Title: Making Learning More Efficient With a Hybrid Course
Author: Doug Ward

Summary: A professor of journalism redesigns an introductory editing course as a hybrid course, eliminating more than 17 hours of in-class time during the semester without hurting student learning. The changes emboldened him to promote course redesign in his department and across the university.

Background

Editing has long been a specialty of the School of Journalism at KU, and I came to KU from *The New York Times* in 2004 to help re-invigorate the program. Like others before me, I teach the class as the application of critical thinking to writing, images, design, the web and other elements of journalism. Editors, and journalists generally, need a broad understanding of history, politics, geography, literature and myriad other things that inform their thinking and help them provide contextual information, challenge shaky assumptions, fill in missing information, and inform audiences authoritatively. John Bremner, a longtime editing professor at KU, used to say that editors need to know something about everything and everything about something, and where to find out what they don't know. I subscribe to much the same philosophy, telling students that editing requires them to draw on all aspects of a liberal arts education as they pursue these course goals:

- Learn to edit copy for correct grammar, usage, style, spelling and punctuation, as well as for accuracy, fairness and bias.
- Learn to recognize lapses in logic and judgment, and to ask appropriate questions about missing information.
- Learn to organize stories sensibly and to better understand how words, numbers and images work together to form a coherent package.
- Learn to distinguish between the approaches used in print, online and broadcast media.
- Learn to be more critical consumers of news and information.

When I took over Multimedia Editing in Spring 2005, the course used a combination of lecture and labs. The lecture section met once a week at 8 a.m., often in a dark, windowless room in the Dole Center, an environment that inhibited students' ability to pay attention. Professors led students through material they were supposed to have read, although there was evidence to suggest that this wasn't always the case. Instructors' tendency to summarize assigned material in lecture further removed the incentive for students to complete the out-of-class reading. To encourage students to attend class prepared, instructors gave a 20-minute quiz that focused on rote recall of grammar, usage, punctuation, and current events.

I was never totally comfortable with the lecture format. Editing works best in a hands-on learning environment. I adapted to it, though, and even excelled in my ability to engage students and to help them understand the rationale behind editing rather than just explaining what they should have understood from the readings. Students frequently commented, in person and on class evaluations, about my ability to inspire them and help them understand various aspects of

editing. Lectures certainly helped with that inspiration, but I continued to question the role lecture played in helping students achieve the course goals.

I continued to use the lecture section, largely because Multimedia Editing is team-taught. It usually has 45 to 60 students each semester. All the students met together for the lecture, which contributed to continuity among the sections, and then attended one of three or four lab sections of 12 to 18 students. I coordinated the lectures, covering many of the topics myself but also drawing on other instructors' areas of expertise. I also coordinated the quizzes and lab exercises, again to help maintain continuity among the sections.

After receiving tenure in Spring 2010, I felt greater freedom to modify the course. My ideas about changing the course format began to percolate after the Teaching Summit in Fall 2011, and I began to test those ideas in Spring 2012 as I taught another course online for the first time. As I grew more comfortable with the online format I realized I could use the same techniques in Multimedia Editing, allowing students to learn concepts, editing guidelines and theory at their own pace online and then apply their learning critically while in lab.

I approached the redesign of Multimedia Editing with two primary questions:

1. Would the hybrid format be as effective as lecture in helping students meet course goals?
2. How would students respond to the online material, and would they complete the assigned work?

In Fall 2012, I converted Multimedia Editing to a hybrid course, eliminating the lecture and using online videos and a student discussion board instead. (Two other instructors who taught three other lab sections used the online material I created.) I had always used Blackboard to post readings and a class schedule, so evolving to a hybrid format was fairly easy, especially since the course goals remained the same. Using Camtasia and Captivate on my PC and an app called Explain Everything on my iPad, I created one to three online videos for each week and posted them on the course Blackboard site. In the videos, which ranged from 5 to 20 minutes, I covered material that previously would have been delivered in lecture. In only one did I appear on screen. In the others, I recorded my voice over PowerPoint slides or a blank screen, writing or drawing to make points.

Rather than having students turn in paper copies of observations and summaries from the videos and readings, I had them post their work on Blackboard. I also shortened the quizzes, moving them to the lab and making them open-book. The lab format stayed mostly the same, although I used students' online work to judge comprehension of the readings and videos and to see problems in writing and editing before lab.

