Speaking through Screens:
Connecting with Global Learners Using
Slack, Slides, and Screencasts

By **Talia Vestri**, **Northeastern University**

<1>In the midst of this pandemic, I shifted contingent roles. My year spent commuting out-of-state to serve as Visiting Assistant Professor of English at a selective liberal arts college concluded in May 2020 with the dull whimper of parting goodbyes waved from tiny Zoom boxes. Then, at summer's end, I landed a postdoctoral position at a research university with only ten days left until the start of term.

<2>Swiftly adapting lessons gleaned from Spring 2020, I planned deliveries for two formats that would be pedagogically new to me. One course was to be taught remotely from start to finish; students could join from an on-campus classroom or from their own computers. They all opted to attend virtually. The two others would be asynchronous classes run exclusively online via Canvas. In the final days of Summer 2020, I navigated this new-to-me learning management system (LMS) while juggling full-time care responsibilities and hours-long orientation meetings. Intellectually, I made the transition from discussion-based seminars in nineteenth-century literature and gender studies for students invested in humanistic inquiry to first-year writing courses geared for students planning their future engineering and business professions. Physically, I transitioned from the living room to the office.

<3>Teaching to transgress—from home—over the past year has required replicating, then crafting from scratch, the collective alchemy of a face-to-face classroom. In that shared in-person space, my students and I would segue from open-ended conversations to chats in small cohorts to individual reflection exercises and back again with ease. I depended on that communal networking for knowledge production. But I struggled to envision how students—now spread from Boston to Tokyo—would feel that same degree of connection and engagement with each other, and with me, through a mediating screen. As bell hooks writes, "our capacity to generate excitement [in the classroom] is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices, in recognizing one another's presence" (8). Now, sometimes all we had were voices. When students turn off their cameras, how can educators enable their learners' fullest presence? When students reside across the globe from one another rather than across the hall, how does authentic community form?

<4>In this new world, my working schedule fluctuated around a young child's sleep patterns while my students orchestrated their class attendance around thirteen-hour time differences, family obligations and illnesses, and mounting fear and burnout. Come September 2020, I met a new group of students for the first time through my laptop screen. Some I would never "see" at all. And even though course evaluations later confirmed that my "passion," "enthusiasm," and "energy to teach" bolstered my students at our ungodly starting hour of 8:00 a.m. EST (or, 1:00 p.m. in the afternoon in Ghana; or, 9:00 p.m. at night in China), I was always unsure how well they were coping individually, especially when some only spoke via their keyboards.

<5>I knew that I could no longer count on the same collective energy that had buoyed my other classes through the emergency remote situation in the Spring. I knew that new strategies would be necessary. I also knew that, like many educators, I had neither the time nor bandwidth to reinvent myself.

<6>So, in Fall 2020, I turned to tools that had sustained my connections with students in March and April. I prioritized frequent communication, sending collective emails early and often, soliciting periodic feedback via web-based surveys, and offering one-on-one contact via chat apps and videoconferencing. I incorporated breakout rooms into weekly Zoom sessions and presented documents via screen-share. As the semester continued, though, I experimented with tools that had been, until then, unfamiliar. I built course websites via Wix, created screencast videos via Screencast-o-matic and Canvas's Studio, coordinated social annotating via Perusall, converted lesson plans into slide decks via Google Slides, and commented on documents in real time while students wrote collaboratively in Google Docs. I composed weekly letters to my students in which I knitted material from one week to the next, signing off from these letters with a humorous GIF to extend my teaching persona across the Wi-Fi void.(1)

<7>Dabbling with such tools enabled me to embrace a transitional, even destabilized, position on par with the one my students occupied: we were all adjusting to new frameworks and floundering, at times, with new technologies. Keenly aware of this increased cognitive load, I relaxed expectations of myself as well as my students. We learned—and continue to learn—how to co-exist in this digital realm together.

