

Going Online

Trevor Day

A COMMUNITY'S EXPERIENCE OF TRANSFORMING FACE-TO-FACE WRITING WORKSHOPS, TUTORIALS AND RETREATS TO ONLINE

In the last 18 months, in response to COVID-19 lockdowns, you – as a writer and educator – will have had to grapple with taking your tutorials, seminars, workshops and other learning interactions online. In a recent article in *Writing in Education*, Ursula Canton and I (Day and Canton, 2021) wrote about a particular community of writers and educators – the Royal Literary Fund's Consultant Fellows. In this article I report on this community's experiences of, and solutions to, 'going online'.

The Royal Literary Fund's Consultant Fellows (CFs) form an unusual community. Well-published authors, from novelists, poets and dramatists to journalists, biographers and science writers, they have been successful Royal Literary Fund (RLF) Writing Fellows, tutoring students one-to-one in universities. By invitation, they can then undergo a nine-month training developing their abilities as facilitators of learning interventions, such as workshops and writing retreats. If they graduate successfully from the training they can join the register of RLF Consultant Fellows (Day and Swinburne, 2017). They are independent learning facilitators but the RLF supports their continuing professional development, and through fostering regular meetings (formerly face-to-face and now online) and through a website, forums and blogs, it supports CFs as a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Currently, 30 Consultant Fellows are on the CF register, with about 20 highly active in providing writing workshops and other interventions online for about 60 HEIs in the UK and abroad (<https://rlfconsultants.com/>). Most of their work

is with postgraduates (taught and research), researchers (mostly early- to mid-career) and occasionally with administrative and managerial university staff.

In this article I describe and explain some of the CF responses to going online. Our solutions may be unlike yours given that your context might be rather different. Nevertheless, I hope that some of our solutions will resonate with yours and others will stimulate you to reflect on your practice and consider new options.

Course designs

Our course designs are shaped by several core concerns. As far as possible, we tailor courses to specific purposes and participants. We explore with the university client what they perceive to be the writing challenges for students, and where possible, we gather further information from the students themselves. We adopt constructive alignment, arranging activities and forms of assessment in order to achieve intended learning outcomes (Biggs & Tang, 2011). However, any intended learning outcomes we set are a minimum expectation. Often, we seek to foster attitudinal change and confidence-building. We recognise that simplistic application of learning styles theory is deeply flawed – students may have learning preferences, but these are expressed differently in different contexts (Coffield et al, 2004; Pashler et al, 2009). We encourage self-reflection and recognise the value of peer feedback in students co-constructing their knowledge and developing their practice through working with others (Nicol, 2020). So,

Thinking critically & writing critically

A sample workshop plan for 2 x 90-min online sessions

Learning outcomes

By the end of the course you should be able, or better able, to:

- explain the nature of critical thinking and critical writing
- create persuasive arguments in a well-structured report, thesis or research paper
- use evidence, reasoning and correct use of citations to strengthen your argument
- review and edit your own and others' writing, to strengthen its power and precision

Timetable for Session 1

09:55–10:00. Participants gather in waiting room.
 10:00–10:10. Session starts. Greetings. How the sessions will work. The tension between criticality and creativity. The skills involved in critical thinking.
 10:10–10:25. **Activity 1. Being critical, from start to finish.** In small groups in breakout rooms. Reporting back.
 10:25–10:35. Developing an argument.
 10:35–10:45. **Activity 2. Argument or not?** In small groups in breakout rooms. Reporting back.
 10:45–10:50. Short break.
 10:50–10:55. What characterises effective critical writing?
 10:55–11:15. **Activity 3. Using verbs with precision.** Individually. Reporting back.
 11:15–11:25. **Activity 4. Comparing two paragraphs.** Preparation for homework.
 11:25–11:30. Thank you and an outline of next steps.

Shortly after the session you will be emailed the slides from this session (with the group's findings) along with further notes plus the timetable and activities for tomorrow's session.

