WordPress

FOR STUDENT
Writing Projects
GRADES 6 – 12

Complete Lessons Aligned with
Common Core Standards for ELA
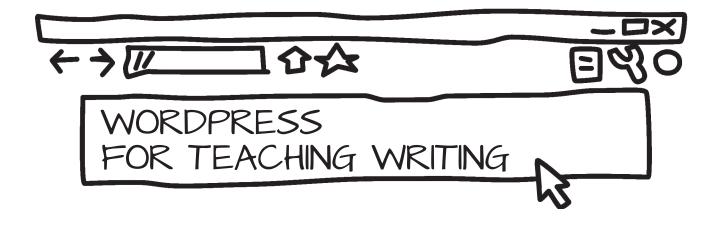
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WORDPRESS FOR TEACHING WRITING

Student blogs are a great vehicle for helping students in middle school and high school learn collaborative writing skills, and WordPress software is a great tool for creating student blogs. As a way to share written work, student blogs can facilitate such writing processes as: brainstorming, writing, rewriting, developing theses, preparing arguments, editing, fact checking, and more. WordPress blogs can be used in many ways to sharpen your students' writing and reinforce Common Core writing standards. Each lesson in this book includes one or more assessment rubrics that show the specific Common Core writing standards met. Appendix C details the writing standards for grades 9 - 12 and outlines the way teachers can put those standards into operation in the classroom.

WordPress blogs can be used to engage students in a variety of different kinds of writing: informational text essays with tracked online research, creative writing pieces such as short stories and poetry, or journalism pieces, including entire school newspapers. In this book, you'll find lessons to help you teach writing skills using WordPress, along with examples from several teachers who have used WordPress blogs successfully with their students.

Some of the benefits of incorporating WordPress blogs into your writing instruction include:

▷ Posting student writing on the class WordPress blog makes the written pieces available for the whole class to read, critique, and help revise.

▷ WordPress blogs contain built-in discussion threads where teachers can have control of what information is posted and who can comment. Student discussions can be tracked and graded. Students can be online at the same time and work together on a project, or they can contribute to the critiquing process outside of school time. Teachers can collect student opinion about an article or the quality of a source.

▷ WordPress is free software, another plus for classroom use. The code used by WordPress is universally available and can be modified as necessary. There are numerous optional WordPress plug-ins that add features to spark creative writing and critical thinking.

Familiarize yourself with WordPress, using the "Getting Started" steps in Appendix A (). Once the blog is created and you are comfortable navigating around WordPress, you're ready to

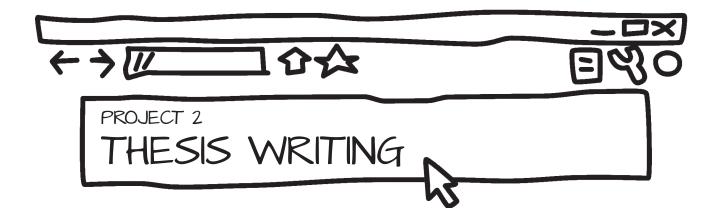start working with your students on a blog project.

You'll need a computer and monitor. An LCD projector or similar device is also needed to display the blog to the whole class.

You may need to update your browser to be sure that your blog will be easy to use. Most browsers work well with WordPress as long as they are up-to-date. Many experienced WordPress users recommend Mozilla Firefox as the browser of choice (**http://en.forums.wordpress.com/topic/which-browser-is-the-best**).

After your students' pieces are written, you will post them to the class WordPress blog where they will be available for the entire class to read. If you want to share your students' work with parents, administrators, or other teachers, a WordPress blog makes it easy to do.

PRIVACY/PRECAUTIONS

While no social network is one hundred percent safe, using WordPress with your exclusive domain address can meet most privacy concerns. You supply the web address only to students, staff, and parents. However, any site on the Internet has the potential to be seen by outsiders. Students should not include their last name in any postings, but adding a last name initial can help differentiate between students whose first and last names might be the same. As an added precaution, WordPress pages can be password-protected. If you want to obtain parental permission, Appendix B (**page 35**) is a form that you can tailor for your district or school.