Community through Continuity: Using Slack and Google Slides in Spring 2020

<8>Back in March 2020, when most schools abruptly shifted to remote learning, I strove for continuity. I decided to rely only on platforms and practices with which my students had been made familiar during the first half of our semester. For example, one of my three classes, an intermediate-level seminar on women writers, repurposed two elements we had been using since January: Slack and Google Slides. In the free version of Slack, available by web browser or smartphone app, students can communicate through dedicated chat "channels" and sub-channel "threads" set for various topics, as well as through direct messages and private groups. Google Slides is a free resource with a Gmail account that allows students to create presentations individually or as groups, collaborating in real time as the slides save automatically. Students were in the habit of posting once per week to our shared workspace on Slack, a strategy that I had originally chosen for a face-to-face course in order to stimulate conversations outside of our regularly structured class time. I wanted to allow students to spark ideas when their readings

were freshest and to make space for students who might feel less comfortable contributing during a faster-paced in-person conversation. In class meetings, I brought attention to students' Slack comments by discussing how their remarks related to a set of textual quotations that I projected on a large screen in the classroom as Google Slides—quotations that I had selected based on the students' collective interests in the chat forum.

<9>During that first half of the semester, however, Slack did not become the animated space I was hoping it would. Students tended to post one remark without returning to engage their peers in a back-and-forth dialogue, making the channels no less static than a conventional LMS discussion board. I did, on the other hand, find that Google Slides enhanced our conversational fluidity, not only because the quotations and images derived naturally from students' online comments, but also because the projections focused our shared visual attention in the room. Starting in March, though, both applications became a lifeline.

<10>Since the class was already adept at navigating these tools, I repurposed Slack and Google Slides for our remote classroom, enabling us to continue our collaborative work asynchronously through Slack and synchronously through Zoom. To accommodate my students, who had been unexpectedly upended from their on-campus residences over spring break with no opportunity to collect their belongings, as well as my own increased demands at home, I cut our weekly meeting time down from the prior in-person 150 minutes to just one 45-minute session. Each weekend, I provided reading questions via our LMS (see Fig. 1) and asked students to post one thoughtful hundred-word comment to Slack in response (see Fig. 2; previously, there had been no directive prompts).

Wednesday April 1 – Jhumpa Lahiri, "This Blessed House"

Reading Questions for Moodle:
Please think critically and carefully about some of these questions as you complete this week's reading assignment. You may want to use one of these queries as a starting point for your Slack post, and we will use some as our basis for discussion during our Zoom-based class meeting.

1. Like Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, this short story begins with the word "They." How does this word function in similar, or different, ways from how it works in Rhys's text?
2. What kind of power dynamics are established in the first dialogue interaction between Twinkle and Sanjeev at the beginning of the story?
3. Why is Twinkle so fascinated by the items of Christian iconography that she finds hidden in their new home? Why does Sanjeev dislike them so much?
4. What sort of expectations does Sanjeev have for Twinkle in their marriage? How does she meet or fail to meet these expectations?
5. How does Sanjeev and Twinkle's Indian heritage inform their relationship?
6. Why do you think Twinkle reacts so strongly to Sanjeev's suggestion that he will throw out the Virgin Mary statue for the lawn?
7. When Twinkle goes up to the attic with the party guests, is she representative of yet another "madwoman" in an attic? Why or why not?

Fig. 1. Weekly reading questions posted to Moodle for Jhumpa Lahiri's "This Blessed House" (1999), as prepared in Microsoft Word (I no longer have access to my prior institution's LMS).

Thread
#lahiri_blessedhouse   ✕

1 year ago
I definitely agree that Sanjeev doesn't like the Christian iconography because Twinkle does. But I would also include in that statement that what makes him even more mad is the fact itself that she likes them. It's not even for spite, it's simply because her liking them makes her beliefs different than his, and Sanjeev can't wrap his head around that. I also think Sanjeev and Twinkle differ in regards to culture acceptance. Twinkle likes the artifacts because they metaphorically 'bless" the house, which is enough for her even though she practices a different religion. Sanjeev, however, is more narrowminded in what is right and wrong, and rejects Christianity as a blessing when he is a Hindu. I agree with ▮▮▮ that it is not unreasonable for him to not want them, but how he tries to associate his concerns with his separate concerns with Twinkle only expose a misogynist way of thinking tied with tradition

#← Also sent to the channel

1 year ago
What struck me as disconcerting was not the fact that Sanjeev didn't want the iconography in his house, but the way that he reacted so strongly to them. When Twinkle presented him with the first piece she found, his immediate response was "Throw it away". Despite the fact that it clearly fascinated his wife, Sanjeev calls it "idiotic" and reacts with disgust. I was shocked by him having such a strong reaction to a statue, but pleased to see Twinkle disregard his behavior. Sanjeev, however, continuously belittles Twinkle's enchantment with the items, calling her collection a "little biblical menagerie" that he will "tolerate, for now". I think that, because Sanjeev knows he cannot actually control his wife, he uses his language to attempt to ridicule her.