Both before and after the redesign, lab sections met in a computer lab in Stauffer-Flint Hall. I had already been using an active learning approach in labs, leading discussions about concepts of editing, having students work through exercises on their own and in groups, and working through completed exercises with the class by having students speak about changes they had made to stories, about the headlines and summaries they had written, or about the graphics they had created.

Implementation

I had long used active learning in Multimedia Editing, and I worked to preserve that element of the course. Active learning encourages students to develop their critical thinking skills by seeking creative solutions to problems and by taking a proactive approach to their education rather than waiting for instructors to tell them what they need to know.

In contrast to a lecture approach, a hybrid class contains elements of active learning. In the case of Multimedia Editing, students set their own schedules for watching video lectures, completing readings and posting responses online before lab. Rather than simply sitting in a classroom and listening, students set the pace of working through the course material, stopping videos whenever they wanted, or replaying portions they had trouble understanding.

To revamp my Blackboard site for the class, I worked with John Hindes, an instructional designer at the Center for Online and Distance Learning. I had used Blackboard extensively for several years, posting readings, handouts, assignments, and other material. John provided a fresh perspective on the structure of the course on Blackboard, encouraging me to make several elements of the site clearer to students. With his help, I streamlined the menu, added objectives for each week, and created a module structure that separated each week's material into a logical progression. I explain the structure on Blackboard in a video that CODL helped me create.

Changes in labs
Labs in Multimedia Editing had always focused on active learning, and a flipped approach for the class re-enforced that. By having students post online responses to readings questions, I was able to review their work beforehand and draw on it during lab. That allowed me to identify problems in student work and display examples on screen for class discussion while the material was still fresh in students' minds.
The weekly quiz for the class also changed. In previous semesters, students took a two-page, closed-book quiz that instructors handed out at the beginning of the lecture period. Those quizzes covered grammar and usage, spelling, style, current events and general knowledge (things like geography, math, and state, national, and world leaders). In the remade course, I gave a truncated single-page quiz at the beginning of the first lab session each week and allowed students to use their reference books. In today's electronic world, students don't need to memorize information; rather, they need to know where and how to look it up. So I used the quizzes to help students learn where to search for basic information about grammar, punctuation, spelling, and style. I kept the paper format for the quiz, in part so students didn't have access to spell-check on their computers.

Creation of videos for the course
Ultimately, I created more than 20 videos for Multimedia Editing. I kept my tone informal and included humor in the videos whenever possible, just as I do when I lecture. Only once did I put myself on screen. I wanted students to focus on the material, which was often in PowerPoint form. Most videos were 10 minutes or less, but a few ran to 15 to 20 minutes.

I found that the videos helped me form a connection with students. In lab, students chuckled about sequences of the videos they liked or raised questions about things they were unsure of.

Students in other professors' sections of the class sometimes spoke to me as if they knew me, even though we had never met. They had watched my videos for the class, though. Those experiences mesh with the findings of a study by the Community College Research Center at Columbia University. In that study, students expressed a strong preference for instructor-created audio and video material in online courses, saying those videos and podcasts helped create a better sense of connection.

This was much the same as it had been when the class had a weekly lecture. Students in all sections of the class got to know me during the semester, even though I knew most of them only by face, not by name. In the end, I found that the online videos worked as well as, or better than, lecture in engaging students across multiple sections and helping them feel a part of a larger class.

These two videos, which I uploaded to KU's MediaHub and embedded on Blackboard, provide a sense of the style and format I used in my course. They also conformed to the maximum length I was aiming for (about 10 minutes or less).

Student Work

Results of the changes
The first question I sought to answer in remaking Multimedia Editing was whether the hybrid format would be as effective as lecture in helping students achieve the course goals. Based on average grades of quizzes and exercises, the answer is yes. The average quiz grade of 86.6 percent was in line with averages from the three previous semesters I taught the course.

