

GUEST COMMENTARY

Using Google drive in English class

By Martha Bloom

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When I was in high school 20 years ago, writing English papers was always a solitary process. I remember the frustrations and eventual delights of grappling with difficult texts and trying to devise original and compelling arguments. While writing, I never had the chance to check in with a teacher or peer to share a question or idea.

As my students know, I am skeptical about technology and chose to become an English teacher, among other reasons, because of my own captivation with Thoreau's writing and ideas. But I do believe that there are new, special ways in which technology helps teachers and students to create community, collaborate effectively, and learn together. Many of my colleagues at Belmont High School and I are using Google Drive to help our students with writing or other course assignments.

This tool enables us to give students formative feedback while they are writing so that they may reflect on their work before they have completed an assignment. This feedback comes just in time to be most helpful and relevant.

This year for the first time in my 13-year career in the district, I am not collecting stacks of papers. Instead, my students, early in the fall, created virtual folders on Google Drive and shared these folders with me; the students write their English essays in Google documents from within these shared folders, which enables me to view and comment on their work as they are writing.

My senior students are currently working on the senior thesis, a yearlong research and writing process where students write a literary research paper synthesizing ideas from three or four novels and many essays of literary criticism. We frequently work in computer labs, and I am able to provide feedback to the students while they

are working. On my own laptop, I open up each student's assignment and move from document to document typing questions and feedback; often the students and I chat in person too, but I do try to leave a written record—comments on the documents—of our conversations. I am able to see when students are having difficulty and give them a suggestion of how to move forward in their work. I love how dynamic the process is and how I am able to play a much more active role in supporting my students as they are writing. The students have told me that they appreciate the feedback very much too.

My ninth graders are also working with Google Drive. This winter the ninth graders, working in groups of three or four, wrote expository essays about imagery in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. In class the students used their iPads, generously provided by the Foundation for Belmont Education, to write their essays; they created

shared Google documents to collaborate, and I circled around the room to support each group and give them written feedback on their Google documents.

I also appreciate how using Google Drive makes collaboration among colleagues easier. This year my Professional Learning Team group, made up of ninth grade English teachers, has used a shared folder on Google Drive to work together and create new assignments. The shared folder enables us to keep a clear, collective record of our work and keep our conversations going between meetings.

For years I have reminded my students that writing is a process that requires passion and practice, determination and delight, and I am pleased that I have a new tool that enables me to support my students' writing processes in such a dynamic way.

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