Article

Peer-Review Writing Workshops in College Courses: Students' Perspectives about Online and Classroom Based Workshops

Erin B. Jensen

Department of Education, Culture, and Society, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT 84112, USA;
erin.jensen@utah.edu

Abstract: Peer-review workshops are commonly used in writing courses as a way for students to give their peers feedback as well as help their own writing. Most of the research on peer-review workshops focuses on workshops held in traditional in-person courses, with less research on peer-review workshops held online. Students in a freshman writing course experienced both a classroom based writing workshop and an online workshop and then took a survey about their experiences. The majority of the students preferred the online writing workshop because of the convenience of the workshop and being able to post anonymous reviews. Students whom preferred the traditional in-person writing workshop liked being able to talk with their peers about their papers. This research article focuses on the students' responses and experiences with traditional and online peer-reviews.

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1. Introduction

Peer-review writing workshops are part of most college writing courses and the use of such workshops within courses is well supported by research. However, most of the research on peer-review writing workshops is focused on traditional classroom settings [1–4]. Increasingly, writing courses are being taught as online or hybrid courses, which means more peer-review workshops are being conducted online. While there is less research on online peer reviewed workshops than traditional classroom based workshops, the current research mainly focuses on peer-review outcomes and does not focus enough on how students think about such workshops. Many researchers assume online workshops share the same benefits as traditional workshops, but less systematic research has looked at how students respond to online workshops, especially in cases where students had already participated in classroom based workshops [1–3].

Increases in technology have helped make it possible for instructors in traditional classroom settings to have students engage in a variety of online learning activities, including peer-review workshops. Instructors can now utilize a variety of platforms to have students conduct online peer-review workshops; often through online assignment systems including Blackboard, Canvas, or WebCT. Turnitin.com is often thought of as being anti-plagiarism software, but it also has a peer-review component. This peer-review component can be used so students can review and comment on other students' drafts, with instructors having the options of matching one student with another, forming groups of peer reviewers, or having such reviews done anonymously. Technology provides numerous options for online peer-review workshops, but more research is needed to determine the effectiveness of such workshops, as well as determine if online workshops have the same benefits as classroom workshops as well as determine if online workshops pose different challenges and offer additional potential benefits.

This research study used surveys to determine how students thought about both traditional based peer-reviews and online peer-review workshops. Students participated in a classroom based peer-review and then completed a survey (See Appendix A). Students then participated in an online based peer-review and completed another survey (See Appendix B). By identifying how students respond to online peer-review workshops after having experienced a traditional workshop, this study contributes to a better understanding of the benefits and challenges of conducting peer-review workshops in an online setting. Increased understanding of online peer-review workshops will help instructors of online or hybrid courses know how to utilize online workshops more effectively and will assist instructors in traditional classroom-based writing courses determine whether or not to implement online workshops into their curriculum.

Literature Review

Extensive research supports the use of peer-review workshops within university-level writing courses, and such workshops have become a standard component of these courses. This research has identified the benefits of such workshops and has provided important guidelines for conducting successful workshops in a classroom setting [1–4]. Research on classroom-based peer-review workshops has found that effective writing workshops need to be well planned and have extensive teacher involvement with teachers modeling what they want their students to do. Min wrote about the need for students to be trained on how to give feedback and found that once students receive training, their comments became more numerous and more specific [1]. Atwell agrees with the need for teaching students about how to participate in a peer-review writing workshop and emphasizes that students "need instruction, demonstrations, reminders, and time if they're to get better at responding to each other's writing" ([2], p. 159). Teachers need to be careful about assuming students know how to effectively review other students' drafts as "too often in English classrooms, teachers expect students to critique the writing they read with little or no understanding of the craft" ([3], p. 4). Planning for workshops also involved giving students direction during that workshop. Herrington and Cadman suggested providing students with "structure by giving detailed assignments" ([4], p. 196) and using some form of handout to provide a structure for students' evaluation and responses.

Peer-review writing workshops are an accepted method of teaching writing and editing skills to students of all age groups and abilities and provide specific help with the revision process. Researchers have found that writing workshops are important to developing students' writing skills and an important part of the writing process [5]. Graham agreed and added, "Writing should not have to be a solitary process. Yes, writers must have ownership of what they have written, but there is great benefit in collaborating with others for help and supporting ideas" ([6], p. 362). Peer-review workshops also provide students responsibility for their writing and for helping their peers with the writing process. Writing workshops "aim to enhance students' authority and responsibility as readers and writers" [7]. Herrington and Cadman believe writing workshops "give students the gift of having some responsibility—some authority for their own learning" ([4], p. 197). Writing workshops can empower students as both writers and as readers.

Effective peer-review writing workshops appeal to all students, not just students who know how to write well. Even students who struggle with their own writing, can give "sound advice to their peers" and they can "profit from the response they receive about their own drafts and from reading the drafts of others" ([4], p. 185). Even though students who struggle with reading and writing may not evaluate a paper as well as another student, all students learn from writing workshops. They believe "writers who decide not to follow a peer's advice" ([4], p.185) may actually learn more than a writer who follows the advice. Furr and Bauman agree that "writing workshops support the considerable needs of disabled readers" ([8], p. 518) by providing "scaffolding of process" ([8], p. 520) during the days before the writing workshop and by providing a detailed plan to follow during the writing workshop.