Comparison of quiz grades over four semesters

	Fall 2012 (hybrid)	Spring 2011 (lecture and lab)	Spring 2010* (lecture and lab)	Fall 2009 (lecture and lab)
Average quiz grade for all students in lab	86.6%	85.8%	89.1%	86.6%
Median quiz grade	88.2	85.9	88.5	86.4
# of students	18	12	16	17

*Semester with additional honors students

The average grade on exercises was slightly lower than that of previous semesters, but two factors skew those scores. In Fall 2012, two students stopped coming to lab late in the semester and completed the online work only sporadically. One of those students had been doing well until late in the semester. Ultimately, both received D's. No students earned D's in any of the three previous semesters. In Spring 2010, five of the 16 students were in the Honors Program, and grades that semester were higher than usual. I had one honors student in Fall 2012.

Comparison of exercise grades over four semesters

	Fall 2012 (hybrid)	Spring 2011 (lecture and lab)	Spring 2010* (lecture and lab)	Fall 2009 (lecture and lab)
Lab average	80%	81.4%	84.1%	81.4%
Median exercise grade	81.2	83.1	86.2	81.45
# of students	18	12	16	17

*Semester with additional honors students

Examples from the online discussion board
In grading the questions I posted on the Blackboard discussion board, I used a rubric with a three-point scale. If students' answers demonstrated understanding of the material and the writing was clear, organized, and grammatically correct, they received two points, which was

full credit for the assignment. If they demonstrated some understanding of the material or had many grammatical errors, they received one point. If they failed to do the assignment, they received a zero.

In general the answers students posted on the online discussion board were good. I wanted them to explain themselves succinctly, accurately and grammatically, and most did, as in these examples:

Examples of exercises
Class exercises are intended to simulate professional journalistic work, and they account for the bulk of students' grade in Multimedia Editing. They are open-book exercises, and students are free to use whatever resources they wish, including the Internet. Early in the semester, the exercises consist of sentences with an error or two each. About three weeks into the semester, students begin editing short articles. Then they move to longer articles, then to summaries, headlines, cutlines, and graphics. By the end of the semester, students must edit stories and then write a headline, a summary, a cutline, and a tweet for those stories.

Most of the stories they edit are ones I or other instructors have created. They are sometimes based on real stories, but more often they are fictional stories into which we have introduced many errors. Those errors include the basics of grammar, punctuation, and usage that students see on quizzes, but the exercises require more sophisticated skills, including news judgment, an eye for structure and tone, the ability to spot potentially libelous or tasteless passages, and the ability to fix errors without damaging the story.

As I say above, the grades on these exercises were somewhat lower in the semester I switched to a hybrid format, though I don't think class format had much to do with that. Rather, the reduction in class average resulted from two students, out of 18, who experienced personal problems and turned in low-level work or stopped showing up for class.

I didn't use a rubric in grading the exercises, though a handout called An Editing Checklist comes close. It lists common problems students need to identify and understand how to fix in articles they edit. As the name suggests, most of the material is in checklist form, and I encourage students to go through the list each time they edit a story. I leave blanks on the checklist so students can add their own elements they frequently miss or want to make sure they catch.

Other handouts I've created also help students identify problems and learn the skills of professional editors.

- Words of Clarity, a short e-book on grammar and usage;
- An AP Style Primer; and,
- Handouts on writing headlines and cutlines.

One of my websites, KUEditing.org, also contains examples intended to help students and professionals improve their work. Combined with an *Associated Press Stylebook*, these

resources provide guidelines for editing, as well as for summarizing information, and writing headlines and cutlines.

These are examples of student work on the class exercises. As much as possible, I have students turn in their work as PDFs so I can grade with an iPad app that allows me to combine traditional written comments with recorded voice feedback; I wrote about this for the ProfHacker section of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. The voice comments provide several benefits:

- They allow me to go into more depth than I otherwise would with written comments, largely because they are faster and easier to provide.
  They help make the feedback more palatable. Written comments, especially when done hastily, are easy to misinterpret. With voice comments, I can use the tone of my voice to encourage students even as I point out flaws in their work.
- They provide an additional personal connection with students. I address students by name at the beginning of my voice comments and then give specific feedback, just as I would in a one-on-one session with students in my office.
- They speed up the return of papers. Once I've graded the student work, I can email the PDFs back to students immediately so that they don't have to wait until class time to get the papers back.