#← Also sent to the channel

Prof. Vestri 1 year ago
Though it's never explicitly stated, it seems like the paraphernalia is deeply symbolic of something, and you're all tapping into that… In addition to the fact Twinkle likes these figures, I wonder if it's also about each character's comfort with their place in the larger culture. Twinkle doesn't mind showcasing Christian icons when they themselves are Hindu, but Sanjeev is deeply concerned with fitting in to the dominant culture by **not** commandeering its culture, as he feels, sacrilegiously. Twinkle is content with the odd blending of tradition; Sanjeev is not.

▮▮ar ago
I agree that their differences in the way they see the iconography is related to their comfort level when it comes to cultural fusion, and Sanjeev's desire for Twinkle to be someone that she is not. The description of the bust at the bottom of page 15 ("He did hate it…") mirrors how he feels about his own wife, he knows that people love her and that he should appreciate her but somehow that makes him resent her more. I found it significant that the story ends with him treating the statue with care and is embracing it. Is this how he will treat his own wife, despite his conflicting feelings for her?

Fig. 2. Portion of a Slack conversation thread stemming from one reading question (#3 in Fig. 1 above), in which six students (and I) engaged in spontaneous, asynchronous dialogue.

<11>Then, on the day before our synchronous class meeting, I would share a deck containing three or four textual slides with quoted passages driven by students' interests as mentioned in the Slack chat—a chat that had, indeed, now become more of a reciprocal conversation since students were motivated to connect virtually from their disparate locations (see Fig. 3). We began each Zoom session in breakout rooms in order to foreground as much "face" time as possible—and to provide me the ten-minute interval I required to whisk my young toddler off to naptime. Each small group examined one passage together, the groups took notes, and I later posted all notes on Moodle to share with the entire class (see Fig. 4). Following these initial fifteen or twenty minutes of discussion in breakout rooms, we returned to the main room to interact as a whole using Zoom's gallery view. I favored *not* using screen-share to display the slides again during this portion, since I wanted to connect with my students as much as possible and facilitate their connections with one another without extra visual distractions.

> "Don't you dare." She stood up, letting the book fall into the water, bubbles dripping down her thighs. "I hate you," she informed him, her eyes narrowing at the word "hate." She reached for her bathrobe, tied it tightly about her waist, and padded down the winding staircase, leaving sloppy wet footprints along the parquet floor. When she reached the foyer, Sanjeev said, "Are you planning on leaving the house that way?" He felt a throbbing in his temples, and his voice revealed an unfamiliar snarl when he spoke.
>
> "Who cares? Who cares what way I leave this house?"
>
> "Where are you planning on going at this hour?"
>
> "You can't throw away that statue. I won't let you." [...]
>
> "Yes I can. I will."
>
> "No," Twinkle said, her voice suddenly small, "This is our house. We own it together. The statue is a part of our property."

Fig. 3. Sample slide from a deck I sent to class on the day prior to the Zoom meeting, featuring quotations that groups would discuss in breakout rooms. Quotations were, in general, lengthier than those projected on-screen during in-person meetings, since students had time to review the deck independently before class.

Discussion Notes:

- Describes her footprints as sloppy... he criticized her character as being unorganized
- He expects her to do more
- Similar to like when he's mad about her just reading in bed when he expects her to be working
- "Unfamiliar snarl"... he's not used to being angry or showing hatred... contrasts other male characters from other stories (*Jane Eyre*: Rochester)
  - Unaware of how he treats her/feels about her
  - Might feel like he's the "good one"
- Why she's defensive of the Christian iconography:
  - She might like these things because he hates it... similar to how he hates it because she likes it
- "Our house. Our property" suggesting that they compromise, but neither character yields to the other's opinions
  - The poster she puts on the inside of the door, but she still shows it to the guests
  - "He followed her"... he may be okay with letting her make decisions... she doesn't put on her heels which he doesn't like
- Property rights... also in Wollstonecraft's *Maria*

Fig. 4. Produced by one breakout room with four students, these notes responded to the slide in Fig. 3 and were posted after class to Moodle in a collective document with other groups' notes.