Research also establishes, however; that not all students respond positively to writing workshops. Research has found that often students do not like writing workshops because they do not see the point of the workshop [9]. Dubson writes about how distanced students often are from their papers and from what they wrote for their writing classes ([9], p. 99). Often the goal of the writing workshop is fix errors, not "rethink and revise" ([10], p. 18). Teachers must provide the direction and preparation necessary for peer-review workshops to be positive experiences for students.

Despite extensive research on classroom-based peer-review workshops, research on online workshops is more limited. Some of the research on online peer-review workshops focuses more on peer assessment and less on the benefits of peer-review and revision [11,12]. Wen and Tsai found that students viewed online peer-reviews as a "technical tool to facilitate assessment, rather than as a learning aid" [11]. Several studies focus more on how students dislike participating in such online writing workshops and resist participating [11,12]. Much of the research on online peer-reviews does show that peer-review writing workshops have similar benefits as classroom-based workshops. The research has established that there is a need for instructors to train students on how to comment on papers, that students need to be engaged in the process, and that there needs to be direct links to how this activity helps in the revision and writing process [11–15].

Peer-review writing workshops are "the heart of a successful writing classroom" or at least a standard part of most writing classes [7]. However, much of the research on online peer-review workshops focuses on ESL classes, science classes, or math classes [1,11,12,14,16]. The research does not seem to be as focused on the experiences of students in a freshman writing course.

Research on online peer-review workshops in freshman writing classes remains more limited, with less research establishing the effectiveness of such workshops. This article attempts to focus on student responses to peer-review workshops in both a traditional classroom-based workshop and online workshops, and identifies the benefits and challenges of such workshops.

2. Methods

For this research study, the researcher chose a freshman level writing class at a large western university as the setting. The researcher chose this class because peer-review workshops are often held in freshman writing classes and because the instructor is known for conducting well-structured peer-reviews in her writing classes where students follow a handout and make comments on both the rough draft and on the handout. The researcher was interested in involving a class that was already using techniques of effective peer-review writing workshops. The first assignment for the class was a literacy autobiography where students were writing about their literacy experiences through their life. The instructor had students participate in a class based peer-review writing workshop during the third week of the semester (See Appendix C). The next week after the peer-review writing workshop, the researcher visited the class to introduce and explain her research study to the students, identifying the nature of the study, the motivation to conduct the research, and the guarantee of anonymity of responses. Students were also told they were not required to participate in the study. Although it was not anticipated that the participants would have any significant emotional distress based on the topic being explored in the study, participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Each participant also signed a Participant Informed Consent form as determined by the IRB.

Once consent was obtained from the participants, the researcher had students complete the first survey (See Appendix A). Students were asked to provide demographic information, such as age (no one under the age of 18 was included in the results), gender, year in college, and major. The survey then listed seven free-response questions that asked the students to describe their experience in the classroom peer-review workshops they had participated in the previous week. Students were asked to identify what they liked and did not like about the workshop, to make suggestions for improving the workshop, and to analyze their comfort level in participating in the workshop. The last question asked students if they had ever participated in an online peer-review workshop and how they would feel about doing so in the future.

The next main essay assignment in the class was for students to write a synthesis paper about an article the instructor had chosen. The researcher decided to have students participate in the online peer-review for this assignment as students had participated in the classroom based workshop a few weeks ago and so students would still remember that experience. The researcher assisted the instructor of the freshman writing class in setting up the online peer-review writing workshop on WebCT (the online assignment system the campus used), utilizing a peer-review platform on "Turnitin". The researcher set up the online peer-review workshop much like the classroom-based workshop and even used the handout the instructor had already prepared (See Appendix D). The handout provided students with guidelines to follow and asked students to answer questions. This handout was included as part of the peer-review assignment and so students answered and responded to all questions online. Turnitin.com did require students to answer the questions using at least a couple of sentences and so students could not just use "yes" or "no" for answers. During the online workshop, students were asked to answer the questions on the handout and make comments on the draft itself.

The rough draft was due on Wednesday of the week and the researcher went to the class on Monday to talk about how to access the online peer-review through WebCT. During that Monday class, the researcher gave all students a handout on how to use the online platform and then she logged into WebCT and showed students where to submit and then where they would be able to access the other student papers. The researcher also gave students a handout that provided step by step instructions on how to access the online peer-review and the handout also included screenshots of what the screen would look like when students accessed the system. The researcher felt she had adequately prepared students for how to use the system. In addition to the demonstration and handout, both the researcher and instructor planned on being available for students during class time if students experienced problems or had concerns. Both the researcher and the instructor also told the students to email either one of them if there were problems. The researcher emphasized to students that they needed to write at least a couple of sentences response for each peer-review question as the program required a set amount of words. The instructor also emphasized that she would be giving scores on their feedback and so students should plan to provide quality feedback.

For the online peer-review workshop, students were required to upload a draft of their assignment to Turnitin on WebCT by the start of the class time. After the deadline for submitting drafts, students were then allowed to begin the peer-review process and had 24 hours to complete that process. The Turnitin platform randomly assigned two students' drafts to each student in the class. The major difference between the face-to-face and online workshops was that while students brought hard copies of drafts to the face-to-face workshops and then had to complete the reviews during a 50-minute class, students had to upload their drafts by class time on the workshop day, were given a 24-hour time frame to complete the online workshop, and could complete their reviews from any computer and could take as much time as they needed.

