing samples based on a weekly writing prompt to their writing group. They received and offered critiques on these samples.

5. **Integration**
   Students worked on their own personal novels in addition to their weekly writing samples. They submitted a final document of the first three chapters (or equivalent length of roughly 35-40 pages) of a novel for critique and evaluation by the instructor. Students were encouraged to continue writing and meeting with their writing group even after the course was finished.

**Design Representations/Prototypes**

In this section, I provide screenshots of how we operationalized this instructional model through Canvas:

1. **Writing Group folders in Google Drive**
   a. Students were split into writing groups, and to address the issue of not having an organized place to hone their skills and give/receive feedback, each group had access to a Google Drive folder in which they could upload their weekly writing submissions and provide feedback on their peers’ submissions.
2. **Student View of the home page in Canvas**
   a. Students could see each weekly module along with links to its contents.

3. **Course content page**
   a. This was where the main instruction (or links to instructional activities) would be given to activate prior knowledge before classwork and/or to demonstrate principles that had been or that would be taught, as well as any class
announcements.

4. **Class discussion**
   
a. Occasionally, there were classwide or writing group-wide discussions or submissions where students could collaborate and communicate as a group. This would allow students to apply their knowledge amongst their peers.

5. **Assignment**
   
a. There were weekly writing assignments that students would upload to an assigned Google Drive folder. They could then provide a link to that assignment through Canvas. These assignments allowed students to apply what they were learning and integrate the class instruction into their own writing.
6. Quiz
   a. Quizzes could be linked in the module. These also provided opportunities for students to apply what they had learned.

**Assessment Reports and Instruments**

The table below is a rubric for assessment of novel-length fiction provided by Cheri Earl. She used this in grading students’ final submissions and their shorter weekly assignments. Cheri covered all of the points required for an A during class, and expectations were stated during class discussions; however, this particular rubric was never shared publicly with the class. It was only used by Cheri in reviewing and grading assignments:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Voice / Style</th>
<th>Characterization</th>
<th>Plot / Conflict</th>
<th>Structure or Form</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Mechanics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A 13-15</td>
<td>Voice is fresh, distinct, consistent, unique, strong and appropriate to the genre and audience; style is artful, descriptive, creates natural emotion, concrete, poetic, metaphorical, original and unique, tight (no excess), strong verbs and nouns</td>
<td>Main and secondary characters are well-developed, fleshed out, concrete, authentic; characters drive the plot, act (are not passive receivers of action), have distinct characteristics, mannerisms, and speech,</td>
<td>Conflict is clear and appropriate to the audience, interesting and well developed and original; explores a human theme; story begins en medias res (backstory is minimal); the conflict is introduced or at least strongly foreshadowed early in the novel;</td>
<td>Form is artful and supports the conflict of the novel (rather than a gimmick); exposition is artful rather than utilitarian; ending comes naturally from the middle</td>
<td>The story and conflict and characterization leave room for the reader to inject him or herself; the form and language reflect the author’s trust of the audience (show don’t tell)</td>
<td>Punctuation is used with style, no surface errors or grammatical errors, name and course info and date are on the paper, word count and audience are marked and according to requirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Example</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>10.5-12</td>
<td>Appropriate to the genre and audience but not wildly unique or distinct, or consistent for the most part; interesting but not strong fairly descriptive, emotion a bit contrived, strong verbs and nouns, tight for the most part</td>
<td>Characters are somewhat developed and distinct and original, have some clichéd characteristics (especially the secondary characters), characters' motivations and are not clearly defined</td>
<td>Conflict is not necessarily original but clear, interesting, and still compelling and the action comes eventually rather than immediately; consequences may be a bit contrived to serve the plot</td>
<td>Form and exposition are original and strong but not necessarily artful; somewhat utilitarian (serve the intended plot to a degree)</td>
<td>For the most part the story and conflict and characterization leave room for the reader to inject him or herself and reflect the author's trust of the audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>8.5-10</td>
<td>Uneven and indistinct; pedestrian and uninteresting; obvious, abstract, imprecise or overdone, lacks power and emotion</td>
<td>Characters are driven by the plot rather than vice versa, unoriginal, stock, uninteresting; characters are clichéd and/or superficial</td>
<td>Main action is clichéd and predictable and the action is overdone or meandering; too much backstory and not enough forward momentum of plot; shows a rushed and not well-thought-out conflict and consequences are trite or message driven</td>
<td>Form is predictable, pedestrian, run-of-the-mill, gimmicky or contrived for affect</td>
<td>Little awareness of audience or reflects a lack of trust for the audience, self-conscious</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Implementation Instruments

In order to be successful in this course, students needed:
- Basic training in creative writing (equivalent of ENGL 218 at BYU)
- Access to a computer with Internet capabilities and a word processor (Google Docs could suffice)
- Time available equivalent to that necessary to take a 3-credit class (i.e., about 6-9 hours outside of class each week).