<12>By reducing cognitive load, providing multifaceted assistance, and prioritizing student connections in each remote session, this class, as well as others, emphasized the value of community to support us through a traumatic time. To my delight, students showed up ready and willing each week, both asynchronously and on camera.

From Continuity to Connectivity: Using Slideshows in Fall 2020

<13>While these methods were successful in extending an established seminar's collaborative energy into the virtual world, a few months later I stumbled into a brand-new teaching environment: I would be leading three courses, one meeting remotely and two working asynchronously online, at an institution that was brand new to me, with students who were brand new to college. I no longer had the advantage of continuity. Some students would be at home, some on campus, some abroad; some would be on Zoom, some on Canvas. The mood had changed. In a synchronous first-year writing course with only twelve students, for instance, I found myself falling into an unfamiliar habit of one-way delivery, lecturing to students more than I ever would do in a face-to-face course. The struggle to stimulate dialogue with this new cohort was straining given students' lack of familiarity with seminar-style discussions, complicated by the awkwardness of "un-muting" in a videoconference setting, with its odd pauses that tend to instill silence rather than invite input. Genuine conversation was hard to come by. I turned, once again, to slides.

<14>Developing effective slideshows in this context demanded new strategies than the ones I had honed in Spring 2020. As I increasingly embraced this tool, I began to balance teacher-centered delivery with student-centered active learning. To do so, I punctuated synchronous slide-led lessons with designated time for individual reflection, directed exercises, group work, collaborative writing, and other interactive modes, alternating between approaches every ten to fifteen minutes to ensure variety and maximize attention (both theirs and mine). During each synchronous hour, I assigned students multiple tasks that would give them anywhere from two to twenty minutes to turn off their cameras and work on their own or to gather in small groups without me present. This variety reduced the feeling that either the slides (or I) dominated.

<15>For example, I recently held two consecutive class sessions about engaging the opinions of other writers. Outside class, students had been researching conversations within their communities, a strategy I chose this year so that our course "content" would derive from students' backgrounds, experiences, and identities. This choice not only allowed us to learn about one another and engage diverse perspectives, but it also minimized intellectual burdens during a continuously strenuous time. As students researched journalistic opinion pieces outside of class, we worked on understanding the genre during our synchronous meetings. To help students comprehend the structure of op-eds, I developed a slideshow informed by short readings from Cathy Birkenstein and Gerald Graff's *They Say / I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* (2014, third edition; since I was no longer traveling across state lines to reach my on-campus office, I had to rely on older editions of texts that I had available as scanned PDFs on my home computer). To facilitate virtual engagement, the deck alternated between information-delivery and practice exercises in order to show students how op-eds position arguments in the context of other voices. Instead of serving merely as a backdrop for an instructor's content-dump, the slides became a conduit for interaction, prompting students to pause and apply lessons

in peer dialogue or independent activities. Surprisingly, instead of compelling me to speak *at* students, slide decks are helping me to work *with* them.

<16>In this particular session, I first incorporated four slides that presented other writers making "they say / I say" moves (see Fig. 5 for one example). With images captured via screenshots, I showed sentences from op-eds that the students had recently read as a model of the genre, where one writer quotes or paraphrases from another. These sample images alternated with text-only slides reinforcing what I explained verbally. Using the "animate" feature in Google Slides, I set the presentation mode to reveal one bullet point at a time, so that the written words acted as shorthand for what I was saying "live" (see Fig. 6 for example of full slide). The bullets did double duty: they also acted as notes for *me* so that I could tune my attention on my students—whom I see in a compressed gallery view on screen in front of the slides—rather than read from offline notes or other on-screen windows. This semester, I have also been making an effort to speak into my webcam's "on" light, as odd as that feels, so that it appears to students as if I am looking directly at them. Slides allow me to do this more seamlessly.

Quoting

> Meanwhile, Team Biden continued to push the sexist theme. Doug Emhoff, husband of Kamala Harris, tweeted: "Dr. Biden earned her degrees through hard work and pure grit. She is an inspiration to me, to her students, and to Americans across this country. This story would never have been written about a man."