After the students had completed the online writing workshop on the synthesis essay, the researcher returned to the writing class and gave the students a second survey that asked them to evaluate their experiences with the online writing workshop (See Appendix B). Students were asked to identify the benefits and challenges of the online workshop, including any aspects of the workshop that they found difficult or frustrating. The second half of the survey then asked students to compare the online workshop to the classroom workshop, and to suggest any ways in which the online workshop could have been improved. The questions were free response, allowing students to provide additional information about the experience. The last question on the survey asked students if they would be interested in participating in an online writing workshop for their next paper and to provide a why or why not. After the students completed the second survey, the researcher also answered questions and gathered additional comments from students, including students' descriptions and explanations of their participation or lack of participation in the peer-review process. Such comments provided further information relevant to the effectiveness of the online workshop.

3. Results

This is a case study of one freshman writing course at a public university that identifies student responses to classroom and online peer-review writing workshops.

3.1. Demographic Information for Survey Participants

The freshman writing class had twenty-two students enrolled, but only fifteen of those students completed both the first and second surveys and participated in both a face-to-face classroom based workshop and online peer-review workshop in the class (refer to the Appendixs A and B for a copy of the two surveys). Students who did not complete both surveys were not included in the survey results. Students in the section had participated in one face-to-face peer-review writing workshops during the semester, so all could respond to the first survey's questions about classroom peer-review workshops and all had some basis for answering questions in the second survey asking students to compare online and classroom workshops. Because all participants had the same instructor for the freshman writing class, all would have experienced a similar classroom peer-review workshop experience, with the instructor preparing students for the workshop and utilizing the same basic method for conducting the workshop, including providing a handout to guide the students' peer-review responses.

Of the fifteen students who participated in the study, fourteen were freshmen and one was a sophomore, and the gender breakdown included nine females and six male participants. Four of the women identified themselves as having science and math-related majors, while the other five identified themselves as education majors. Five of the men identified themselves as science and math-related majors, and one identified himself as an education major. Of the nine women, five preferred online workshops, while 4 preferred face-to-face classroom-based workshops. Of the six men, four preferred online workshops and two preferred face-to-face classroom workshops. Nine of the science or math students (regardless of gender) preferred online writing workshops, while six of the education majors preferred the face-to-face classroom based workshops. Only one education major (who was female) preferred online writing workshops, while the other five education majors preferred classroom-based writing workshops. Table 1 contains the self-reported demographic information for the fifteen participants in the study.

Table 1. Self-Reported Demographics of Study Participants.

Gender	
Male	6 students
Female	9 students
Major	
Education	6 students
Male	1 student
Female	5 students
Science or math	9 students
Male	5 students
Female	4 students
Year in school	
Freshman	14 students
Sophomore	1 student

3.2. Data Analysis

An inductive approach was utilized in the data analysis. The researcher analyzed the data from the two surveys, as well as course documents including workshop peer-reviews to help determine students' responses to face-to-face and online peer-review workshops, specifically identifying benefits and challenges of such workshops, and seeking to gain a better understanding of how students

compare the two. Qualitative inquiry aims to "document diverse variations and (identify) common patterns" ([17], p. 28), and this study sought to do this with the student responses to classroom-based online and peer-review writing workshops. Open-ended survey questions were evaluated using inductive qualitative analysis. This was conducted using case study analysis as recommended by Creswell in which the researcher analyzed the responses from the surveys and "described" those responses [18]. The researcher analyzed the data inductively, focusing on individual student responses. The researcher coded these student responses, then identified recurrent themes or occurrences of similar and related responses, and then organized the themes into categories and looked for "correspondence between categories" ([18], p. 163). The researcher then developed "naturalistic generalizations . . . that people can learn from the case" ([18], p. 163) in order to reach conclusions and generate potential applications from the student responses.

3.3. Results

This section provides the results of student participation in classroom based peer-review and the online peer-review. This section also includes the data obtained from student responses to the two surveys conducted, one after the face-to-face classroom based workshops and before the online workshop and the other after the online peer-review workshop.

3.3.1. Classroom Face-to-Face and Online Peer-Review Workshop Participation

The students in the freshman writing class used in this research study had participated in one face-to-face classroom based peer-review workshops before they completed the first survey. Of the twenty-two students in the class, twenty of the students participated in the first workshop, although only sixteen students had complete drafts. All students who came to the class had the opportunity to review and write comments on at least two papers. The twenty students with drafts received feedback from at least two other people.

For the online peer-review workshop, students had to upload a draft of their paper to Turnitin and then complete two peer reviews of student papers selected by Turnitin for them. Eighteen students successfully uploaded their drafts to Turnitin while four students failed to submit their drafts by the deadline. Two of the four students had missed the previous class when the researcher had given students instructions for the online workshop experience, which would seem to indicate that hearing how to participate was helpful in then actually being able to participate. One student indicated that technical difficulties prevented him from submitting the draft by the deadline and another student was behind in the overall research process and had not completed her draft by the deadline.

Of the eighteen students who submitted a draft by the deadline, fourteen of those students then completed the next step of the workshop by completing the online peer reviews, with thirteen completing two reviews and one student submitting one review. All eighteen of the submitted drafts were reviewed by students in the class, with nine of the drafts being reviewed by two other students and the other nine drafts reviewed by one other student. Of the four students who failed to complete the peer reviews, two indicated that technical issues prevented them from completing the review and the other two indicated that they were not aware of the deadline and missed it completely. Because only fourteen of the eighteen students who submitted a draft completed the peer-reviews and none of the four students who failed to submit a draft went on to do the peer reviews, some of the students only received one peer review, suggesting that one issue with online workshops is ensuring that all students participating in the workshop receive two peer reviews.