Timetable for Session 2

09:55–10:00. Gather in Zoom waiting room.
 10:00–10:15. Session starts promptly. Discussing **Activity 4. Which abstract is better written?** Whole group discussion and compilation of findings.
 10:15–10:20. Characteristics of weak critical writing.
 10:20–10:30. **Activity 5. Straw men.** In small groups in breakout rooms. Reporting back.
 10:30–10:40. Critiquing another person's work.
 10:40–10:45. Using sources effectively.
 10:45–10:50. Short break.
 10:50–11:05. **Activity 6. Sequencing can be critical to the strength of your argument.** In small groups in breakout rooms. Reporting back.
 11:05–11:20. **Activity 7. Putting the pieces together.** Copyediting. In pairs in breakout rooms. Reporting back.
 11:20–11:25. Rhetoric: the art of persuasion.
 11:25–11:30. Conclusion, thank you and following up. **Activity 8. Rhetoric: Optional follow on activity.**

Shortly after the session you will be emailed the slides from this session (including findings) along with accompanying notes and a link to an online feedback questionnaire.

TD, June 2021

Figure 1. An extract from a *Critical Thinking and Critical Writing* course design for doctoral students. The course is finetuned according to discipline.

we prioritise groupwork and interactivity in our course designs, recognising that students may have different learning preferences, and as far as possible make the sessions multi-modal, but with a carefully constructed narrative arc. An extract from a sample online course design is shown in Figure 1. This course, run as two 90-minute sessions on consecutive days, replaced a half-day face-to-face workshop.

In shifting our course designs from face-to-face (F2F) to online, we quickly established that half-day and one-day workshops would need to be deconstructed and reshaped into something rather different. The practice literature makes clear that facilitators and participants suffer from 'Zoom fatigue' if they are engaging online for extended periods (Blum, 2020; Sklar, 2020; Ramachandran, 2021). So, we typically responded by reworking courses into 90-minute or 120-minute online sessions, with a short break in the middle of each. A half-day F2F course might be split into two 90-minute online sessions, with sessions run on consecutive days or one week apart (Figure 1); a whole-day course might be converted into two 120-minute online sessions.

We encourage participants to write away from the screen at times and we have them working in different combinations (pairs, small group and whole group) to inject variety, heighten interaction, minimise fatigue from physical inertia and to encourage viewing onscreen windows in different ways. Commonly, students do individual writing tasks with their video off and audio temporarily muted. I draw participants back to the whole group, and have them re-establish contact in video, by delicately ringing a Tibetan cymbal.

As with our F2F courses, we tend to set 18 as the maximum number of students or staff attending online workshops and retreats. More than that and it is unrealistic to keep track of all participants and engage with them all individually.

Welcome!

- Please enable your microphone and camera (we'd like to see you)
- Click on 'participants' (so you can see who is attending) and 'chat'
- Choose 'gallery view' (top right?) so all participants' images are the same size

Communicating with me/everyone

- Feel free to use chat
- Raise and wave a hand to grab my attention
- Mute or unmute yourself as you wish
- We will be using breakout rooms and polling in this session
- We will have a short break by 10:45 am.

Figure 2. Ways of working are shared in slides at the start of the first session.

Changing the courses to online revealed unexpected benefits. By engaging with students over a more extended period of time, we got to know them better and we could weave out-of-session tasks around the online sessions. Information and activities could be emailed ahead – flipping – so that session time could focus on groupwork and discussion rather than information-giving and individual work.

Preparation and expectation

We swiftly realised that if we were going to make an online course as richly interactive as a face-to-face one, we would need to set expectations. When working in a physical teaching space such as a standard teaching room it is, of course, rather easier to track people's reactions and check the extent to which they are engaging. How could we encourage engagement during online sessions? We do so by making clear our expectations well before the course begins, reminding participants again when the course starts (Figure 2), and we seek to make the sessions activity-rich, enjoyable, relevant and practical, and foster a mutually supportive environment.

By way of example, several days before a course runs I email the course's Zoom weblink to participants, along with the timetable for the first session and the activities we will be doing on that day. I may ask participants to do some pre-course preparation, such as reflecting on their writing practice or completing a short writing activity e.g. pick an object and write down how its qualities relate to writing a doctoral thesis. We then pick up on the pre-course activity during the first session, usually in small groups in breakout rooms.

In the pre-course email I may include a link to a pre-course online questionnaire encouraging participants to share with me (anonymously if they wish) their concerns and expectations. This will help me tweak the course design. I usually share the anonymised findings with the group soon after the start of the first session (Figure 3), establishing to what extent we can meet their requests.

