

Research Proposal (student's preliminary notes)

1. *What do I want to study?*

Issues around students' perspectives on writing collaboratively using social networking sites.

2. *Why is the topic important?*

Research in collaborative writing suggests the following:

Collaboration in Composition Studies

- a. The field of composition highly values collaboration throughout the writing process, including in the invention, composing, and revisions stages.
- b. This belief is widely embraced in composition classrooms worldwide.

Benefits of Collaborative Learning in Virtual Spaces:

- c. Recent research demonstrates that collaborative learning in virtual spaces, particularly using visual media, effectively highlights the ongoing nature of composition.
- d. Collaborative writing done exclusively online can be as effective, if not more so, than traditional face-to-face meetings.

Social Nature of Collaborative Writing:

- e. Collaborative writing privileges the social aspects of textual production and reception.
- f. These benefits extend beyond the traditional composition classroom into virtual and online environments.

Challenges with Virtual Spaces:

- g. Students often view popular social networking sites like Facebook as sacred spaces separate from academic contexts.
- h. Instructors in higher education need to acknowledge the growing usage of such sites, even if they were initially considered outside academic boundaries.

Recent research shows how virtual spaces, especially networking sites, may be as beneficial for collaborative learning as face-to-face meetings in higher education, so it is important to study the students' perceptions of using these virtual spaces for collaborative learning opportunities.

3. *Why is it important to me?*

I am interested in exploring what students think about the affordances of collaborative writing on social networking sites, such as Facebook, because I worked as a TA in a writing course, and I noticed that students enjoyed using social media for social activities. However, they didn't see much value in using Facebook to engage in collaborative class assignments, which contradicts the literature cited above.

4. *How is the topic significant within the subject areas covered in my class?*

In my classes, we learned about the benefits and challenges of students' collaboration for learning in higher education. We also reviewed relevant theories on the use of technology, such as virtual spaces for collaborative activities.

5. *What problems will it help solve?*

Although research suggests that university students may benefit from using social media sites for collaborating on their writing tasks, students may consider these spaces exclusively for social interactions and separate from academic spaces. The problem is whether instructors can establish this social space in classrooms while maintaining academic integrity and simultaneously encouraging students to utilize these spaces to fulfill personal *and* academic goals. To accomplish this, instructors need to understand the attitudes that may guide their students' collaborative textual production in these expanding inclusive spaces.

6. *How does it build on research already conducted on the topic?*

By investigating students' attitudes toward *Facebook* in a writing classroom, this study can address a gap in the literature concerning the untapped potential, or indeed lack of potential, for collaborative writing in online social spaces.

7. *What exactly should I plan to do if I wanted to conduct a study on the topic?*

To investigate students' attitudes toward Facebook for collaborative writing activities, I will survey 10-15 students in a first-year undergraduate English writing course for one semester.

Pre-Survey: Topics for Students' Survey Questions (First Week):

- Facebook use and categorization.
- Comparison of written texts on Facebook to class-produced texts.
- Experience with academic collaboration.
- Pre- and post-assignment collaboration attitudes.
- Comfort using Facebook for in-class assignments.
- Quality comparison of work produced on Facebook vs. in-class.

Mid-Survey: After completing the survey, I will conduct a traditional composition lesson with collaboration in class. Following this, I will conduct a mid-semester survey to assess students' attitudes toward collaboration and experiences using Facebook.

Final Collaborative Project:

I will invite students to form their own groups based on whether they want to use Facebook in class to facilitate their collaboration or proceed according to traditional in-class methods.

Post-Surveys: For the groups that decide to use traditional methods, I will provide them with a similar survey to the one described for the mid-semester.

For the groups that decide to use Facebook to collaborate, I will provide them with a survey that asks some combination of the following questions on the following topics:

- a. Collaboration definition.
- b. Pre- and post-assignment attitudes.

- c. Quality comparison of Facebook-produced work.
- d. Effects of Facebook on the collaborative process.
- e. Changes in the definition of collaboration.
- f. Facebook usage (in class and outside).
- g. Willingness to use Facebook for collaboration in other classes.

Data Analysis:

I will compile the survey results to gauge student attitudes towards producing academic texts, collaboration, and *Facebook* usage to see if the class experience has changed attitudes at all. The survey results will be considered independent of student grades or personal consideration of the quality of students' final projects. I am interested in the students' attitudes toward the process, not necessarily the quality of the final product.