Because the online peer-review workshop was divided into two parts, with students first submitting a draft and then completing the peer-review process, not all students participated in both parts and any who missed the first part also failed to complete the second part. Students' failure to submit a draft by the deadline carried over to their failure to complete the peer-review process, although the researcher had told students they could complete the peer reviews even if they had not submitted a draft. Such results suggest that students who did not submit a draft by the deadline did

not proceed to the next part of the workshop and did not benefit from reading other students' drafts and benefit from seeing how others had responded to the assignment. The Turnitin platform used for the online workshops requires a deadline for submitting drafts so the program can then randomly distribute drafts to students for review. Students who did not meet the deadline also did not complete the peer reviews, suggesting that failure to complete the first step meant students did not attempt to complete the second part of the workshop. See Appendix E for the major themes of the data.

3.3.2. First Survey Results: Classroom Peer-Review Workshops

All students participating in the study had experienced face-to-face classroom based peer-review writing workshops, and fourteen of the fifteen reported positive experiences with such workshops. Only one student wrote on the survey that such workshops were not helpful and he preferred to receive feedback from professors and graduate students who were more knowledgeable about writing than other students in the class. The majority of students, however, recognized the benefits of such workshops.

Benefits

The majority of the students indicated the main two benefits of the classroom peer-review was receiving helpful feedback and having an opportunity to read a peer's paper, as this gave them a chance to see an alternative approach to the assignment.

(1) Helpful Feedback

Students identified receiving helpful feedback as the most important benefit of classroom based peer-review workshops. For the classroom based peer-review workshop, students traded papers and then were asked to make comments on those papers and to fill out a writing workshop handout. The peer evaluations asked students to comment on thesis statements, organization, evidence, paragraph structure, style, and mechanics, along with how effectively the draft achieved its purpose and targeted the intended audience. Fourteen students felt that getting good feedback on their papers was the greatest benefit of these writing workshops. One student wrote, "People really wrote a lot of comments on my paper. That was helpful." Fourteen of the students indicated that the feedback was typically in the form of comments on the draft itself, but ten also wrote that they received helpful feedback on the handout as well. While feedback was usually in the form of written comments, there was also verbal feedback given to students. Fourteen students commented on the value of receiving verbal comments about their drafts as students exchanged verbal comments about their drafts and were able to ask questions of their reviewers and receive additional feedback and explanation from those reviewers. One student wrote, "I liked having a conversation with the student who reviewed my paper. It helped me improve my writing." Students were mainly interested in the amount and quality of feedback that they received in the writing workshop.

　　15 students responded:

　　　　14 students: Good feedback provided.

(2) Alternative Approaches

In addition to the feedback received on their drafts, five students commented on the value of reading others' drafts and seeing how others responded to the same assignment, giving them additional ideas of how to develop and support a thesis, use evidence, or argue a differing idea. As one student wrote, "The best thing was getting feedback on my papers that I might not have thought about." Another student wrote, "I read a paper that used a really good idea that I hadn't thought about before." In general, students felt more confident after reading other students' drafts as they gained more confidence in their own writing or gained insight into how students could respond to the assignment.

15 students responded:

5 students: Value of reading other students papers.

Limitations

Although the response to classroom-based writing workshops was overwhelmingly positive, with three students finding no limitations or problems with the workshops, many of the students expressed some frustration with the workshops. Twelve of the students identified limitations or problems with the workshops and some provided suggestions for improving them.

15 students responded:

12 students: Provided specific limitations or problems with the workshops;
12 students: Lack of time;
3 students: Need more people to review.

(1) Lack of Time

The main concern that students expressed about classroom-based peer-review workshops was related to time issues. The number one complaint was that there was not enough time for students to read and evaluate a draft and then to make comments. Most students wrote "more time!" on their surveys. Seven students felt that they did not have enough time to complete two reviews, while five other students felt that many students had not given helpful and detailed comments in part because of a lack of time. Students had to hurry to get through a draft by the time class ended which usually resulted in fewer comments and less feedback.

(2) Limited Number of Reviews

A related complaint was that more people should have read the draft. In a 50-minute class, most students had time to evaluate two drafts, but many students would have like more than two reviews. As one student said, "more opinions by more people" were needed. Another student suggested having more than two people evaluate a draft "just in case one of them isn't helpful." Another complaint was that other students were too nice and didn't want to give negative critique even if the paper needed it, because they didn't want to hurt anyone's feelings. Student responses to the in-class peer-review workshops typically supported the research that has been done on such workshops.

3.3.3. Second Survey Results: Online Peer-Review Workshop

In the first survey, the researcher asked if any of the students had completed an online peer-review workshop. All of the students indicated that they had never participated in an online peer-review workshop, and twelve of the fifteen expressed their willingness to try such a workshop, while two of the fifteen indicated that they did not want to participate in such a workshop. Even though two students indicated that they did not want to participate in the online workshop, all fifteen students did participate in the online workshop.

After participating in the online peer-review writing workshop, the researcher returned to the class and had students fill out a second survey (See Appendix B). Students identified the benefits and challenges of such workshops. The last question on the survey asked students which type of peer-review writing workshop they would like to participate in for the next assignment and the majority of students expressed a preference for participating in an online workshop.