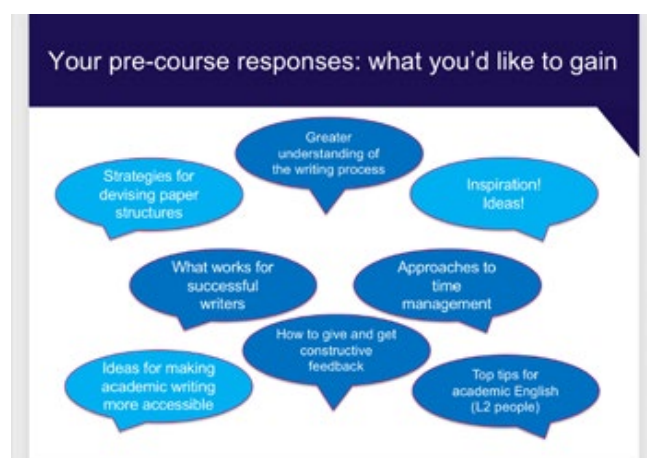


Figure 3. A collation of participants' responses to part of a pre-course questionnaire. This course for doctoral students and research staff was about writing high quality papers.

In that pre-course email I make clear that the expectation is that they will join using a device with a sufficiently

large screen (a desktop, laptop or, at a pinch, a tablet). A smartphone screen is too small given that we are engaging in text-rich activities. The atmosphere I seek to engender on my courses (online or F2F) is a friendly, highly interactive and strongly supportive one. Participants are encouraged to ask questions, share experience and knowledge verbally, and also on the chat thread. Everyone is asked to share at some stage, whether with the whole group or in smaller groups or pairs in breakout rooms. The high level of interaction achieved is borne out by post-course feedback, which often includes comments about the participant being surprised that this was attainable online. For example: *Please keep the mix of slides, polls, breakout rooms, chat, individual activities – this worked.* And another: *I really enjoyed the sessions. I thought the Zoom platform wouldn't work well for this kind of training but it really did.*

In using this approach, I have worked with postgraduates and staff in eight universities, doctoral training entities and research centres, and in none of these has agreeing to such engagement been a problem. It is possible that a few would-be participants are put off because they realise they have to engage more fully in the sessions – they cannot lurk, or drop in and out (Bozkurt et al, 2020). Dealing with the implications of those expectations does require some sensitivity and flexibility. There will sometimes be one or two participants with mitigating circumstances, such as having to pick up a child from school, which means they miss part of a session. A participant may have very good reasons for not wanting to share their video and this needs to be respected. On my courses, all or most participants share audio *and* video and fully attend all parts of the course. Normally, not being able to share audio prevents the would-be participant from attending as they would not be able to engage in the group activities. Group interaction is a vital part of these online courses, as it would be if students or staff were attending a course face-to-face.

Online platforms

In September 2020 in an online survey we asked CFs which platforms they had used to run online sessions. The responses were: Zoom (17); Microsoft Teams (8); Blackboard Collaborate (3); and GoToMeeting (1). Since then, CFs have almost uniformly adopted Zoom as the preferred platform. Our experience has been that Zoom is stable and easy-to-use, and in our work with universities, we negotiate for using Zoom. Microsoft (MS) Teams is more feature-rich, and in many universities we find it is the institution's preference because of its connectivity to other MS software and for administrative record-keeping. However, when running online workshops we have found the user experience (as facilitator and as participant) is less favourable compared to using Zoom.

For us, the biggest drawback with Zoom is its limited functionality for polling (quizzes) and for displaying results. This issue can be circumvented by using polling platforms such as Poll Everywhere (<https://www.polleverywhere.com>). In the rest of this article, the platform being discussed is Zoom unless stated otherwise.

Online presence and interactivity

It was important to CFs that participants attending online sessions had a clear outline, so they could have the appropriate materials to hand (either onscreen or printed), such as the session outline and activities, and any writing extracts. Should anything happen to a participant's internet connection, or they arrive slightly late, they could then join the session with awareness of where they were in the proceedings.

As a facilitator working online, our visual appearance is as important as it would be working face-to-face, perhaps more so. We tend to dress smart-casual. Our image needs to take up a reasonable proportion of the onscreen window, and be well lit, without any distracting background. When running an online workshop, I work facing a window, with a sidelight to create some contouring (Figure 4). Taking advice from RLF colleagues Karin Altenberg and Kerry Young, we aim to have a nondescript or cheerful background, seeking to avoid triggering controversy or concern amongst participants.