In order to provide a successful course, the instructor needed:
- Administrative access to the course through Canvas
- Working knowledge of how to use Canvas and Google Drive
- Time to read through and give comments on 15 student writing submissions each week
- Access to a computer with Internet capabilities and a webcam
- Lesson plans for each module
- Novel writing experience
- Experience teaching creative writing and novel writing courses
- Syllabus

Evaluation Instruments

Formative

During the development of the course, I worked closely with Cheri Earl to make sure that the online course being developed adequately represented her in-person course. Since Cheri had already been teaching her course for multiple years and had found success with her course content achieving the learning outcomes, our primary focus during the initial phase of the design process was evaluating how well the in-person Beginning Novel course would translate into an online setting. Questions we considered were:
- Does this course address the aims of a BYU education? Why or why not?
- How does this course match or not match expectations of a traditional beginning novel course?
- Do Cheri and I have enough knowledge of Canvas to design and build this course?
- Is the workload in this course manageable compared to other online 300-level courses?
- Is the quality of the students’ work comparable to the quality of their work in in-person ENGL 318 courses?
- Do the students feel that they are participating in a valuable experience throughout this course and improving in the ways they hoped to improve?

We also ran a pilot spanning a few weeks of Cheri's in-person Winter 2020 course with the students enrolled. This pilot contained a few potential modules of the online course and introduced online elements designed to increase Cheri’s efficiency and capacity to teach. This pilot not only provided Cheri and myself with valuable experience designing for and building course materials in Canvas, but it also provided an opportunity to see how well the course material translated into an online setting and how well it was received by students.

At the end of the pilot, we asked the students to take a survey, answering the following questions:

1. How did this online creative writing experience compare to in-person creative writing courses you have taken? What did you like better/worse about this online experience and why?
   a. “It's better in person because it means more of Cheri Earl, who is [a] marvelous professor [sic]. More short segments from Professor Earl each day would be very motivation [sic]. Online is great because I could do it when I had time. I did look forward to opening each day's assignment and going to work on it.”
   b. “This had a lot more assignments then [sic] the in person class but that makes sense to make up for the participation of a physical class. I found it harder to keep up with because all the due dates were really confusing.”
   c. “I prefer in-person classes. I like being able to sit down and discuss the new things we have learned. It is a lot harder to stay engaged in class time if it is a recorded lecture and you know you won't get called on to speak. Although it was nice to be able to do assignments and watch lectures at my convenience, I often saved it for the end of the week instead of spacing it out. That made the experience worse for me (even though it was my fault).”
   d. “There was definitely a lot less interaction for this course. Part of that had to do with the fact that the other members of my ‘group’ did not really participate. I somewhat like the impersonal nature of reading someone else’s comments rather than hearing them in person, since that allowed me to be less embarrassed or angry and instead really think about what they said and see the value of their feedback.”
   e. “Better: I feel like I got more feedback and from more classmates due to the posting and replying feature. Worse: The video lectures were kind of boring and it was harder to focus than if I had been in an online class with more interaction.”
   f. “I prefer in-person interactions. It's easier to ask questions and get feedback in in-person classes than online. It was nice to be able to go through at flexible times and turn things in online.”

2. Did video conferencing enhance your experience in this course? Why or why not? How could this tool be better utilized?
a. “I think it would be nice to check in once a week with . . . video conferencing. It's nice to connect a face with the comments being written. Also, there are those who like to share their opinions, and it's always good to see Cheri Earl doing what she does so well, that of drawing out all the students and making us think on our feet.”
b. “Not really, it felt as helpful as all the reading we did. I'm not sure how it could be better.”
c. “Yes. The conference was much better than the recorded lectures because it was easier to stay engaged and participate. I would do more conferences than recorded lectures.”
d. “I feel like the conferencing was a good touch since it allowed for some real interaction. It felt less like I was taking a course on my own. I feel like if conferencing is utilized in the future, maybe Canvas shouldn't be used as the platform for the conference. The audio wasn't reliable for me, and the video from other people always appeared choppy and inconsistent (rather than smooth and real-time).”
e. “Yes, it was nice to have a face to face discussion. However, I do like the written interactions on everyone's writing assignments and I don't think that would work as well with video.”
f. “Yes, it was nice to have a video conference. It would be nice to do more critiques this way to get more insight into what works and what doesn't in our writing.”