Examples of In-Class Exercise Responses

Spotting weaknesses earlier
The second question I sought to answer was whether the hybrid format would help me spot students' problem areas before class and allow richer discussions in lab. In general, it did. I graded students' online discussions before class and chose examples of both strong and weak work to discuss in class. With the strong examples, I identified students by name, showed their work on screen, and had them explain their thinking and their reasoning so that others could learn from their techniques. I spread the recognition around as much as possible and most students responded well.

I kept the weak examples – those with poor grammar, spelling, and other issues we were focusing on in the class – anonymous. I explained that I wasn't interested in embarrassing anyone or in denigrating them in any way. Rather, I wanted everyone to be aware that they needed to apply to their own writing the things we were working on in class. Working from anonymous weak examples worked well. Even though I didn't put names on these examples, students recognized their own writing. Several times, they whispered to classmates that the work was theirs and that they didn't want their work held up as a bad example again. Other times, they told the entire class that the work was theirs and asked about ways to improve. The method motivated some students to improve the quality of their responses, and I did notice fewer errors in that work after a few weeks.

The student's writing showed an excellent grasp of the subjects I included in my videos, readings, and handouts that week, and I had the student talk about how she wrote the entry: Did she take notes? How did she decide what to include? What made her think of the anecdote? The goal was to help others hear from a peer about methods they could use to improve their work.

Below are a few sentences or parts of sentences I used to illustrate work that needed to be improved. I did not identify the students whose work this was drawn from. Rather, I used the examples to spur discussion about improving thinking, reasoning, writing, and editing.

- Subject-verb agreement
  If an editor or reporter isn't skeptical, they could end up looking like a fool.

- Grammar: *as* vs. *like*
  Like it says in "What is libel" from the Media Law Resource center,

- Grammar and tightening
  The main reason it is important for an editor to always be skeptical is because …

- Spelling and homophones
  Liable is, according to our readings, a false statement against a person or company that causes harm to them

- Logic
  I've never heard that he had shoplifted, so it must not be a widely known fact.

I had used a similar technique for several years, drawing from assignments that students handed in physically. The online assignments allowed me to see students' work sooner and to give them feedback more quickly, making the examples I used in class fresher. Rather than waiting a week or more before talking about assignments, I was able to do so within a day or two after students completed those assignments.

Student response to online material
The third question I sought to answer was how students would respond to the online material. Most offered favorable comments. At the beginning of the semester, I explained the new class format and told students that the material online had taken the place of a course format with 8 a.m. lectures. If they didn't complete that online work, I said, we could always return to the 8 a.m. lecture format. (That semester there was still a space set aside for an 8 a.m. lecture in case the hybrid format wasn't well received.) I also encouraged students to talk with me about any concerns or problems they had. Several times in class during the semester, I asked students about how the format was working, whether they were having any particular problems or whether there were things I could do to improve the online assignments. I never received a complaint or even an ambivalent comment. Rather, students said they liked the format, especially because we were able to use lab time for discussion and one-on-one work.

Analytics from Blackboard and completion rates of online assignments suggest success in student engagement. Students were required to post responses on an online discussion board on 12 of the 16 weeks during the semester. They completed more than 90 percent of posts, with eight of the 18 students accounting for all the missed posts. Analytics for classroom videos likewise suggest student engagement with the online material, with most videos viewed at least once and some of them twice or even three times during the semester.

Owing to technical difficulties I didn't get usable analytics data for Fall 2012, but I went back after Spring 2013 and collected statistics for the entire 2012-2013 year. During those two semesters, most class videos were viewed more than 100 times, and two were viewed more than 250 times. Those numbers include the first and second semester of the hybrid class, which had 45 to 50 students each semester. The analytics suggest that students viewed the videos early in the semester more than once:

What Is Editing? (303 views)
What to Look for When Editing (253 views)
The Importance of Clarity (215 views)

The number of views on later videos was lower, but still averaged more than 100.

Reflections

The hybrid format was really more of an evolution than a revolution in my teaching style. Without calling what I did "hybrid" or "flipped," I had already been using such a format in Multimedia Editing for several years. The benefit of the redesigned course, though, is that it eliminated 70 minutes of scheduled class time each week -- a total of 17.5 hours over the semester -- without hurting student learning. In effect, the new format had made learning much more efficient.