PROJECT 2
THESIS WRITING

Use your class WordPress blog to teach students how to write a thesis. This lesson concentrates on the value of constructing quality claims and arguments while refuting fallacies. This Thesis Writing project is appropriate for grades six through twelve. Part One involves learning to write thesis statements. Part Two extends the lesson by adding Internet research on the thesis topic and learning how to recognize quality research sources.

PART ONE - CREATING THESIS STATEMENTS

TEACHER PREPARATION: 10 minutes

Create a new WordPress page (the thesis landing page) for the purpose of thesis writing practice before you start the lesson.

CLASS DISCUSSION: 25 minutes

1   Discuss the concept of a thesis with your students. One definition that works for this project: **a thesis is a summary of a proposition that will be upheld in an essay.** The thesis is usually the last sentence in the introductory paragraph. Explain that it is important to take a side on the issue, but remind students to write the thesis in third person so the writing speaks with authority.

The following example shows a thesis with and without at least two thesis variables tied to something meaningful. Since the objective is to write about issues that are well published, a thesis with no variables does not often examine the most prominent issues for debate.

Editorialized thesis with no variables: "Michigan should repeal its mandatory motorcycle helmet law."

– This thesis is void of variables and is not tied to anything meaningful. Although this thesis has a third person voice, it does not contain sufficient information to build a robust essay offering specific and/or relative

subject information currently debated in published texts.

Non-editorialized thesis with well-defined variables: "If Michigan repeals its mandatory motorcycle helmet law, the state may earn several million dollars in travel, restaurant, and healthcare revenue."

– This thesis contains three variables: travel, restaurant, and healthcare. It is tied to something meaningful – revenue.

You can tailor the level and sophistication of theses to meet your class and department needs.

2 Students can develop thesis ideas by visiting the "Freshly Pressed" WordPress blog, a round up of "editor's picks to community favorites" located at **http://en.wordpress.com/ fresh**. This page features new blog releases and often includes a wide array of human interest or newsworthy stories and commentaries. Have the students examine the variety of blogs. Each student should choose a topic that is controversial or newsworthy.

3 After your students have read the blog of their choice and found more information on the Internet regarding the subject, have them navigate to your WordPress thesis landing page and post a general title for that topic in the available comment form. If you enable "no moderation" for comments, they will post immediately.

4 Under the student's topic, each student posts a preliminary one-sentence argumentative thesis. Students can use the WordPress comment field for writing and rewriting until they feel their thesis is ready to be published on the site.

COLLABORATION FOR THESIS DEVELOPMENT: 25 minutes — ☐ ✕

1 Have students help each other develop their theses via the collaborative process discussed in the Hero Essay project (**page 11**). Encourage students to critique at least two or three peer theses.

2 Have students post links related to their thesis on a "Resources" WordPress page so every student can acquire background information on each topic. Students can easily copy and paste a Web address into the WordPress comment field. They also can include a few words about why they were attracted to the story.

ASSESSMENT — ☐ ✕

Once the collaboration has been closed, use the rubric (**page 19**) to grade the initial preliminary thesis as well as the peer feedback.

RUBRIC 1 - THESIS DEVELOPMENT

Student Name: _____   Date: _____

Writing Variable	1-4 Needs Work	5-6 Fair Job	7-8 Good Job	9-10 Terrific	Score	Common Core Strand
Thesis	Thesis is not clear. Reads like an editorial.	Thesis mentioned with one variable, but not well developed.	Thesis is clear and contains at least two variables.	Thesis has well-defined variables and expressed authoritatively.		W.9-12.1 W.6-8.1a W.9-12.2 W.6-8.2 W.6-8.1 W.6-8.2a
Argument	Not at all convincing.	Somewhat convincing; needs more support, facts, and evidence.	Convincing, but needs fine-tuning.	Excellent presentation, very convincing, strong development of argument to support thesis.		W.9-12.1 W.6-8.2 W.9-12.2 W.6-8.2b W.6-8.1 W.6-8.2c W.6-8.1b W.6-8.2d W.6-8.1c W.6-8.2e W.6-8.1d W.6-8.9b
Evidence	Points are confusing and not connected to main topic.	Average development of points presented.	Evidence is presented well; needs fine-tuning.	Points are valid, plentiful, clear, and concise.		W.9-12.1 W.6-8.2 W.9-12.2 W.6-8.2b W.9-12.7 W.6-8.2c W.9-12.8 W.6-8.2d W.9-12.9 W.6-8.2e W.6-8.1 W.6-8.7 W.6-8.1b W.6-8.8 W.6-8.1c W.6-8.9 W.6-8.1d W.6-8.9b