3. Did you ever have a video conference with your individual writing group? Why or why not?
   a. “No. Didn't know it was possible to do. Probably need more instruction on how to facilitate that.”
   b. “Not with my individual writing class, I think we were too busy to have a good time for it.”
   c. “No. I never even knew how to set one up, and the thought didn't actually cross my mind since we could already comment on each other's papers online.”
   d. “No. The other members didn't end up really participating.”
   e. “No. I guess we just didn't think about it. The written feedback seemed sufficient...sometimes it is harder to give feedback face to face because you want to be nicer.”
   f. “No, no one instigated it.”

4. What do you want us to quit doing in Beginning Novel online?
   a. “Nothing. Just make it a 14 week course as soon as possible.”
   b. “I think you need to fix the due dates, since the official one that shows up is sometimes different than what the assignment says, and all the assignments were due seemingly random days which made it a lot harder to keep up with.”
   c. “I would scrap the reading quizzes. Or make them multiple choice. Or be more specific. The very first one said to write a short essay, but I had no idea how short it should be or if it was open-book or anything.”
   d. “Other than using Canvas for the video conference(s), nothing in particular.”
   e. “If possible, the video lectures. I didn't feel like I got anything useful out of them.”
   f. “It all was fine.”

5. What do you want us to keep doing in Beginning Novel online?
   a. “Like I said, make it a 14-week course, ASAP . I need it.”
   b. “I thought most of the assignments were helpful and fun even if there were a lot of them.”
c. “The 6-word, 18-word, 25-word, and 100-word stories were great. They made me come up with great stories on the spot.”
d. “Keep giving us all the short assignments! That really helped direct my writing and helped me be productive. It also helped me learn by giving me that little amount of space to try out what we were talking about without feeling overwhelmed.”
e. “Fun mini writing assignments like the 100 word stories! And the writing group scene assignments.”
f. “writing goals and video conferencing.”
6. What do you want us to start doing in Beginning Novel online?
a. “Make it more available, more often.”
b. “I don’t know.”
c. “Do video conferences more frequently (instead of reading quizzes). Encourage everyone to share excerpts of their writing with the class in these conferences.”
d. “I feel like we should have had more readings (from the blog or elsewhere). The blog was given to us as a resource at the beginning, but we only used it once or twice. It would have been nice to be directed to the blog for certain learning/reading material. Sometimes it felt like I was going on just a little information when I tried new things.”
e. “Maybe switch up the writing groups every week so as to get more perspectives.”
7. I think having a fully online version of the Beginning Novel course offered at BYU would be a benefit to students.
a. Strongly Agree
   i. 50.0%
b. Agree
   i. 50.0%
c. Disagree
   i. 00.0%
d. Strongly Disagree
   i. 00.0%
8. What else would you like us to know about your experience?
a. “It was very motivating. I made great progress on writing my novel while I was engaged in the class. My productivity has really dropped off since the class ended. So, the class is a motivator. If the class was a full class and repeatable, I’d just keep taking it until my novel was finished. It’s truly helpful.”
b. “Nothing.”
c. “It was kind of hard for me to find all of my assignments the first week. I knew they were somewhere on Canvas, but I am not very familiar with Canvas, and I had to hop all over it to make sure I had done everything.”
d. “It was really great!”
e. “It was awesome! I would totally take this class if it became offered.”

**Summative**

Most evaluation data was gathered during the pilot phase. However, throughout the duration of the course itself once it was launched, as well as after the course was complete, we conducted some additional evaluations (all available feedback can be found below the questions):
- Informal survey of students (questions asked during video calls gauging students’ participation and what they liked/did not like about the course so far)
● Formal assessment of students (assessments in Canvas, quizzes on readings, final exam)