I didn't cut down on the required assignments, though I condensed 15 weeks of lecture into 3 hours, 42 minutes of videos that students watched online. Students were able to work through those videos and other online material when and where they wanted, rather than when and where the department had scheduled a lecture each week.

The hybrid format didn't cut down on time I spent preparing for class or on grading, but it did allow me to use class time to focus on problem areas that emerged in online work. I spent more time working with students individually or in small groups than I had in previous semesters. I made a conscious effort to do that, although having much of the coursework online certainly helped me carve out more time with students. In previous semesters, I usually spoke with the class for about a third of the lab time and then had students work on assignments I had prepared for them. I rarely engaged them as they worked. Without the lecture, I found myself wanting to reach out to students, and I generally pulled them aside individually to discuss their work. In that regard, the switch to the hybrid format was an unqualified success. I made excellent use of my time with students, and continue to evaluate the way I interact with students.

My experiences line up with those reported in an extensive study by Ithaka S+R. That study found that learning among college students was about the same whether they enrolled in traditional or hybrid courses. The only real difference, the study found, was that students enrolled in hybrid courses completed work more quickly than those in a traditional class. I found much the same thing, in part because I was able to compress 50 to 75 minutes of lecture material into two or three videos of 5 to 20 minutes. As a result, students completed the course material about two weeks earlier than they had in the past. That allowed me more time to work with them individually during the latter part of the course.

I spoke with students frequently about the hybrid format, explaining my expectations and their need to complete the work before they came to lab, and asking for their feedback and suggestions. Almost uniformly, I received positive feedback. However, I received mixed reviews from the two other instructors who taught Multimedia Editing that semester. One embraced the approach and has carried it forward as she has taken over the class. Another disliked the hybrid approach and echoed the skepticism that others in my school have put forward: that a common lecture creates more uniformity in the content of a multi-section course, improves course planning, and removes doubts that students have been exposed to material.

I see their point, but I simply don't see it as a valid reason to add 17-plus hours of in-class time to a course each semester. Instructors who teach different sections of a class can still meet and plan course material, talk over issues in student learning, and make adjustments in their courses.

I also disagree with another common argument I hear: that all courses should cover the same material in the same way. All instructors have different strengths, and forcing them to take an identical approach runs the risk of weakening an instructor's individual strengths and diminishing enthusiasm for the material. Common courses should indeed have common goals, but instructors need latitude to reach those goals in a way that best helps their students.

A hybrid structure also offers another benefit: Once it is in place, the format allows for other instructors to step into a class easily and draw on resources that have already been created or compiled. Instructors can easily add their own material, as well. In other words, it makes a course or curriculum communal property. That no doubt rankles the sensibilities of some faculty members who see course material as individual intellectual property. I agree to some extent, but I also have no problem sharing any or all of my course materials. The individuality in those course materials comes from my ability to shape them apply them during the semester. If others use my materials, they may benefit from the structure I have created, but they will still apply those materials in an individual way.

The hybrid approach I used in Multimedia Editing gained the attention of my dean and other instructors in the School of Journalism. Some were doubtful of the approach and still are; but others began to reconsider. The associate dean has also insisted that other team-taught classes use a hybrid approach, in part because of the success of Multimedia Editing. So I've begun to see a ripple effect from my work with hybrid learning, and I've consulted with several faculty members about their courses. Late in the spring, faculty members began asking for more information about hybrid and online course creation, so I have led many workshops around the university. Additionally, my work gained the attention of the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE), where I became a fellow and then the associate director. I also edited and wrote much of a 2014 university report on course redesign, laying out an argument for widespread adoption of flipped and hybrid courses, and I now write frequently for CTE's blog, Bloom's Sixth, about the need to innovate our approach to teaching in higher education.

Given my experiences with hybrid learning, I have no interest in using a lecture format again. I was never fond of lectures, either as an instructor or a student. They promote passivity among students and give the impression that an instructor knows everything about a topic. That was always a fallacy, of course, but in an age of instant information, that sort of thinking has become almost comical. In this new world, a teacher's role should be that of a fellow learner, providing thought-provoking course material, raising cogent questions, and helping students find answers to problems they identify. That's certainly the direction I plan to head in my teaching.