RUBRIC 1 - THESIS DEVELOPMENT P.2

Student Name: _____

Date: _____

Writing Variable	1-4 Needs Work	5-6 Fair Job	7-8 Good Job	9-10 Terrific	Score	Common Core Strand	
Details	Minimal details offered.	Details in developmental stage.	Details are good; the reader has a feel for the stance the writer has taken.	Details are vivid, strong, and embrace the reader; the argument is convincing based on the details supporting it.		W.9-12.1 W.9-12.2 W.6-8.1 W.6-8.1b W.6-8.1c W.6-8.1d	W.6-8.2 W.6-8.2b W.6-8.2c W.6-8.2d W.6-8.2e
Vocabulary	Very limited range of word use; utilizes slang and/or attacks.	Some development of word variance evident; slang and/or attacks evident.	Vocabulary is at grade level; good use of variety of words and expressions.	Highly effective in using a variety of words; avoids attacks, slang, etc.		W.9-12.1 W.9-12.2 W.6-8.1 W.6-8.1a W.6-8.1c W.6-8.1d	W.6-8.1e W.6-8.2 W.6-8.2b W.6-8.2c W.6-8.2d W.6-8.2e

RUBRIC 1 - THESIS DEVELOPMENT P.3

Student Name: _____   Date: _____

Writing Variable	1-4 Needs Work	5-6 Fair Job	7-8 Good Job	9-10 Terrific	Score	Common Core Strand	
Grammar	There are more than 15 serious grammar errors.	There are 10 – 15 serious grammar errors.	There are fewer than 10 serious grammar errors.	There are no serious grammar errors.		W.9-12.1 W.9-12.2 W.6-8.1 W.6-8.1a W.6-8.1c W.6-8.1d	W.6-8.1e W.6-8.2 W.6-8.2b W.6-8.2c W.6-8.2d W.6-8.2e
Cohort Support	Did not make an appropriate effort with peers in class or electronically.	Made a minimal effort with peer support in class or electronically.	Worked well with others; demonstrated support of peers in class or electronically.	Offered extra support to those peers in need in class or electronically.		W.9-12.1 W.9-12.2 W.9-12.4-6	W.9-12.10 W.6-8.4 W.6-8.5

Several high schools, colleges, and universities use WordPress to create online editions of their school newspapers. **The Eagle Eye, Online Edition**, a product of Lock Haven University, Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, is a great example of an electronic college newspaper using WordPress as the delivery platform. Dr. Sharon B. Stringer, *The Eagle Eye* news advisor, is in charge of the electronic edition.

Student reporters write the stories and then funnel them to one student who edits and posts the stories. Anyone with a WordPress ID can post comments, which are currently unmoderated.

Like a typical newspaper, the most newsworthy or prominent stories are published on the home page and most contain a hyperlink to lead the reader further into the publication. Producing an online edition of the newspaper allows alumni and other members of the Lock Haven University community to have access to the newspaper at a manageable cost.

The Eagle Eye, Online Edition can be shared on Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr. With more than 1,000 Facebook likes, it is clear the flexibility to incorporate social networking for the print and online WordPress edition is a way to increase readership. WordPress also allows stories to be shared on other social networking sites, such as LinkedIn and Pinterest.

There are numerous middle and high school online newspaper sites created with WordPress. Examples of successful sites include: *The Branford High School Buzz*, from Branford, Connecticut (**www.branfordbuzz.com**), *The Prowl Newspaper*, from Palmetto High School in Palmetto, Florida (**prowlnewspaper.wordpress.com**), and *The Blotter*, from New Albany High School in New Albany, Indiana (**nahsblotter.wordpress.com**).