● Formal survey given to students after the final exam to gauge what worked well in the course and what could be improved. Questions asked included:
  ○ What would you like to get rid of in the course, i.e., what isn't helping you?
    ■ “Long, uninterrupted class hours. It would be nice to get up and stretch my legs, get a drink of water, or use the bathroom. It's hard to pay good attention for two and a half hours, especially online.”
    ■ “At least a few 300 word writing assignments that don't directly help us write portions of our novels. The writing exercises are enjoyable, but in many cases, it doesn't allow room to write portions of our own novels.”
    ■ “. . . I think a short 5 min break in the middle of class would be nice, and would help me be more attentive.”
    ■ “Hmm this one's a toughy. I quite honestly didn't have any complaints about the class, am I allowed to just say that? Sorry!”
    ■ “I would space out the reading assignments a little more so that they aren't all in the first half of the term, because it was a little overwhelming at times. I feel like the course was front-loaded in terms of work, and spacing it out more would allow me to enjoy the reading and writing activities more.”
  ○ What would you like to keep in the course, i.e., what is helping you?
    ■ “The production schedules. They really pushed me to work through troubling sections instead of going around them or leaving for other projects.”
    ■ “Weekly (stand alone) meetings with group members to get feedback.”
    ■ “. . . I enjoyed the writing exercises that got me out of my novel for a minute. Sometimes it's fun to go into a different headspace. I would also definitely keep the 300 word assignments about character and character development, and the weekly production schedules.”
    ■ “Definitely the forums where we post our writing assignments. I liked to scroll through and read everyone's work and get inspiration. And . . . the character-building assignments were very helpful too.”
    ■ “Assigning Bird by Bird. I absolutely loved reading that book, and felt like it really inspired me in my writing and in my life overall.”
    ■ “Loved the additional books and writing help that was assigned, inspired my writing techniques”
    ■ “Your sanity. I liked that. But also keep the writing assignments, the materials required, the inspirational thoughts at the beginning of each class. Also, I liked how you didn't pressure us to do the readings by a strict deadline, which let me enjoy the books more. I also like the reviews we do after.”
  ○ What would you like to add to the course that isn't here already, i.e., what would help you that the course isn't already doing?
    ■ “More in class prompts. I've found that some of my best ideas and passages start from in class prompts, but we didn't have nearly as many as I would have liked.”
    ■ “I can't really think of anything right now, but will post again if I think if [sic] something.”
“...I would like more in-class writing time and prompts. It's fun to hear what everyone comes up with in such a short amount of time and motivates me to be more creative.”

“Incorporating breaks into the lectures or more in-class activities. I thought the lecture material was all super interesting but had a really hard time focusing by the end of class every day just because it was long. This would probably be less of a problem in a normal-paced Fall/Winter class.”

“A break in the long class period. Having more writing activities in class, since I tended to formulate new concepts and plot points in that setting very easily”

“More in class writing assignments like the people have already mentioned. Incorporate one everyday? That'd be nice. They give me anxiety but I like it.”

**Budget and Timeline**

**Timeline**

The original timeline was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>End Date</th>
<th># of Days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Module 1</td>
<td>2-Dec-19</td>
<td>12-Dec-19</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 2</td>
<td>13-Dec-19</td>
<td>23-Dec-19</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 3</td>
<td>23-Dec-19</td>
<td>12-Jan-20</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Module 4</td>
<td>13-Jan-20</td>
<td>22-Jan-20</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 5</td>
<td>23-Jan-20</td>
<td>2-Feb-20</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 6</td>
<td>3-Feb-20</td>
<td>12-Feb-20</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 7</td>
<td>13-Feb-20</td>
<td>23-Feb-20</td>
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<td>Module 8</td>
<td>24-Feb-20</td>
<td>4-Mar-20</td>
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<td>Module 9</td>
<td>5-Mar-20</td>
<td>15-Mar-20</td>
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<td>Module 10</td>
<td>16-Mar-20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Module 11</td>
<td>26-Mar-20</td>
<td>5-Apr-20</td>
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<td>Module 12</td>
<td>6-Apr-20</td>
<td>15-Apr-20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Module 13</td>
<td>16-Apr-20</td>
<td>26-Apr-20</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 14</td>
<td>27-Apr-20</td>
<td>6-May-20</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put the pieces together</td>
<td>7-May-20</td>
<td>20-May-20</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review</td>
<td>21-May-20</td>
<td>3-Jun-20</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 19. Original project timeline

However, it was then simplified to the following:
This timeline was followed into March. However, once the COVID-19 pandemic struck, causing classes for Spring term of 2020 to be moved online, this process was expedited. The full online ENGL 318R course was finished and starting to be implemented by the end of April, 2020.

**Budget**

9 hours/week (approximately 3 hours of design, 4 hours of development, and 2 hours of evaluation) x 28 weeks = 252 hours
252 hours x $26/hr = $6,552

However, I did this work free of charge, so this budget is simply theoretical.