

Developing a Classroom Web-Based Learning Tool Utilizing D2L

By Cheryl Massé

Department of English

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Faculty Teaching Certificate Program, Spring 2006

When I entered my first classroom, it was filled with computers, computers arranged in a disadvantageous pattern. Some of my students faced away from what I thought was the front of the room. Others were placed in such a way that I could not see what the students were doing, enabling them to surf the Web, visit Facebook, and, in one case, view porn. I quickly learned to circulate around the room during the class period to keep an eye on what was going on. I also informed students that they were not permitted to visit any of the above sites on the Web, and that the computers were meant for classroom work only.

In doing so, I realized that I was not providing them with an alternative. During in-class assignments, some students naturally finish ahead of others, leaving them with nothing to do. This invites misuse of classroom computers.

In addition, I was concerned about mistakes I was consistently seeing in students' written work, including errors that came under the heading of grammar. Presumably, most students entering college already understand

the basics. The curriculum developed for English 101 at MSU is rigorous, and time is a precious commodity. Still, I needed a way to address grammar issues that came up.

I developed a series of online lessons that took care of two problems. First, if students finished early in the classroom, they were permitted to look at what I call "Grammar Pour Le Jour." In addition, I was able to isolate significant problems that I saw in student work and address them in a timely manner. If a group of papers showed weakness in a given area, I developed an online lesson that addressed it.

"Grammar Pour Le Jour" is an item that comes up, each day, when my students log on to D2L. There is a lesson per class period; in each of the semesters I have taught, this means twice a week. I was able to re-use the items that I developed that first semester the next semester; sometimes, I simply rearranged them as issues arose. Other times I developed new items.

First, I developed a logo, a way of identifying and separating from the day's assignment the items in the D2L "Course Home>News" sections. It is in this section that I post homework and upcoming due dates for other coursework.

The logo appears below:



The logo reads,

**“Grammar Pour Le Jour”:
Your daily dose of information on writing well...
one hot tip**

This ensures that each item is highly visible to students, who generally log on to their computers and D2L upon entering the classroom. It is easily differentiated from the homework assignments and other announcements, as it employs the use of color and alternate fonts.

Included in each day’s entry is a grammar rule or other writing issue. Examples of both proper and improper usage are given, along with live Web links to both additional information on the topic and pertinent interactive exercises. These links come from a large variety of sites; the rationale for doing so is to allow students to find sites that they like and that work well for them.

An example of a complete listing appears below:



The links in blue lead to Web sites; the first, “Click here for more information on the use of pronouns,” is linked to “The Everyday Writer: Vague Pronoun Reference.”

(http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/everyday_writer3e/20errors/2.html).

The second, “Click here for an exercise on pronoun use,” leads to Towson University’s page, “Faulty Pronouns - Exercise 1.”

(<http://wwwnew.towson.edu/ows/modulePROex1.htm>). (Note: Links active as of 4.27.06.)

Students enjoy the variety offered, often choosing a favorite from among the sites they are referred to during the course of the semester. They are able to choose a style that pleases them, along with an academic level they find comfortable. Ideally, once they find a page they like, they will revisit the site with other questions that arise.

Another important use for this feature is as a reference. When I correct and grade papers, I am able to refer students to a specific place; I simply write, for example, next to a comma splice, “See ‘Grammar Pour Le

Jour' for January 24." For this particular day, "Grammar Pour Le Jour" provides links to information and exercises on run-ons, fused sentences and comma splices. Students are then able, on their own time and at their own speed, to address weaknesses in basic skills. I have consistently seen improvement in student work when I have referred a student to a pertinent "Grammar Pour Le Jour."

This tool works in several different ways: It both teaches students basic skills and provides them with an acceptable way to use classroom computers during downtime. It also provides them with a variety of resources from which to choose when accessing the Web for information on basic English usage and rules. I plan to use—and adapt to future systems and situations—this Web-based teaching tool throughout my teaching career.

Works Cited

Lunsford, Andrea A. "Vague Pronoun Reference, The Everyday Writer: Book-Specific Resources/20 Most Common Errors/Error #2." Bedford/St. Martins. The Everyday Writer, 3rd Edition. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2005. 8 April 2006.

<http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/everyday_writer3e/20errors/2.html>.

Towson University Online Writing Support. "Faulty Pronouns - Exercise 1." Towson University Writing Support Program, Department of English, Towson University. 8 April 2006.

<<http://wwwnew.towson.edu/ows/modulePROex1.htm>>.