Figure 4. We consider our onscreen image as facilitator to be important – professional, friendly and non-threatening.

The main forms of interaction during online sessions are through discussion in the whole group (verbal or text in chat), discussion and activities in breakout rooms (with or without reporting back to the whole group), individual writing activities, and the use of polling (with results compiled anonymously and shared). Slides – usually in MS Powerpoint – are used sparingly as a visual stimulus, for summarising information and for reminders of instructions for activities. I often type 'live' onto slides the findings of a whole group discussion, or the report backs from breakout rooms, so the slides become another source of evidence, capturing what has happened on the course, which is shared with participants.

Groupwork challenges

As CFs, we have found the biggest challenges with going online are with orchestrating group work and checking that each group activity is working well. As in the face-to-face situation, you can choose the blend of people in each group: for example, by discipline or experience. But in F2F courses it is much easier to monitor each group,

interjecting with a light touch should an activity or discussion be in danger of stalling. This is trickier online. Either you trust the process and allow the group in a breakout room to complete the activity, or you dip in and out to check on progress. A very light touch is needed so as not to disturb the dynamics within the breakout room, showing that you are seeking to be supportive rather than simply eavesdropping.

For longer courses working with a co-facilitator can be invaluable. Between you, you can check on different groups and spend extended time with each if need be. For participants having a co-facilitator can mean a welcome change in the ebb and flow of a course, as with F2F sessions. When working online with the whole group, your co-facilitator can check the chat file as well as observe and report back on the extent of engagement of all participants.

Practising being a participant

From April 2020, CFs started meeting in groups online to test the functions of Zoom and rehearse aspects of their workshops-in-development; this activity quickly became invaluable. It became apparent that what the facilitator observes and what a participant sees on Zoom may be rather different (Figure 5). During these 'dry runs', the facilitator can become a co-host and see what happens when someone else becomes the host. The facilitator may ask for feedback from colleagues such as: How easy is it to read the text on the slide? Or, have I given you sufficient instruction ahead of you working in the breakout room? We soon discovered the idiosyncrasies of Zoom. For example, anyone joining the session late cannot see the chat or uploaded files that have been shared before they arrived. If need be, and with agreement from others, they can be sent the saved chat file afterwards, which contains the entire chat exchange for the session (but not with the uploaded files *in situ*).

Online writing retreats

Among the toughest challenges for learning developers is transposing the benefits of face-to-face writing retreats to the online equivalent. There is plentiful evidence of the benefits of writing retreats (Kornhaber et al, 2016; Tremblay-Wragg et al, 2021). These include the development of camaraderie within a writing community, accountable goal setting, building confidence and reducing stress, benefiting from giving and receiving peer feedback, an emphasis on writing process, and paying deep and extended attention to creating, reviewing and editing a piece of writing.

The way CFs first conceived writing retreats was strongly influenced by the Arvon model (<https://www.arvon.org/>) – 4 to 5 days spent in beautiful surroundings working with two or more well-published writers. Many CFs have been participants in, as well as facilitators of, such retreats. CF pioneers Tina Pepler and Babs Horton adapted the Arvon-style approach to working on-campus in 'immersives': combining workshop activities and writing sessions with one-to-one tutorials with facilitators. Such immersives were usually organised