> midge." Sure enough, he wrote with fearless gusto an op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal* this weekend, advising Jill Biden, an English professor at Northern Virginia Community College, to stop insisting that people call her "Doctor Jill Biden," which "sounds and feels fraudulent, not to say a touch comic." She is the spouse of the president-elect and earned

Fig. 5. Example of a slide calling attention to "they say / I say" moves in previously assigned readings. Since presenting this deck in class, I have re-done the visuals with a lighter background, sans serif fonts, and larger text sizes, as I realized that the text and coloring were not as universally accessible in the original version.

Quoting

Use direct quotations when:

- an exact phrase is unique to the writer

- a sentence uses particular language that is relevant to your commentary

- the expression of the idea is as (or more) essential as its content meaning

- quoting "I say" language as your "they say" helps you get across an idea

Fig. 6. Example of a text-only slide with bullet-pointed phrases that accompanied my verbal delivery. Note that I included enough content to ensure that students could view the slideshow on their own at a later date, accounting for those who may have been absent from the synchronous sessions or who could benefit from reviewing the material at their own pace asynchronously.

<17>After I presented this introductory material, I paused for students to practice. The next slide, a barebones instructional one (see Fig. 7), invited them to locate "they say" rhetoric in an op-ed they had each researched and to reflect on why the author had chosen to quote or paraphrase. Students turned off their cameras and did this work on their own for five minutes. Since this was the first of several practice exercises lined up for that day, I did not yet ask students to share their findings, but simply to pause for reflection on their own.

Practice!

1. Scan one of your op-eds for a "they say" statement.

2. Does the writer quote or paraphrase here?

3. Why?

Fig. 7. Simple slide prompting students to spend a few minutes assessing an example from their own research findings.

<18>Next, we explored how to generate these rhetorical moves. Featuring a sample paragraph from a prior course reading, the next series of slides varied by color-coded text, and each prompted students' input (see Figs. 8 and 9). For instance, after a student read the paragraph aloud, I asked everyone to identify phrases they felt represented the passage's main idea. They did this work silently, and then I called on volunteers. We moved to the next slide, where the paragraph was replicated, now with phrases highlighted (based on my predictions of what they might identify, and which they indeed did). Afterwards, I turned to a slide that contained only the highlighted phrases—not the entire passage—and asked students to generate one-sentence paraphrases of these ideas (see Fig. 9). Each student typed their final sentence into Zoom's chat box to share with everyone. We scrolled through these diverse offerings to point out how every sentence represented its writer's unique voice and not the original.

1. What are the main ideas?

There are many positives to remote work. Just imagine: forget the Googleplex, the free food, or the foosball tables. American techies could spread out across the country and relocate wherever the cost of living is lower and the air cleaner; digital nomads could disperse worldwide and countries--as Estonia and Barbados are doing already--could compete to attract them. Hiring could become more inclusive: Historically excluded talent, from communities in the heartland, could get hired without having to be in Silicon Valley, Boston or New York. And tech companies could finally put their W-2s where their mouths are as they make pledges to improve diversity and inclusion by hiring more from the Black community, from potential hotbeds for artificial intelligence-innovation such as Atlanta, or cast a wider net for female coders.

Fig. 8. As we proceeded through the slideshow, students contributed their sense of the main idea before I revealed a color-coded slide that highlighted important phrases.

2. Paraphrase the main ideas.

positives to remote work

could spread out across the country and relocate

hiring could become more inclusive

improve diversity and inclusion

Write a sample paraphrase of the main ideas above.

Fig. 9. Then, I isolated the highlighted phrases on the slide in Fig. 8 and asked students to pause and paraphrase these central concepts without the original paragraph available to them on-screen.

<19>In the next segment of the lesson, we isolated quote-worthy phrases and, after a sequence of modeled sentences, practiced quoting and paraphrasing first from the sample paragraph and then from students' researched op-eds. Students recorded their op-ed "they say" sentences into a shared Google Doc, and I commented in the margins while they were writing. (see Fig 10). I watched in real time as they revised and re-typed in response to my notes. In our next class period, we picked up with the slide deck and Google Doc in order to learn about, and then compose, responsive "I say" claims.

Kruger and Jarrat argue that changing times have led to a multitude of student issues that colleges are not prepared to meet. Highlighting the lack of proactivity of university services, they write that "While some of these difficulties are indeed new, the reality is that many are existing challenges that have been magnified by the crisis", and that could have been addressed preemptively.

