



November 2019 . . . In this issue:

- **Low-stakes Writing in Digital Contexts by Luca Ambrogiani**
 - **Top Takeaways from Our Town Hall Event**
 - **Writing Culture Faculty Survey**
-

Low-stakes Writing in Digital Contexts

By Luca Ambrogiani

York instructors that are already familiar with WAC pedagogy (or have been keeping an eye on this newsletter!) will have certainly heard the term "low-stakes writing." Defining it for those who have not is simple enough: it's a type of activity consisting of short, usually non-graded writing tasks, which are meant to familiarize the student with the activity of writing in a specific context, help scaffolding their efforts towards a bigger writing project, and keep them continuously engaged with course topics and contents. Even though WAC literature calls attention to the many benefits of low-stakes writing, it is something that instructors can sometimes struggle to implement: after all, the procedures applying to traditional graded work are not useful here, and keeping tabs on several submissions per week can quickly become taxing, or simply more effort than originally intended. When I approached low-stakes writing for my own classes, I resorted to my own background as an ESL speaker and teacher of languages, mostly familiar with [communication-based approaches to learning](#). Perhaps there was something to be gained from that perspective, drawing from the idea that a genuine communicative context is more conducive to learning than a fabricated one.

This reasoning shaped my signature project: helping York faculty adopt low-stakes writing in digital contexts and social media platforms (e.g. Wordpress, Medium, Blogger, Facebook, Twitter, Quora, Wiki formats, and Blackboard). Tools and assistance on the topic of online publishing may provide an answer to these needs, encouraging faculty to adopt a beneficial (though often overlooked) type of assignment while respecting the students' demonstrated need for real, immediate contexts instead of make-believe situations. Of course, the use of online tools makes low-stakes writing all the more appealing, as digital publishing platforms uniquely allow students to read and provide

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Ultimately, the goal of this project is to create an easily accessible compendium of resources for instructors who wish to incorporate—or enhance—low-stakes writing in their classes through digital platforms. This requires curating a selection of said platforms and identifying the best writing formats for each, as well as taking into account issues such as accessibility, availability, privacy, and the degree of “outside engagement” usually to be expected when committing to a certain type of online presence. York faculty's input is critical at this early stage! If you would like certain tools and platforms to be prioritized, be sure to get in touch, even if you have never thought about having an online writing component in your class.

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Luca Ambrogiani is a Ph.D. candidate in Comparative Literature at the Graduate Center and a new WAC fellow at York. He is interested in exploring the relationship between popular literary genres and their adaptations in media, and his research focuses on detective fiction and the supernatural in literature. Before his doctoral work, he earned a bachelor's and master's degree in Foreign Languages and Literatures at the University of Urbino. He has been teaching at Lehman college for the past two years.

Top Takeaways from Our Town Hall Event

On October 17, we held our first WAC colloquium of the school year, a town hall event titled A Culture of Writing: Re-imagining Writing Across the Curriculum at York. Thank you to those faculty members who participated! Some takeaways from our discussion were:

- WAC assessment is a particular challenge, given the diverse nature of writing in different disciplines
- We share priorities and commitments to supporting students as emerging academic writers. Discussing strategies and successes is a powerful way for us to provide this support across disciplines and programs.



We look forward to seeing you at future events!

Writing Culture Faculty Survey

If you use writing in any form in your teaching (and most of us do), we're interested in your input! The survey takes 15-20 minutes to complete, and can be found at the following

link. <https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=NYNnCwrV00GxUjAUmZM-M-m0xa-fmVrtJjmO52pDKcE1UQTZZMTRCQ1FLQ1dRVlhCSE5KODdSSFpEOS4u>

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