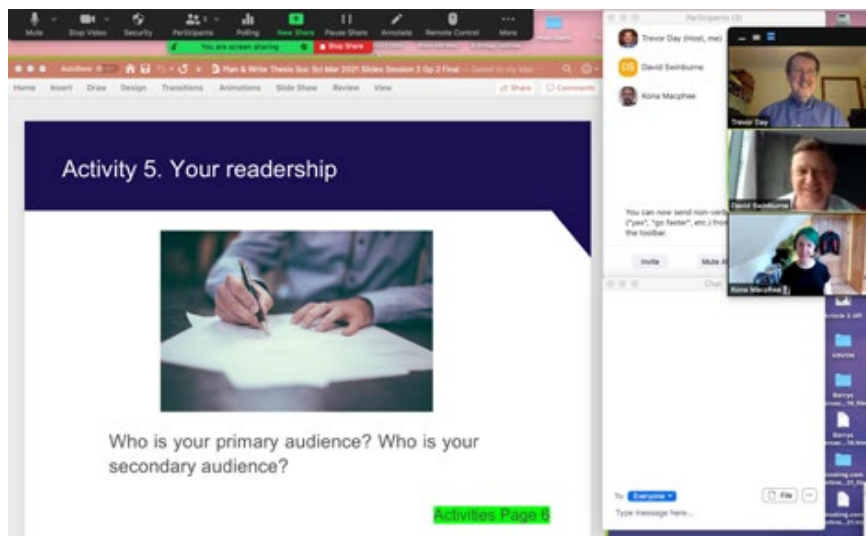


Figure 5. As the screenshot of the facilitator’s computer screen shows (see left), what a participant sees onscreen is not exactly the same (see right). This is a good reason to practise being in both roles.

with a one-day or two-day workshop at the start and a one-day or two-day workshop a week later, and seeing students in between for one-to-one tutorials with one of the facilitators.

Responding to the financial and time constraints of university clients, on-campus immersives or off-campus retreats provided by CFs have often evolved to two-day events, as is a popular format (Murray and Newton, 2009). In 2020, CFs Katie Grant and Anne Wilson working with arts, humanities and social science doctoral training partnerships adapted their F2F writing retreats to working online. With two facilitators and up to 16 students, how could their face-to-face writing retreats be adapted to the online environment?

As with their F2F retreats, the online experience is a blend of workshop activities, timed writing sessions, and one-to-one tutorials with the facilitators. The retreats (whether online or F2F) are scaffolded across the three years of the research council funded PhD. In year 1 the focus of the two-day retreat is on demystifying academic writing at postgraduate level and ‘managing uncertainty’ (especially relevant in this pandemic year). Day 1 is a blend of workshop activities and timed writing sessions in response to prompts. Students are encouraged to give peer feedback even at this early stage. On Day 2, there are workshop activities, but the balance of the day is shifted towards timed writing sessions (the students can write offline if they prefer) plus one-to-one tutorials of 30 minutes each.

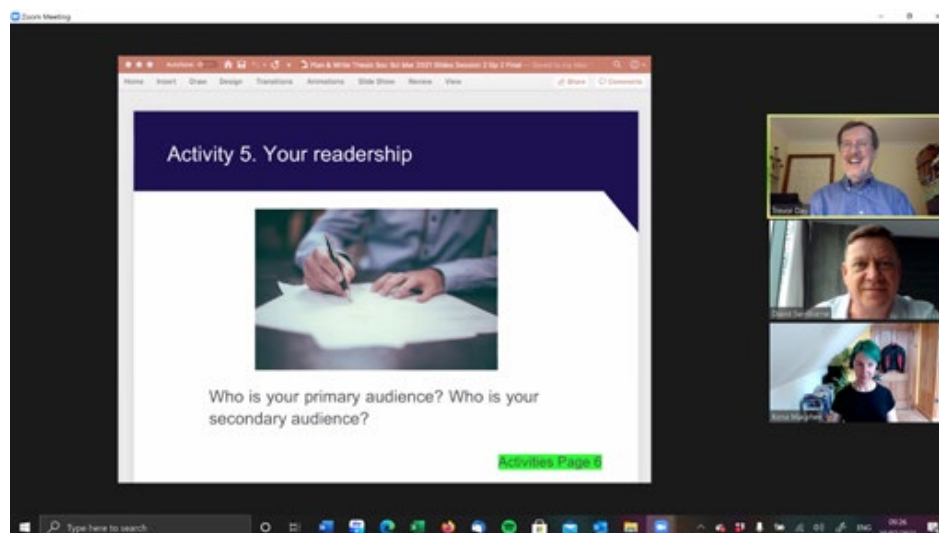
In year 2, the format is similar, but to ensure that students make progress over the retreat’s two days, in a pre-retreat email participants are asked to identify a particular section of text on which to focus, and which they will be happy to show to one or two peers. The student’s text could be anything from a transition report (transition from MPhil to PhD) to a troublesome section of the thesis or the draft of a chapter – a substantial enough text for two days’ concerted attention. Focussing on these texts, students develop their writing skills, such as enhancing voice, structure, critical analysis and editing for sense and style, skills which, once the retreat is over, they should be able to apply with confidence to the rest of their thesis.