Talia Vestri
8:56 AM Feb 19

Couldn't you paraphrase this in your own words just as well? I'm not convinced this long sentence is worth quoting... Thoughts?
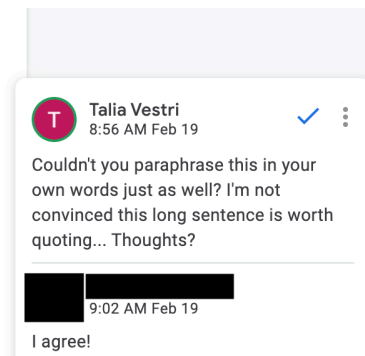
9:02 AM Feb 19

I agree!

Fig. 10. One student's "they say" sentence in shared Google Doc, with sidebar work-in-progress comments.

<20>In this way, slide decks provided a slew of benefits, and they continue to do so as I evolve my emergency remote teaching practices. In one crucial sense, slides help students to keep track of on-screen lessons, enabling them to re-focus whenever their attention wanders due to understandable "Zoom fatigue" (Jiang; Schroeder). I learned this when students shared, after being asked for feedback, that they "appreciated seeing the discussion topics on screen, so [we] have time to think about them before participating" and that slides "prevent that trap of missing a few seconds of a call and being unable to jump back in with full understanding." In addition, slides can account for momentarily broken audio due to Wi-Fi instability. Keeping in mind the tenets of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), slideshows let me deliver information simultaneously in auditory and visual formats and vary that visual delivery in different graphic and orthographic orientations ("The UDL Guidelines"). Moreover, since I store the collected decks as PDFs on the course website, they give learners an opportunity to return later to any day's material and think it through at their own pace. Finally, slides aid me with organizing lessons during this time-strapped year.

From Connectivity to Connecting: Screencasts in Fall 2020 and Beyond

<21>While these interactive slideshows suited my synchronous courses, I needed to figure out how to present comparable material to my asynchronous students, those learning within a Canvas-only platform. Given my time constraints, I recognized it would be possible, even simple, to adapt synchronous slideshows into screencast videos (recordings of the desktop screen accompanied by audio narration). Not only did screencasts allow me to produce dynamic audiovisual content to enhance the otherwise depersonalized delivery of text-heavy LMS pages, but they also led me to begin experimenting with other approaches to video recordings beyond the conventional parameters of a narrated slideshow.(2)

<22>In these ten-to-fifteen-minute videos, I explain key concepts to students who are encountering course material solely online. In various videos, I present, for instance, adapted iterations of the "they say / I say" slideshow discussed above. In others, I do not use slides but, instead, alternate between web pages and PDFs to demonstrate important topics such as internet research or close reading (see Fig. 11).
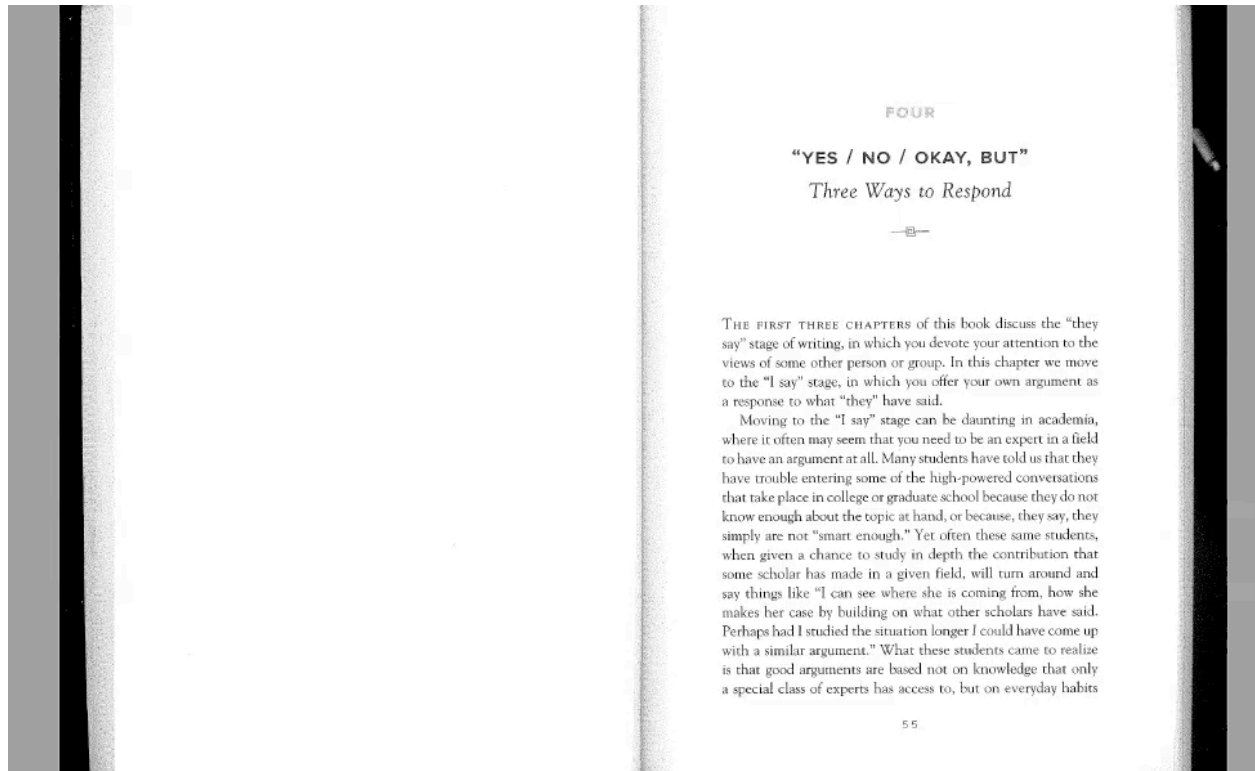
FOUR

