

**Bill Wolff**

**Writing for Electronic Communities, Fall 2009**

**Toward an Understanding of New Media Literacy: A Collaborative Writing Project**

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In this semester-long project we will collaboratively compose a scholarly essay (<http://bit.ly/VWkCl>) using GoogleDocs. GoogleDocs is an online writing environment that allows for the easy sharing of content and also tracks changes over time. It has the look and feel of Microsoft Word and though documents can be exported in multiple formats, all of our writing for this project is to be composed in the space itself.

The project has multiple goals:

- introduce students to Google Docs as a collaborative writing space as distinguished from blogging and micro-blogging
- challenge students' conceptions of authorship
- think about how online spaces can construct a text
- provide a space where students can explore the course and other related texts in academic prose over a period of time

Here is how the project will work:

1. For week 2, one student will compose a 4 – 5 page essay that addresses the overall theme of the course and goal of the essay in terms of the first text read for the class (*Blogging* by Jill Walker Rettberg). Outside sources should not be used at this point.
2. For week 3, another student will build on/complicates the first student's essay by revising/writing about/adding 4 – 5 pages of ideas informed by the by the 2nd text read for the course (*Multiliteracies for the Digital Age* by Stuart Selber).
3. This continues through week 8 or all students have added 4 – 5 pages of content, whichever comes first.
4. The reading for week 9 will be the collaborative essay draft. In class we discuss it in terms of its content, its revisions, and what it was like to write the text.
5. Over the remaining weeks, the text will be revised based on what we discussed in week 9, and complicated by incorporating ideas informed by the authors.
6. During the revision weeks, 1 or 2 students will each add/alter/change 2 – 3 pages of text based on the readings. Students should also cite from their own and other students work (blog posts and Tweets) to support, challenge, and provide evidence for claims made in the essay.
7. The end product will be a 20 – 25 page academic essay paper that explores the central themes of the course using the required texts as sources.
8. We will discuss the final paper the last day of class.
9. After the semester, I will write an introduction to the essay and an analysis of the content and process, and we will try to find a place for it to be published.

There are, of course, a number of things that could go wrong with this project. I can envision great success and untamed chaos. Perhaps both simultaneously. But I am excited by the possibilities it can offer for thinking about writing in a new media age.