Year 3 students are offered a staggered three-day retreat, the first two days launching a month of writing productivity. Again, students are asked to choose work-in-progress text on which to focus on Days 1 and 2. Again, they will share text with one or two peers. Peer feedback notwithstanding, on the Year 3 retreat the balance shifts from workshop activities towards timed writing sessions. Thirty-minute one-to-one tutorials focus on an individual’s writing challenges but include setting goals for writing productivity and skill development in the run up to Day 3, which takes place a month later. On this day, participants share their successes and challenges, and one-to-one tutorials help untangle writing problems. The overall focus is on ongoing mutual support. For example, on chat, participants share ‘words of encouragement and wisdom’. Anne and Katie will have seen some students across all three years and so will have tracked their development. That final day is a rite of passage for the students and a poignant farewell for the facilitators.

In Katie Grant’s view, ‘The Year 1 and Year 2 retreats work as effectively online as they do face-to-face. Flexibility is key, so that we can respond to issues as and when they arise. We have learnt to be as flexible online as we are F2F. The Year 3 retreat would benefit from being at least partially face-to-face. Those “edge” conversations between students, over lunch or refreshments, can forge relationships which are hugely supportive as students navigate the final stages of their thesis.’

Online writing groups

The value of writing groups, where a group of practitioners meet regularly to set writing goals, report on progress and offer mutual support, including peer review, is well established for academic writing (Aitchison and Guerin, 2014; de Caux et al, 2017). The heightened loneliness and isolation of doctoral researchers due to lockdown restrictions prompted some doctoral training centres to consider ways of nurturing students’ emotional resilience. Anne Wilson and Katie Grant responded by organising online writing groups, working with up to 16 doctoral students. Their facilitator-supported writing groups run for 6 weeks, with members



meeting online once a week on the same day and at the same times in the morning and afternoon. As with their writing retreats, the meetings are structured but flexible. Unlike their writing retreats, a writing group is led by one facilitator.

Typically, a writing group day starts with members checking in with their writing goals for the day. This is often followed by prompted rounds of freewriting. Fifteen-minute, one-to-one tutorials are on offer. If students highlight a particular writing problem, for example always writing defensively or trouble with paraphrasing, a mini-workshop might be created in response.

After the morning's activities, the writing group logs off and then reconvenes for half an hour in the late afternoon, reporting on how their writing day has gone. Group members share their successes and challenges, with supportive feedback from the facilitator and other group members.

The aim of a writing group is to provide structured mutual support for group members up to the point at which it can become self-sustaining. The group may fragment within weeks, but even then students often form splinter groups or buddy pairs which continue long after the initial intervention.

According to Katie Grant, 'Six weeks is about right for having the group led by an outside facilitator. After about four weeks, group members express the hope that the group will continue. At six weeks, somebody nearly always volunteers to coordinate that continuation.' She adds, 'One of the real strengths of an online writing group – or an online writing retreat for that matter – is that it takes place in the environment where the student habitually works. It becomes a space of shared productivity rather than isolated angst.'

One-to-one tutorials

Many CFs incorporate one-to-one tutorials within their longer interventions. They also offer tutorials to individuals to follow up on issues revealed in shorter

courses. The most common model is to have the tutee identify their concerns and email a text sample to the facilitator. The facilitator reviews it in the light of concerns and marks up the document. The document, with tracked changes or similar, is returned to the tutee, and they then meet online to discuss what has emerged. The ensuing exchange is often wide-ranging and deep. To best assist the tutee requires an exploration of their writing processes (Nicol, 2020), not simply focusing on the end product. For many CFs, using screenshare is equivalent to sitting side by side with the tutee in a F2F situation, studying the document together. Many CFs have rapidly adapted to this 'new norm'.

Opening up access

Catering for the needs of those with diverse learning preferences and distinctive cultural backgrounds is a challenge, whether F2F or online (Wingate, 2015). Our experience as CFs over the last 18 months is that a wider diversity of participants currently engage in online workshops than previously attended equivalent F2F courses. This is confirmed by our clients, who report higher take up rates for writing-related courses, and it appears to be more than a temporary phenomenon.