15 students responded:

10 students: Time benefits;
3 students: Better comments;
3 students: Anonymous comments.

Benefits

The majority of the students indicated the main benefits of the online peer-review was having more time to write comments, receiving better comments, and being anonymous reviewers.

(1) Time Benefits: Flexibility and Convenience

The most commonly mentioned benefit of participating in an online peer-review workshop was the flexibility and convenience it provided. Students liked being able to complete the peer reviews anytime within a 24-hour window, allowing them to choose the time and place to complete those reviews. The researcher set up the online writing workshop to address some of the time constraints that students identified as limitations of the traditional classroom peer-review workshop. While students had felt limited and rushed as they evaluated two drafts in a 50-minute workshop, the online workshop gave the students 24 hours to complete the peer reviews. Students were not required to come to class and could stay at home if they wanted. Ten of the students identified being able to complete the peer-review on their "own time" as the most important positive of the workshops. Many students stayed at home and didn't have to drive to get to class or as one student expressed it, "I didn't have to drive 30 minutes to class." Others wrote about sitting in their pajamas on their sofa with their laptop. Students valued that they could choose (within a 24 hour period) when and where to complete the peer reviews.

(2) Better Comments

Some students felt that they received more useful comments on the online peer-reviews than they had with the face-to-face classroom based workshops. One possible reason for such comments may have been the minimum number of words required to answer the questions on the online workshop. The researcher set up the online workshop so students had to provide answers that met a minimum number of word responses. Some students felt that setting a required minimum number of words for responses forced students to provide more complete answers. Other students liked having to include a set number of words because it forced students to make longer comments. Another student agreed by saying, "Students have to give you feedback where in class not everyone does." In addition, some students also felt that they had provided more helpful and complete responses to questions because of these minimum standards. One student wrote, "I knew I had to write sentences and so I paid more attention to what I was writing." Students found that they had to provide a more complete answer to one question before moving on to the next question.

(3) Anonymity

Students felt they were able to make better comments on the online writing workshop, partially because they were providing reviews anonymously, not having to worry about how students would respond to their comments. As one student expressed, "I could be more honest because the person didn't know who reviewed it." Another student added that "not seeing the author's face as I was reviewing enabled me to be more honest with my comments." The online nature of the workshops removed the issues related to students having to directly identify problems with a student's draft, allowing them to be more honest and direct.

Limitations and Problems

Despite a generally positive response to the online peer-review, students also identified some areas of concern about the workshops, including technology issues, lack of helpful comments, and lack of verbal communication and interaction.

15 students responded:

> 5 students: Technology issues;
> 3 students: Lack of helpful comments;
> 2 students: Lack of verbal communication.

(1) Technology Issues

Students knew how to use WebCT and turnitin.com, but had not used the peer-review portion before and this lack of knowledge caused some difficulties. Students had to submit their drafts to Turnitin on WebCT and then they had to go back into Turnitin and then click on a different icon and assignment to review other students' drafts. Although the researcher had given students detailed instructions for completing the workshop, she had not been able to show students exactly how to complete the reviews because that option was only available to students actually enrolled in the course (the WebCT student view option was not available on Turnitin). Of the fifteen students who completed the second survey, five were concerned with the technology issues. One student wrote, "I really tried to figure out what I was supposed to do, but I couldn't. I finally emailed [the instructor] and she helped me." One student who had submitted a draft for the workshop had been unable to find where to evaluate the two other students' drafts, and one student was unable to complete a second review because he had timed out and had not been able to return to the draft and complete the review.

(2) Lack of Helpful Comments

Three students indicated that their overall concern about the online peer-review workshops was a lack of helpful comments. Nine of the students received only one review, and although some felt that the overall comments were more helpful, those who received only one review were concerned about receiving feedback from only one other student instead of the typical two reviews. One student wrote, "I am frustrated. I spent a lot of time on my two reviews and then only received one review back. And, it wasn't a very good review." Two students indicated in class that they felt it unfair that they had completed two reviews, but had received only one review. Two others felt that there needed to be an opportunity for verbal communication. Four didn't report any dislikes.

(3) Lack of Verbal Communication

Two students indicated that they missed the verbal communication that typically accompanies the face-to-face classroom based workshops that they had participated in earlier in the semester. While classroom-based peer-review workshops have a verbal component in which students share comments verbally and have the opportunity to discuss their comments and ask and answer questions, the peer-review was done totally online with no verbal interaction and some students missed that. As one student indicated, "Reviewers usually tell you better comments than they write down. I just wanted to hear what they had to say." In the online workshop, all reviews were completed anonymously, which provided some benefits, but also did not allow for any direct exchange between the writer and the reviewer, and two students especially missed this exchange.

3.3.4. Suggestions for Improvement of Online Workshops

On the second survey, students were asked to identify ways to improve the online writing workshops, and students responded with two overall suggestions: improve the technology and/or increase the training and add some type of verbal communication or discussion component.

15 students responded:

> 10 students: Improve the technology and the training to use the technology;
> 3 students: No issues with technology.

