Chapter 31
What Now? Shifting Our Colleagues’ Perceptions of Digital Writing

Troy Hicks
Central Michigan University, USA

ABSTRACT
Though many teachers, including the authors in this collection, are incorporating digital writing tools and making significant changes in their instruction, too many other teachers are not. Based on the results of a Pew Internet and National Writing Project survey, this chapter explores six skills that a majority of writing teachers describe as “essential” or “important.” Building on the premise that all teachers want their students to learn these skills, this chapter describes strategies for how digital writing tools could be used in that capacity. With examples such as alternative search engines, creating a personal learning network, modeling the digital writing process, and understanding the dimensions of fair use, copyright, and citation, the chapter provides entry points for all teachers - even those unsure about why or how to use particular technologies - to begin teaching digital writing.

INTRODUCTION
A wise mentor once described a strategy to solving problems based on three simple questions. First, we might ask “what?” as a way to define and clarify the problem. Then, we might ask “so what?” as a way to determine significance with various aspects of the problem or potential outcomes. Finally, we might ask “now what?” as a way to identify solutions and move forward.

My mentor would use this as a framework in his own classroom, as well as during staff meetings and professional development sessions. He used it as a way to honor the voices in the room and build relationships. By hearing various perspectives on a problem, as well as the implications each stakeholder has, we would be able to progress toward an efficient, reasonable solution.

So, at this end of this collection on digital writing, it is easy to see that we have been presented with many answers to all three of these questions. To answer the “what” question, the authors in this volume have demonstrated our immediate need to shift instruction and assessment practices toward

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-5982-7.ch031
digital writing. Given the variety of tools, from tablets to smartphones to cloud-based collaborative services, there is no doubt that we need to move toward more holistic and comprehensive uses of technologies in literacy instruction.

The “so what” question adds a number of additional layers, including our need to prepare students for college and career, to meet new educational standards, to engage multiple literacies – and in the broadest sense – to promote student engagement. For me, these layers can be understood through new theoretical lenses such as the New London Group’s “Pedagogy of Multiliteracies” (2000), Lankshear and Knobel’s “New Literacies” (2011), or Mishra and Koehler’s “Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge” (2006), though I will not delve too deeply into these frameworks here.

Additionally, we can look to our professional organizations who have encouraged us to explore these new layers of digital writing in robust ways. For instance, in the work that I contributed to the National Writing Project book *Because Digital Writing Matters* (2010), I interviewed nearly 20 educators from around the country and developed vignettes that described the ways that they moved beyond merely using technology and, instead, taught the rhetorical and technical skills associated with digital writing. I have since worked with many more teachers, and thousands have shared their own experiences through blog posts, videos, Websites, journal articles, and conference presentations, as well as in this volume. In short, many teachers are taking up the call to teach digital writing in serious ways, and I applaud their efforts.

Finally, we might consider the “now what” question. In many ways, this entire collection has, indeed, already done a tremendous job of answering that question by providing numerous teaching strategies, technology tools, and emerging media and genres for us to consider. We are moving forward as all the chapters leading us to this conclusion have demonstrated.

Yet, we know that many teachers are, for any number of reasons, not moving forward with digital writing. You know these colleagues. They are the ones who claim that students only fool around in the computer lab, or that it takes too long to find things online, or that we cannot count on a Website being there to function from one day to the next. They are the ones who, with all the right intentions, may avoid using computers for fear of not appearing to be an expert in front of their students. I understand that many of the robust, multifaceted digital writing practices described in this book will take a certain amount of risk-taking, and that could make many of our colleagues uncomfortable.

So, instead of asking “now what,” I want to pause, to reframe, and to ask “what now?” as a way of looking closely at where we are at as a profession. I do this not as a play on words. Nor do I do this to take away from the outstanding work presented in this volume. Instead, I want to look at a snapshot from the broader state of our field based on a recent survey of the ways in which teachers described their attitudes and beliefs toward digital writing. It is critical that you – as someone interested in digital writing and the positive effects it can have on instruction, assessment, and achievement – understand what many more of our colleagues are thinking when it comes to using technology in their classrooms. We must recognize their immediate needs: to teach those critical components of writing instruction. Only by helping them meet these needs will we be able to help, at least initially, to shift their perceptions about digital writing.

Thus, my sincere hope is that if any of the strategies described in this book heretofore do not sound like one’s that your colleagues might try, then perhaps the ones I outline in this final chapter will be a starting point to open the conversation on digital writing. And, I outline them based on principles of good writing instruction, principles on which we can all agree. These are