

# Composition Flipped: A Textbook Alternative

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*The one thing that I say to my students on the first day of class that garners the most enthusiastic response is that they do not have to buy a textbook for the course. Sometimes they actually cheer at this announcement. I then go on to explain that, instead, I have provided a “free, online, interactive textbook created specifically for them.” This resource for my composition courses is otherwise known as Composition Flipped.*

## An Online Textbook

As the name implies, *Composition Flipped* is my answer to creating a so-called flipped classroom where students are asked to prepare material from the website I have created *before* coming to class, so that we can then engage in more collaborative activities together where we can benefit most from being in the same room together. The truth of the matter is, though, that this website has grown into something larger than a storehouse of video lectures for students to watch before our class meeting.

The *Composition Flipped* site does include weekly lesson prep materials—a multi-page lesson per week—that students are asked to work through step-by-step *before* the class meetings of the upcoming week. These materials may include my direct writings and videos to them, outside readings, multimedia content, and opportunities to interact via discussion or online comments—all in preparation for the in-class work to come. This is not general, stock material, but rather content I have created and curated specifically for the class exactly matched to our in-class progression through the semester. It is, in this sense, a custom textbook of my own creation geared to the specific needs of my students. In keeping with best practices in classroom flipping, this material is complementary to our in-class collaborative work, and not repetitive. Students are held accountable to apply this information in class, and are therefore motivated to work through it. Boiled down, it’s akin to having them do the “reading” prior to a class meeting; however, in this case, it is interactive and the online nature allows for a certain degree of tracking. (I can at least see if they’ve logged in and visited the pages, and I can ask that they complete simple “mastery” quizzes or make some online comments after each lesson prep.) Of course, in addition to providing “textbook” material, *Composition Flipped* also houses the course syllabus, schedule, and other important course documents. All the essential content material is always there ready to access whenever students need it.

## A Communication Hub

While *Composition Flipped* is a customized online textbook of sorts, it is also a communication hub for our course. There are easy tools for students to contact me, to schedule conferences, and to communicate with one another. There are realtime chat features and group discussion spaces (when needed for special projects), and each student can securely and privately access their personal grade report throughout the course. The website also uses a “Commonplace” where students post their draft work and revisions for peer review and for ease of access as the course progresses. Everything stays in one place, and in this sense, students are co-authors of our shared textbook that has an audience of their peers.

It also provides the ability for me to push communication to the students beyond our face-to-face interactions, which proves very useful, allowing us to stay connected between course meetings. This alone helps greatly in student success.

## The Underlying Tech

What I have described here can certainly be accomplished using most any learning management system (LMS) such as Canvas. I have chosen, however, to build my own through WordPress and a number of custom extensions. This gives me the greatest amount of control over the course tools and functionality that I provide to my students.

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## A Screen Shot

Below is a screen shot of the “current lesson” page that students will see when they log into the site each time. The content here changes week to week to reflect the material they should be working on in preparation for the week to come. It is very easy for students to see what they should be reading and working on at any moment throughout the course.

Not shown in the screen shot below (lower on the page) is the clickable steps the students must page through to complete the prep material for the week. It’s intuitive and right in front of them each time they log in.

The screenshot displays the 'Composition flipped' website. At the top, there's a navigation bar with tabs: Syllabus, Schedule, **Current Lesson**, Readings/Assignments, Gradebook, Contacts/Discussion, and Commonplace. The main content area is titled 'Prep Week 1: Getting Started'. It features a 'Note from the Instructor' box with a red border, a yellow box for 'Regarding First Week Scheduling', and 'Lesson 1 Objectives'. A red button 'Schedule a Conference' is visible on the right sidebar. The sidebar also includes a 'Welcome, Prof McGuire' section with links to Profile and Logout, a 'Meet with the Professor' section, 'Your Flip Points' showing 2560, an 'Access Code' field, a 'Filter by Week' dropdown, and a 'Get Text Message Reminders' section.

## For More Information

If you want to see more, or have questions about my approach with *Composition Flipped*, just let me know. I'd be happy to chat further.

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