Improve the Technology/Increase the Training

Ten students indicated that the best way to improve the online writing workshop would be to improve the technology and/or the training needed to use the technology. Although the researcher had provided a demonstration of how to access the online peer-review, had provided a handout with screen shots, and had been available via email to answer any questions, some students still struggled with the technology. The main technology issues that students told the instructor and researcher about were difficulties with knowing where to access student drafts and how to review them; even though this information was on the handout and explained during the demonstration. A couple of students were able to submit their essays, but then were confused about what to do next. One student wrote, "I figured out how to submit my essay but could not find where the peer reviews were posted. I guess I should have emailed [my instructor], but I didn't. I just felt frustrated." Six of the students wrote that they needed more training on how to use the program and felt that the handout and demonstration had not been enough training. One student wrote, "I know you gave us the handout, but I still didn't get what I was doing. I needed more training." After the completion of the online workshops, the researcher realized the university had prepared videos students could watch about how to access and complete a peer-review workshop. For future workshops, the researcher plans on including those videos in addition to the providing a handout and a demonstration.

Three students actually felt that students had used the technology issues as excuses for not doing the assignment and suggested improving the technology and/or training to remove a convenient excuse. One student wrote, "A lot of people had technological problems. Those glitches could be fixed. Unless they just didn't want to do it." Another student agreed when she wrote, "Just make sure everyone knows how to do it, so it doesn't give them an excuse to not participate." A third student added, "Fix the technical problems, if there really were any."

Add Verbal Communication of Discussion Component

Three students thought that adding a discussion piece to the online writing workshop would be helpful. As one student expressed it, "I wish there was some way to have a face to face time so if you have questions you can ask them there. Sometimes comments are confusing and there is no way to clarify." Another student suggested using WebCT's discussion board to have an online conversation about the revisions and what needed to be changed. Adding a verbal communication piece would eliminate the anonymous qualities of the peer-review, but providing such an option for students that do not mind being anonymous is something to consider in future research.

3.3.5. Classroom *vs.* Online Peer-Review Workshops

After having participated in both a classroom based and online peer-review workshops and then being asked whether they would prefer a classroom-based or an online writing workshop for the next scheduled writing workshop, nine of the students chose online writing workshops while six chose classroom-based writing workshops. The nine who chose online workshops indicated the main reason for their choice was the convenience and flexibility of working online. The nine students also wrote about appreciating having more time to complete the reviews. As one student expressed, "The ability to take longer in formatting a response and being able to be more honest is very appealing." The six students who preferred classroom-based writing workshops indicated that the main reason was because of the verbal communication and discussion they could have with the students who evaluated their papers. The five students that did not complete the online writing workshop also wrote that they would like to have classroom-based writing workshops because it was easier to just show up to class with a draft than it was to use the technology necessary to complete the online workshops.

4. Discussion

This research study focused on student responses to classroom face-to-face peer-review workshops and online workshops and asked students to compare the two. More students participated in the classroom workshops than the online workshops, partially because the classroom workshops have a structure and an easy to complete format, while the online workshops require students to complete the two parts of the workshop on their own, which requires that students take individual responsibility for such workshops. After students have the opportunity to participate in structured classroom and online workshops with clear guidelines and questions provided, more students indicated that if given a choice, they would choose the online alternative because of the greater flexibility and convenience it provides, along with the removal of time limitations and constraints. For those who take the peer-reviews seriously, the online workshops provide more helpful feedback, although students feel limited by the lack of verbal communication and interaction between the writer and the reviewers. Further research and technology advances could identify ways in which the writers and reviewers could participate in such an exchange and could increase the effectiveness of online workshops.

The research study also has established that technology provides the opportunity for online workshops, but also presents one of the greatest challenges to having effective workshops. Instructors must work to ensure that the technology provides students with an easy to complete online peer review and the training necessary to do so. The study has indicated the need for increased training for students, possibly providing a hands-on demonstration for the online peer-review workshop. Students must assume responsibility for completing the online workshop to ensure that all students who submit a draft will receive the specified number of peer reviews to ensure that students have the feedback necessary to revise their drafts and improve the quality of the finished product. Online workshops provide new challenges for peer-review workshop, but may also offer benefits that help to solve the constant issues of time constraints and limitations from completing the reviews within a 50-minute class. Further research will help to establish further connections between classroom and online workshops and will help to confirm that online workshops can be useful tools for helping students to revise their writing.

Additional demographic findings from the study suggest that preferences for classroom or online workshops may vary according to major and gender. However, the researcher recognizes the very small sample size of the study. At least in this class, students majoring science and math-related majors were more favorable to online writing workshops, while those with education majors preferred classroom-based writing workshops. In the class, a higher percentage of male students preferred online writing workshops than females, which may suggest some gender differences related to workshop preferences. With such a small sample size, such findings are mainly relatable to this specific class. The researcher is interested in continuing further research and expanding the sample size to see if such preferences and trends continue to be found.

Future Research

As technology continues to influence writing courses, the use of online writing workshops will increase and so further research is needed on how to best use such workshops to increase student learning and improve student writing. This research study was a preliminary attempt at better understanding the experiences of students in online peer-review writing workshops after they had experienced a classroom based peer-review writing workshop. There are few studies that look at both online and classroom based with the same group of students. This article does add to the research on online writing workshops. However, this research study is limited in its scope and claims and so further research is needed. One of the main limiting factors of this study is the small study size of only having fifteen students. Further research would need to expand on not only the number of participants but also on the number of freshman classes used. Further research could look at a broader number of students enrolled in other freshman writing courses and see if the results stay the same or change based on a broader sampling of students.