An electronic WordPress newspaper is time consuming, but, in many cases, the production of the newspaper is part of a journalism class. At least ninety minutes is needed to set up the initial WordPress site. Artwork such as the masthead or flag need to be designed separately and added to the site. It is also necessary to set aside several hours of instruction on journalistic concepts to encourage objective story writing and reporting. Student editors will spend several hours each week to write, edit, re-write, post, and encourage other students to submit articles.

OPERATIONALIZED COMMON CORE STANDARDS

The CCR anchor standards and high school grade-specific standards work in tandem to define college and career readiness expectations—the former providing broad standards, the latter providing additional specificity. Below each Common Core Standard are specific ways that secondary school teachers can put the standards into operation using the lessons in this book. Common Core Standards for grades 6 - 8 are very similar to those for grades 9 - 12, and the ideas shown here will work for those grades, as well.

TEXT TYPES AND PURPOSES

W.9-12.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

> **W.9-12.1a** Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that logically sequences claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
>
> > –Establish an argument on a subject matter.
> >
> > –Develop and revise a thesis statement.
> >
> > –Use pre-writing strategies to logically sequence ideas.
>
> **W.9-12.1b** Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases.
>
> > –Defend a claim utilizing facts and statistics.
> >
> > –Identify social networking audience for which these claims are targeted.
> >
> > –Identify the audience.
> >
> > –Remain sensitive to the diversity of readers.
>
> **W.9-12.1c** Use words, phrases, and clauses as well as varied syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.

–Write a well-organized essay using standard grammatical syntax to link support-ing ideas to thesis statement. For example, students will address sentence variety appropriately placed words, phrases, and clauses to defend their position.

W.9-12.1d Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

–Create tone representing a non-bias, authoritative, third person voice. Avoid col-loquial language, attacks, and slang, germane to the conventions of the argument.

W.9-12.1e Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

–Write a conclusion that summarizes the major claims discussed in the body, with-out introducing new information. Reiterate thesis first.

W.9-12.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

W.9-12.2a Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes it to create a unified whole; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

–Present a subject of their choice based on chronological, top/down, bottom up, or historical significance via segments that collectively communicate a thorough understanding.

–Present important ideas and/or facts about the subject in other forms of communi-cations other than writing.

W.9-12.2b Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.

–Practice working on signal phrase*s* (Diana Hacker, *Developmental Exercises for Rules for Writers*, 2011) that introduce paraphrases or quotes to qualify the infor-mation for the reader, explaining its significance assuming the audience has little or some basic knowledge of the subject.

W.9-12.2c Use appropriate and varied transitions and syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.

–Develop sentence variety by using a combination of long and short sentences to establish better readability as well as use conjunctions and coordinates and occasional semi-colons or chronology with much more concentration on sentence construction started in the first informative learning outcome

W.9-12.2d Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic.

–Use terminology or nomenclature appropriate to foster an authoritative writing tone.

W.9-12.2e Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

–Copy edit the various paragraphs, sentences, and selected nomenclature until the entire informative topic is appropriately conveyed.

W.9-12.2f Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).

–Write a conclusion that aptly reiterates the major facts and importance of the topic.

W.9-12.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

W.9-12.3a Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation and its significance, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

–Examine multiple points of view – from first or third person limited to third person omniscient. Here students will embody idiosyncratic nonfictional, anecdotal, or fictional story telling through the use of rich and vivid character development and descriptive adjectives expressed in current, future, or past time sequences based on a conflict, plot, and setting.

W.9-12.3b Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

–Introduce dialogue or narrative that represents required story segments such as historical background, time sequence, and the major story theme tied to the protagonist, antagonist, flat (no effect on story outcome), and round characters (can effect story outcome).

W.9-12.3c Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome (e.g., a sense of mystery, suspense, growth, or resolution).

–Focus on organization that adds to the creation of tone and purpose. Sequencing events will enhance a specific tone. For example, if creating a mystery, the writer will intentionally plant clues for the reader to follow.

–Focus on vocabulary and sentence variety by using a combination of long and short sentences to establish better readability. Separate them by using conjunctions and coordinates and occasional semicolons or chronology. Think about delivering a top-down or bottom-up explanation where appropriate.

W.9-12.3d Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

–Use sensory imagery to portray plot, setting, and character.