Several factors seem to be encouraging online take up. It usually requires less physical effort and planning to attend an online workshop. It can be perceived as a 'safer psychological space' than meeting in person in a room on campus. For many postgraduate students who are part-time and have work and family commitments, online workshops can be accommodated more flexibly and are less time-consuming to attend since travel is not usually involved. On several occasions I have run a workshop, when one of the participants has a baby or toddler bouncing on their knee (usually remarkably well behaved and bemused by the experience). Sometimes a participant is stroking a pet cat or dog, but not in the sinister manner of a Bond villain. This reveals another benefit of going online. Under the current circumstances, it offers a window into our students' world. We see students in their home or university setting. With students scattered across the world, my online workshops that start at 10:00 am (UK time) are sometimes attended by those

from North, Central or South America, where it is very early in the morning, along with attendees from China, where it is late afternoon or early evening. Experiencing this community – meeting in real time but on different continents and in different time zones – is a rather wonderful dimension of the online experience, albeit created in response to an international calamity.

Who is disadvantaged by going online? That is hard to judge, since systematic gathering of reasons for non-attendance is not happening routinely in many universities since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the kinds of learning activities that CFs offer, 'lurkers' are not encouraged to attend, even accepting that a more passive learning preference might be a legitimate and successful approach for some people (Bozkurt et al, 2020). The most disadvantaged seem to be those with access to limited technology (computer or tablet) and/or have a poor internet connection. In my experience, it is remarkable that in online workshop sessions with participants from several countries the one or two with poor internet access (perhaps switching video off to reduce bandwidth usage) are often those in the UK.

Which is better: online or face-to-face?

This depends. Let us consider the three main players: the participants, the university client and the workshop facilitator.

Consultant Fellows usually gather post-course feedback from participants using a standardised online questionnaire. This requests measures for course satisfaction, relevance, suitability of content, effectiveness of activities and appropriateness of the knowledge and skills of the facilitator. These are scored on a five-point Likert scale against the course's intended learning outcomes. In addition, four open-response questions ask about benefit, proposed action to be taken, any suggestions for improvement, plus a final catch-all question about anything else. The scores and positive comments have not shifted significantly for F2F courses pre-COVID and equivalent online courses post-COVID. For those who attend CF online courses the experience is different compared to a F2F equivalent, but not recognisably less beneficial. Expectations might temporarily be lower, given the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic and associated lockdowns. However, for many participants – pandemic or no pandemic – attending courses online is easier.

For the university client, assuming a more normal situation than at present, there are substantial benefits in having CFs run activities online rather than in rooms on-campus. Allowing CFs to organise sessions online reduces administrative workload for university staff and cuts costs. Online sessions do not require booking teaching rooms on-campus, providing paper handouts, offering refreshments, and paying CFs for travel and possibly accommodation. When I recently asked my eight university clients what they wished me to do next academic year, all but one wanted me to keep all or the majority of my courses online, subject to negotiation in each case. Only one client, a research institution, wished

me to reinstate the courses as F2F as soon as possible – a decision, it must be said, not determined by feedback from students.

As for the CFs who facilitate online sessions, views are very mixed. A small minority much prefer the F2F experience and want to return to face-to-face sessions as soon as possible and would even consider no longer running the course if the client insisted on it being online. A slightly larger minority find the ease and effectiveness of running courses online, without having to engage in extensive travel, makes the online option very inviting. The majority of CFs lie somewhere in between, perfectly prepared to run the course online or F2F, perhaps a blend of the two, with each option judged on its own merits for a given course.

For many participants, mutual encouragement is greater in the F2F workshop or retreat than online, although online writing groups are one solution for engendering sustained mutual support. And for the facilitator, managing group dynamics, checking on progress of tasks and shifting between different modes of interaction – pairs, small groups and whole group – is more nuanced and can be achieved more elegantly working F2F. F2F is a more physical experience, but even online some CFs get participants to work creatively on large sheets of card or paper, and then screenshare what they have created. It is down to the ingenuity of the facilitator, giving clear instructions, to encourage 'hands on' tasks when working online.

In conclusion

The online 'experiment' has been remarkably successful; much more successful than we could have envisaged when CFs began to meet online in April 2020 to consider how to shift F2F courses online. By returning to the basics of course design, taking into account the nature of the online medium, meeting online as a community to share our experience and expertise and to test out our online solutions, we rapidly devised successful online courses. We have gone beyond 'emergency provision', and our online courses are well-designed and sustainable. Our clients confirm this as does the feedback we receive from participants. The busiest CFs have become even busier in the last 18 months.

