

1-23-2021

## Build It in the Chat: Using the Chat Function in Online Platforms to Facilitate and Improve Student Writing

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### Recommended Citation

Altman, James, "Build It in the Chat: Using the Chat Function in Online Platforms to Facilitate and Improve Student Writing" (2021). *UNLV Best Teaching Practices Expo*. 126.

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# Best Teaching Practices Expo 2021

## Teaching Practice & the Need it Addresses

Helping college students “find their voice” as writers is challenging even without the isolation necessitated by the Pandemic. Shyness, lack of comfort with the subject matter, and fear of using the wrong word or phrase, can all keep students from expressing their ideas as fully as they, and we, would like. This can lead to non-completion or plagiarism of assignments. If a student is also a non-native English speaker and/or has physical and/or cognitive difficulties, the situation can appear insurmountable. Building student writing thought by thought, line by line, paragraph by paragraph addresses the problem by allowing individuals to express ideas as they emerge while giving and receiving feedback in real time as documents and discussions develop while capturing the results. All lengths/genres of writing in all disciplines can utilize the practice. No additional equipment/expertise is needed beyond what instructors are already using.

## Evidence it Benefits Students



Throughout my time teaching/tutoring at UNLV, in the Department of English, or the Academic Success Center, I witnessed my students having great success using this practice, regardless of the specific platform and/or technology in play at the time. The great majority of students engaged with the practice fully. Thereafter, not only did assignment completion increase while plagiarism greatly decreased, but the breadth and depth of thought students gave topic significantly increased, to the point they started suggesting topics/assignments that were so good I reused them. One example is a word-by-word close-reading analysis of Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*. Herrick (2009) and Brown and Hocutt (2015) details similar benefits and concerns for Google Hangouts (now Google Chat). Bhaskar et. al. (2020), and Lynn et. al. (2020) do the same for Webex and Zoom. Each of the aforementioned articles calls for more research on their topic.

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Office of Accessibility Resources

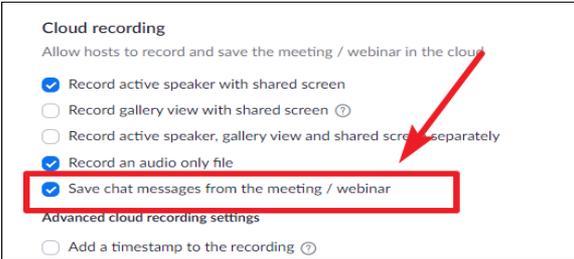


## Resources And Where To Find Them

Office of Information Technology fully supports [Google Chat](#) and [Google Meet](#). Google also provides the option of creating private group chat rooms where the practice can be employed. Additionally, the UNLV Office of Information Technology also fully supports Zoom. The [Classroom Technology Webex Video Conferencing](#) page provides useful resources for instructors and students on all aspects of using Webex, including the chat function. Using the practice. [Zoom](#) is a paid, account based, system. It also offers some limited features for free. Some UNLV Departments are currently using Zoom. Consult your department for specifics regarding Zoom status.

## How Others Can Adopt This Practice

- To adopt this practice, UNLV instructors should log in to their online platform of choice, and open/enable the chat function. Conduct the class session as you would normally. As questions/discussion points emerge, capture them within the platform and/or clip them into MS Word, or similar application, for archiving and/or distribution later. You can either handle this part yourself or switch it between individuals or groups. Depending on the topic, students choose single words, sentences, and/or paragraphs on which to comment. The comments form the basis of the students' papers. You can easily set ground rules on what kinds of comments are permissible, whether any comments can be used by multiple students/groups, etc.



## References

- Brown, Maury Elizabeth, and Daniel L. Hocutt. "Learning to use, useful for learning: a usability study of Google apps for education." *Journal of Usability Studies* 10.4 (2015): 160.
- Herrick, Dan R. "Google this! Using Google apps for collaboration and productivity." *Proceedings of the 37th annual ACM SIGUCCS fall conference: communication and collaboration*. 2009.