"YES / NO / OKAY, BUT"

Three Ways to Respond

THE FIRST THREE CHAPTERS of this book discuss the "they say" stage of writing, in which you devote your attention to the views of some other person or group. In this chapter we move to the "I say" stage, in which you offer your own argument as a response to what "they" have said.

Moving to the "I say" stage can be daunting in academia, where it often may seem that you need to be an expert in a field to have an argument at all. Many students have told us that they have trouble entering some of the high-powered conversations that take place in college or graduate school because they do not know enough about the topic at hand, or because, they say, they simply are not "smart enough." Yet often these same students, when given a chance to study in depth the contribution that some scholar has made in a given field, will turn around and say things like "I can see where she is coming from, how she makes her case by building on what other scholars have said. Perhaps had I studied the situation longer I could have come up with a similar argument." What these students came to realize is that good arguments are based not on knowledge that only a special class of experts has access to, but on everyday habits

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Fig. 11. Sample screencast (fifteen minutes) using PDFs of readings and dynamic Google Docs to illustrate "I say" rhetorical moves.

<23>For online as well as "live" courses, screencasts have been proving invaluable for distributing information that might otherwise be addressed during in-person class time, such as how to navigate our digital platforms. In addition to content-based lessons, I have produced simple five-minute screencasts to show students how to access an online course portal, work through weekly modules, or use peer review tools; how to launch and interact with Perusall; and where to locate my feedback on graded assignments in Canvas. I have created screencasts showing how to navigate a course's Wix website and how to create blog posts for the site (see Fig. 12). Many times, at the end of a week, I realize I have not explained something in adequate detail; now, rather than send a lengthy email, I spend ten minutes setting up and recording a screencast. Then, I send students a link to the video, thus cutting out potential frustrations and frantic midnight emails from confused students. No matter their time zone or location, each learner can listen to and watch—and pause—my video at a time convenient for them rather than scramble to send me a desperate query for clarity or, even worse, fester in silent confusion.

Fig. 12. A screencast (approximately two minutes) illustrating how to add a blog post to a course website.

<24>One final application of screencasts promises tremendous payoff: providing feedback on student work, particularly on drafts of papers. I experimented briefly with this technique during Fall 2020, recording five-to-eight-minute videos in which I highlighted three overarching recommendations for revision for each student. To make a screencast, I generated an audio message alongside a video capture of my cursor highlighting and pointing to relevant passages in the paper on-screen, sometimes even typing in written annotations while I spoke as a way of planting visual reminders for the students within the document. Instead of asking students to wade through discursive feedback in marginal annotations—a convention that has led all too often to drowning students in impenetrable teacher-ese—I condensed my feedback into a mode that students could digest, and with which I could convey a tone of encouragement rather than seeming to point only to weaknesses on the page. I tried my best to recreate in these screencasts the semblance of an office-hour encounter, conducted asynchronously.