Much of the research has focused on classroom based writing workshops. Further research needs to be done with students who have only completed online workshops and see if their experiences and suggestions align with what this research study found or if their suggestions and comments focus on other elements entirely. It would also be interesting to contact the fifteen participants in this study again and see if they have had further experience with online writing workshops and if so, see if their answers to the surveys would be similar or different.

Freshman students were the basis of this study and further research could focus on other levels of students enrolled in both freshman composition and in upper division writing courses. Future research should include upperclassmen who may feel like their time is more of a priority than incoming freshmen and may value the flexibility and convenience of online workshops more than freshmen. It would also be interesting to see if more specialized upper division writing classes would give a different outcome on the surveys. For example, would business writing students be more inclined to prefer online writing workshops than students in a social science based writing class? The results from the freshman writing class indicated that students with education majors liked the interaction of classroom-based writing workshops, while the students that identified as having math and science majors preferred online writing workshops. It would be interesting to see if these same patterns continued with further research and specifically focusing on this aspect of this initial survey.

The majority of students in the study indicated that more training was needed on how to use the technology. Future research could address this issue and include more of a discussion on how to better prepare students to use the technology. It would be interesting to see if students were provided more training on how to use online peer-reviews, if the same concerns about technology would be found. Further research is needed to determine if technology issues and perceived lack of training continues to be listed as one of the main concerns of online writing workshops.

One aspect that was not a focus in this study was the idea of gender and the impact how gender impacted preference. While this research study found males in the class as being more likely to favor online workshops and females in the class seemed to favor classroom-based workshops, would such results hold true with a much larger sampling? If differences are found, why do such differences exist? Further research might be more able to answer these questions.

In reviewing the survey questions that were used, the researcher realized the survey questions need to be modified to better fit the focus of the research project and to be more objective. One of the survey questions asks students to think about how comfortable other students are in reviewing papers and such a question is not quantifiable or necessary to better understand students' responses to online writing workshops. The survey would be better if it used a combination of open ended response questions and a Likert scale. The researcher plans on continuing this research and incorporating these changes to the surveys.

This study does add to the research and conversations of how students perceive of writing workshops, both classroom based and online based. However, further research is needed to determine if such conclusion can be applied beyond the experiences of fifteen freshman writing students.

5. Conclusions

Peer-review workshops are commonly used in writing courses as a way for students to provide feedback to each other. Extensive research has focused on traditional classroom based writing workshops and has established best practices for such workshops. Less research has focused on online peer-review writing workshops. This research study adds to the research on how students perceive of both traditional and online writing workshops. This research study has a small sample size and further research is needed to see if the patterns of preference for either online or traditional stay the same or change. More research needs to be done on online workshops and how to make them as effective as possible because they are increasingly a reality of today's educational environment.

Appendix A

Survey 1. Classroom Based Writing Workshop Survey

This survey is being administered by a Ph.D. student conducting research on peer-review writing workshops. Please provide answers to the following questions; all responses will remain anonymous.

(1)   Demographic Information:
        Year in College:
        Major:
        Gender:
        Class Time:
(2)   Describe the experience you have had in the peer-review writing workshops you have participated in during your freshman writing class.
(3)   What did you like about the writing workshop?
(4)   What suggestions would you provide to make the workshop more effective?
(5)   How comfortable are you critiquing the writing of your peers and giving them suggestions?
(6)   Have you ever participated in a peer-review online writing workshop? If so, what was your experience?
(7)   How would you feel about participating in a peer-review writing workshop online instead of in the classroom?

Appendix B

Survey 2. Online Peer-Review Workshop Survey

This survey is being administered by a PhD student conducting research on peer-review writing workshops. Please provide answers to the following questions; all responses will remain anonymous.

(1)   Demographic Information:
        Year in College:
        Major:
        Gender:
        Class time:
(2)   What two things did you like best about the online writing workshops?
(3)   Please identify any problems that you encountered in participating in the online workshop.
(4)   What suggestions would you provide to make the online workshops more effective?
(5)   Compare your experience using the online writing workshop to your experiences using writing workshops in the classroom. How are they similar and how are they different?
(6)   How comfortable are your peers in evaluating your writing and giving you suggestions?
(7)   Which do you think was more beneficial to your writing? Why?
(8)   If you had a choice for the next writing workshop, would you choose the online workshop or a classroom based workshop? Why? Explain your answer.

Appendix C

Classroom-based peer-review handout on the Literacy Autobiography

Literacy Autobiography (in-class)

Writer's Name_____Evaluator's Name_____

Answer the following questions as specifically as possible. Respond on this sheet, but also mark on the draft itself.

(1)　**PURPOSE:** Evaluate how effectively the writer explains about their literacy throughout their life. Does the writer respond to the assignment question(s)?

(2)　**INTRODUCTION**: Evaluate the effectiveness of the introduction. How does the writer introduce the topic? Does anything else need to be added? Underline the thesis. Does the thesis make an argument? What is the argument?

(3)　**ORGANIZATION**: Evaluate the organization of the paper. Does the paper's organization fit with the main point? Is the organization of the paper logical and effective?

(4)　**EVIDENCE**: Does the writer provide specific examples to support each point? Identify any places where more examples or details is necessary. Are quotes and paraphrases cited correctly?

(5)　**PARAGRAPHS**: Does each idea have a different paragraph? Mark any paragraphs that need to be improved. Does each body paragraph have a topic sentence?

(6)　**CLOSING**: Evaluate the closing. Does it provide a sense of completeness to the paper? Does the conclusion of the proposal emphasis the solution?

