Course Title: Writing Skills
Department: English and American Studies
Students: Students enrolled in this class belong to one of two groups. Either they are studying English as part of their Education degree to become English teachers, or they are double majoring in English and a second subject.

Teaching Concept: The Writing Process
Because the majority of students report never having taken a writing course before, they are often unfamiliar with the concept of the writing process. They have experience writing academic texts in German, but their experience regarding academic texts in English is usually limited to timed writing responses with little to no feedback. Therefore, the task of writing essays or term papers in English as part of their studies is an extremely difficult one for many students.

The writing process consists of five stages: pre-writing, writing, revising, editing, and receiving feedback. However, the process is not a linear one and often involves a writer moving back and forth between the stages. Therefore, students need not only learn what’s involved in the various stages but that it’s normal - and, in fact, necessary - to weave between them at the speed, pace, and order that is unique to them and their process.

Why did you choose a digitized form of teaching?
I chose to supplement my course (and specifically the concept of the writing process) with digital tools for three main reasons: time, individualization, and self-efficacy.

Time: As every educator knows, there is never enough time. Although we discuss the writing process together in class, there are so many concepts and elements that need to be covered throughout the semester that I am not able to dedicate as much time as I would like to - specifically when it comes to guiding the students. Supplementing that guidance with digital tools relieves the burden of being limited to 90 minutes each week.

For Example: Students submit their topic and pre-writing notes (via Kaizena), and I provide them feedback there. Because this is done digitally, the student receives my notes much quicker and I don’t lose any class time.
Individualization: Because the writing process itself is highly individualized, the use of digital tools complements that process. Students can focus on the stage they need to work on at any given time, they can move through those stages at their own pace, they can access helpful resources specific to where they are in the process, and they can move fluidly between the stages of the writing process in the manner that works for them. They are also able to receive personalized feedback from me via the digital tools.

For Example: Students work through the HyperDoc at their own pace, meaning they can move through the writing process at the speed that fits their needs.

Self-Efficacy: All of the digital tools I use promote self-efficacy, which is extremely important for students as they move into higher modules and are expected to do more with less hands-on instruction. Because they work with the digital tools in my class, they are better equipped to work independently on the writing process of longer and more complex texts such as term papers and even theses.

For Example: The digital tools that I use allow me to give audiovisual feedback, so students are able to hear my voice. This allows me to give more comprehensive feedback, which in turn allows the students to better understand the logic behind my feedback, which results in them feeling more confident in their ability to implement the feedback.

How do you digitally support your teaching (what are the specific digital tools)?

HyperDocs: The HyperDoc is a file created in Google Docs that provides students with an overview of and resources for the various stages of the writing process. Embedded within the HyperDoc are links to resources (such as videos, websites, and documents), due date reminders, and a column wherein students can track their progress if they save/download a copy for themselves.

Google Docs: In the pre-writing stage, students can collaborate with each other on their research (and practice formatting) by adding interesting sources they found in a shared Google Doc.

Google Forms: These are embedded in the HyperDoc, and I use them to provide students with practice activities. For example, one of them is designed to help with brainstorming, and students can see their classmates’ responses after submitting their own answers. Another one is designed to help them refine their formatting skills, and because I am able to add correct/incorrect responses and feedback comments, the students receive immediate feedback on whether or not they formatted the sample sources correctly.

Kaizena: Students submit all of their assignments (from pre-writing through the final draft) in Kaizena. This eliminates the need to print anything out, and allows me to provide feedback much faster because students don’t have to wait until the following class. I provide them both
written and audio feedback, and I am able to link them to helpful resources. For example, if they have not quoted a source correctly, I can highlight that sentence and link it to a resource that provides instruction on citing sources. The students are able to ask me questions directly within their document or reply to my feedback (either written or verbally), and they can ask each other questions in the class chat room.

Screencast-o-Matic: Students receive written/audio feedback comments from me in Kaizena, but they also receive a feedback video via Screencast-o-Matic. In the video, I provide the student with an overall assessment of their essay, and if needed, I can even demonstrate revision suggestions for them, point out specific passages, or show them how to do things (such as changing the margins or adding a hanging indent). Their videos, along with a rubric, are linked in the document in Kaizena, so all of their feedback is in one place. I also have students use Screencast-o-Matic themselves in our last class of the semester to create a helpful video on a specific element of the writing process for the next semester’s class.

What advantages do you see for your students and for yourself?

For the students:
- They can work at their own pace.
- They can focus on the areas that they need to focus on.
- They can develop their listening and speaking skills in English, even though the focus is on writing.
- They are able to receive feedback in a much quicker and more efficient manner.
- They can replay their feedback videos as often as needed.
- They are able to have a dialogue with me about their essays whenever the timing is convenient for them - there is no need to come to my office.
- They are able to familiarize themselves with a number of digital tools and websites that they can use in their future studies and in their future teaching careers.
- The variety of digital tools allows me to engage each of the different learning styles.
- They don’t have to print anything out.
- They develop time management skills as they are responsible for setting the pace at which they work. They only have intermittent deadlines.
- They are able to develop a degree of self-efficacy regarding the writing process.

For me:
- I have more time in class to cover the individual elements of writing, such as the parts of an essay, organizational structures, passive voice, etc.
- I can give more comprehensive and individualized feedback to each student.
- I can take on a more facilitative role in their writing processes instead of an authoritative one.
- My feedback workload is more spread out as students submit their pre-writing notes and rough drafts at different points throughout the semester, which means I am not overwhelmed with everyone’s submissions at the same time.