The academic year, 2021–22, will be another period of steep transition but in another direction. Having shifted courses online many HEIs will be moving substantially towards blended learning – combining online and F2F. This will be a challenge for universities given timetabling constraints and the design and availability of their physical teaching spaces. If students have face-to-face sessions for part of their day where will they go on campus for their synchronous (live), online sessions? Ideally, blended courses will combine the strengths of both kinds of provision – online and F2F. The experiment continues.

References

- Aitchison, C. and C. Guerin (2014). *Writing Groups for Doctoral Education and Beyond*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Biggs, J. and C. Tang (2011). *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*. 4th ed. Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.
- Blum, S.D. (2020). 'Why we're exhausted by Zoom', *Inside Higher Education* blog article, 22 April 2020. <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/04/22/professor-explores-why-zoom-classes-deplete-her-energy-opinion>
- Bozkurt, A., Koutropoulos, A., Singh, L. and S. Honeychurch (2020). 'On Lurking: Multiple perspectives on lurking within an educational community', *The Internet and Higher Education*, 44, 100709. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2019.100709>
- Coffield, F., Moseley, D., Hall, E. and K. Eccleston (2004). *Learning Styles and Pedagogy in Post-16 Learning: A Systematic and Critical Review*. London, UK: Learning and Skills Development Agency.
- Day, T. (2018). *Success in Academic Writing*. 2nd ed. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Day, T. and U. Canton (2021). 'I'm a writer and ... Reconciling identities: working in the space between writing and teaching', *Writing in Education*, 83, 31–37.
- Day, T. and D. Swinburne (2017). 'Getting someone in: The role of blended professionals in HE writing development', *Educational Developments*, 18(3), 20–24.
- de Caux, B., Lam, C., Lau R., Huang, C. and L. Pretorius (2017). 'Reflection for learning in doctoral training: writing groups, academic writing proficiency and reflective practice', *Reflective Practice*, 18(4), 463–473.
- Kornhaber R., Cross, M., Betihavas, V. and H. Bridgman (2016). 'The benefits and challenges of academic writing retreats: an integrative review', *Higher Education Research and Development*, 35(6), 1210–1227.
- Murray R. and M. Newton (2009). 'Writing retreat as structured intervention: margin or mainstream?', *Higher Education Research & Development*, 28, 541–553.
- Nicol, D. (2020). 'The power of internal feedback: exploiting comparison processes', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2020.1823314>
- Pashler, H., McDaniel, M., Rohrer, D. and R. Bjork (2009). 'Learning styles concepts and evidence', *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 9(3), 106–19.
- Ramachandran, V. (2021). 'Stanford researchers identify four causes for "Zoom fatigue" and their simple fixes', *Stanford News*, 23 February 2021, <https://news.stanford.edu/2021/02/23/four-causes-zoom-fatigue-solutions/>
- Sklar, J. (2020). "'Zoom fatigue" is taxing the brain. Here's why that happens.' *National Geographic* blog article, 24 April 2020, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/coronavirus-zoom-fatigue-is-taxing-the-brain-here-is-why-that-happens>
- Tremblay-Wragg, E., Chartier, S., Labonté-Lemoyne, E., Déri, C. and M-E. Gadbois (2021). 'Writing more, better, together: how writing retreats support graduate students through their journey', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 45(1), 95–106.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Wingate, U. (2015). *Academic Literacy and Student Diversity: The case for inclusive practice*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Acknowledgements: The members of the RLF Consultant Fellows' community, and in particular Katie Grant, Chris Simms and Anne Wilson. RLF project consultants and managers Karin Altenberg, Kona Macphee and Kerry Young, and the RLF's Digital Director, David Swinburne.



Dr Trevor Day, originally a marine scientist and science writer, is now a social scientist, writing developer and an academic author and nature writer. In his spare time he is inclined to dive into a river or the sea given the slightest opportunity. His latest books are *Success in Academic Writing* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2nd ed) and *Sardine* (Reaktion Books), a multidisciplinary appraisal of this modest but important fish. He thrives on helping others unleash the power and precision of their writing, especially doctoral students and early- to mid-career researchers. Trevor has just retired as Director of the UK's Royal Literary Fund Consultant Fellows' programme (2013–21) and remains a writing consultant for several universities, doctoral training entities and research centres in the UK and overseas.