(7)　**FORMAT:** Is the paper 2 pages? Is there a Works Cited?

(8)　**CORRECTNESS**: Mark any possible problems with grammar, punctuation, spelling, or word choice.

(9)　**OVERALL SUGGESTIONS**: Provide two suggestions for improving the draft.

Appendix D

Online Handout for the Online Peer-review Writing Workshop

Synthesis Paper (online)

Writer's Name_____Evaluator's Name_____

Answer the following questions as specifically as possible. Respond on this sheet, but also mark on the draft itself.

(1)　**PURPOSE**: Evaluate how effectively the writer explains the various sides of the issue and highlights the differences between these views.

(2)　**INTRODUCTION**: Evaluate the effectiveness of the introduction. How does the writer introduce the topic? Does anything else need to be added? Underline the thesis. Does the thesis make an argument? What is the argument?

(3)　**ORGANIZATION**: Evaluate the organization of the paper. Does the paper's organization fit with the main point? Is the organization of the paper logical and effective?

(4)　**EVIDENCE**: Does the writer provide specific examples to support each point? Identify any places where more examples or details is necessary. Are quotes and paraphrases cited correctly?

(5)　**PARAGRAPHS**: Does each idea have a different paragraph? Mark any paragraphs that need to be improved.

(6)　**CLOSING**: Evaluate the closing. Does it provide a sense of completeness to the paper? Does the conclusion of the proposal emphasis the solution?

(7)　**FORMAT**: Is the synthesis paper at least 4 pages long? Is there a Works Cited?

(8)　**CORRECTNESS**: Mark any possible problems with grammar, punctuation, spelling, or word choice.

(9)　**OVERALL SUGGESTIONS**: Provide two suggestions for improving the draft.
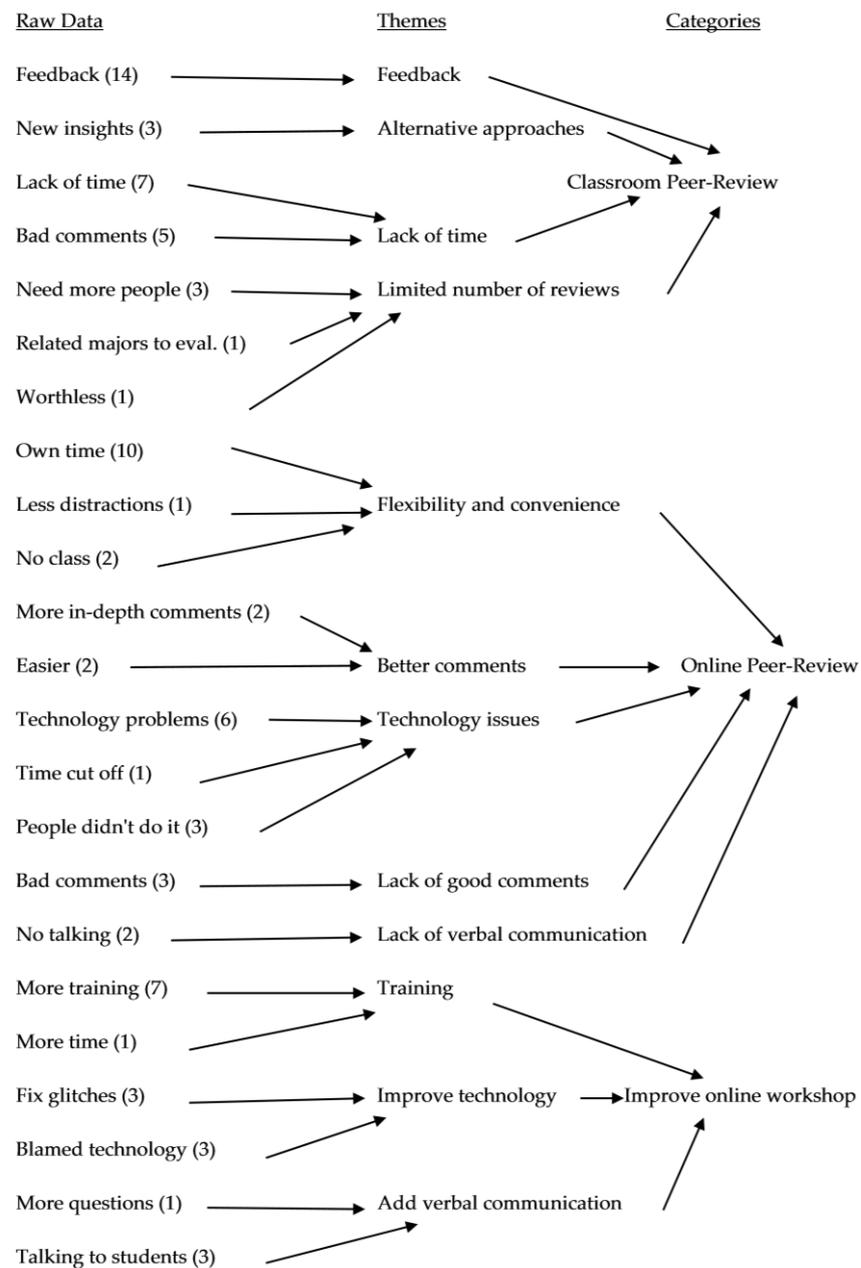
Appendix E

Figure A1. Raw Data and Themes from Surveys.

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