<25>After sending out half a dozen of these trial screencasts last semester, I asked students during an optional video-conference session how they had felt about receiving this kind of feedback. Their response was overwhelmingly positive. Generously, these students expressed concern that I would be spending too much time producing such videos. Ironically, I told them, the screencasts were often saving me time.

<26>I did, however, discover some caveats while experimenting for the first time with this tool. Looking back, many screencasts are too long (four-to-five-minute segments would be preferable to lengthier fifteen-minute ones), and they are not punctuated by the solicitation of student input

the way my "live" sessions are. Many videos capture vocal tics like "um" and "right" in too-fast speech or linger before changing pages, potentially losing students' attention. Accessibility was also an issue, as no simple tool allowed me to produce captions during or after recording in a timely manner, which would have assisted all students with processing the audiovisual delivery.(3) Most of all, they were tiring. With forty students in two online sections, for instance, I could not muster the physical energy to create a large batch of videos consecutively in a single day. I have since learned to plan to space out production work over successive sittings.

<27>Aside from mechanical blunders, however, screencasts—even clumsily produced ones—can convey a degree of liveliness that connects with students across geographic and temporal distances. While they watch me navigate materials on-screen and listen to my voice rambling in their ears, online students can feel more attuned to my teaching presence, which, as many educators have observed during this emergency remote situation, is "particularly important for students enrolled solely in online programs" (Kelly). In many senses, that is all of us.

Future Directions

<28>The one unavoidable limitation with *any* screencast-driven communication, however, is that no matter how personalizing, they reinforce unidirectional delivery from teacher to students. Unintentionally, screencasts leverage hierarchical power structures that lack the integration or coordination of unique student voices. In future iterations, I plan to ask students to create their own screencasts throughout the semester, perhaps assigning learners to respond to my feedback with their own three-to-five-minute videos. They could outline how they plan to tackle a paper revision, for instance, or narrate their unique interpretive analysis of a literary passage after watching a video modeling my own close reading.

<29>Indeed, at the close of Fall 2020, I offered my online students an opportunity to create a multimodal reflection presenting one key takeaway from the semester. Many chose to generate a screencast or narrated slideshow. I was delighted to sit at my desk listening to each of their voices explain their growth over the term, and it made me wistful that I had not been able to get to know each of them better. Exchanging a set of screencasts back and forth over the duration of a semester—from their home to mine and back again—could be one way for students in an asynchronous course to feel authentically seen. While I have found a number of ways this year to speak effectively with my students remotely through our screens, such an audiovisual correspondence could allow me, in turn, to recognize every student's fullest presence.

<30>After all, we strive to be a community of voices. Let's hear each one.

Notes

(1)In the summer between Spring 2020 and Fall 2020, I also utilized another kind of digital space to help me process what we were all experiencing. On my personal website, which I newly designed and launched during the pandemic, I started a "Teaching Tips" blog. Here, I consider advantages and disadvantages of some of these strategies. See, for instance, posts on writing weekly letters to students (Vestri, "Sending Students"); on using Google documents combined

with breakout rooms (Vestri, "Google Docs); and on using slideshows to facilitate class discussions (Vestri, "Slideshows").(^)

(2)In early April 2021, just prior to submitting final proofs for this essay, I re-used a screencast I had produced in December 2020. Wanting to offer my exhausted students a "break" from attending our early-morning Zoom sessions, I developed an asynchronous, interactive exercise in Google Docs; the first step on the instructions page directed them to watch this screencast video via a link. Students completed the exercise on their own time and returned later to comment on peers' work. Moving forward, I see the advantage of producing all screencasts without contextualizing information or class-specific commentary, making them more easily available for repurposing. Not only would this strategy save time in subsequent uses of each screencast, but it would also build a catalogue of last-minute alternatives to "live" teaching—just in case of, well, emergencies.(^)

(3)See Lau's essay in this special issue for a detailed discussion of accessibility considerations in light of the emergency remote situation and strategies for ensuring inclusive classrooms.(^)

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