Author conversations
On writing for a digital platform

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We did a big redesign at my institution where we redesigned our Introductory Psychology class and used technology. I have this vivid moment in my mind of sitting in my office after three years of work on redesigning our Introductory Psychology class, and we're about to hit the button on the data. Like, did this improve learning outcomes, and what happened to our D, F, W rate? Like, how many students got a D, or an F, or withdrew from the class. And I'm about to click the button, and I remember like — my heart's pounding, I'm sweating, and I'm like, did it work? Did it not work? Did I just spend three years of my life on nothing? And I clicked the button, and it turned out our D, F, W rate went down by 10%. And when you have 2500 students, that was like 250 students passed that class successfully that did not the previous year. And then it was like this idea: if I can do this here, the technology is now such that maybe we could do this for thousands more.

When you're writing for a digital-first product, it's kind of an interesting process where you sit down and you think, 'here's my learning objective: I want students to understand this social psychology concept.' But then you think about like, yes, I could explain it in my writing or author kind-of voice. Or I could have students watch something. Or I could have students do something. Or I could have students do some combination of those things.

There's so many options available to you, that you're literally trying to design what's the best way for students to learn this concept given all the options that we have available to us in the technology world. And so it's kind of culling through, and looking at the research. Like what does science of learning tell us about what's the best way for a student to learn a particular concept. And so it kind of adds a whole other dimension about how you're authoring. No longer am I just writing. I'm also thinking about what can I have a student do, and what's the best option for me in this environment.

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