

**Ready for Launch: Incorporating the LaunchPad Solo for Journalism Resource in a
Writing-Intensive Course**

**Ginger Orton & Dr. Courtney Meyers
Texas Tech University**

**Box 42131
Lubbock, TX 79409
806-742-2816
gorton@ttu.edu**

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Introduction/ Need for Innovation

Both scholarship and industry feedback highlight a gap between the writing competency of a college graduate and the expected writing skill of an employee (Morgan & Rucker, 2013). This skill gap is especially troublesome for educators in programs that intend to create professional writers, such as an agricultural communications program. Students enrolled in writing-centric classes struggle disproportionately with the more complex, nuanced mechanics of writing, like punctuation, grammar, and spelling, because these skills require both memorization of rules and correct situational application (Lunsford & Lunsford, 2008). Although developing writers frequently make mistakes of this nature, the goal of a writing course is to create independent writers with high levels of self-efficacy. One way to achieve this is through self-assessment quizzes, which have been linked to increases in self-efficacy and in turn greater performance and understanding of expected outcomes (Bissel & Collins, 2004). Online quizzes are an accessible, effective way to assign deliberate practice and impart these essential skills an adept writer possesses (Anderson, et al., 2012; Babon & Cook, 2017; Davis, et al., 2011).

This poster presents the use of LaunchPad Solo for Journalism as an online quiz platform to encourage mastery of journalistic writing skills, specifically the acquisition of punctuation, grammar, and spelling skills, that are historically nuanced and difficult to master. The purpose of this innovative idea was to integrate this software into an undergraduate agricultural communications course as a resource for students to take quizzes intended to improve their writing ability and encourage retention of concepts presented in the accompanying textbook.

How it Works

Students were required to purchase a textbook package that included the *Working with Words* textbook and an online access code to LaunchPad Solo for Journalism. This online platform contains quizzes, videos, worksheets, and additional resources to supplement the *Working with Words* textbook along with another textbook, *News Reporting & Writing*. The instructor worked with the textbook company representative to set up the online course platform. Students could then search for the course and sign in to take the required quizzes. The system displayed due dates the instructor added in the system that matched what was in the syllabus.

During the semester, we assigned 14 quizzes for credit and another 10 optional quizzes for extra credit. Each week, the instructor assigned chapters to read that aligned with other coursework and an accompanying quiz in LaunchPad Solo. The quizzes were about grammar, spelling, and punctuation concepts such as subject verb agreement, comma splices, pronoun case, collective nouns, verb tense, punctuation, that vs. which, and Associate Press style basics. Most assigned quizzes contained 10 multiple choice questions. However, some quizzes in the system had as few as 5 questions, while others had as many as 20. The instructor assigned a standard score of 10 points for each quiz regardless of how many questions were asked. The assigned quizzes were automatically graded, so students immediately knew their scores. If they missed a question, LaunchPad Solo referred them to a specific chapter and topic within the book, so they could review why the response was incorrect.

Results to Date/ Implications

To gather feedback about using LaunchPad Solo, students enrolled in the course during the Fall 2020 semester ($N = 26$) completed a brief online questionnaire administered through Qualtrics™. The questionnaire gathered insights about the perceived ease of use, effectiveness, and benefits of integrating LaunchPad Solo in the course. A graduate research assistant administered the questionnaire during the last week of classes with the incentive of 10 points extra credit. Students were reassured the instructor would not see names connected to results.

Results indicated that students perceived LaunchPad Solo provided the most improvement in their ability to punctuate properly, with an improved understanding of grammar rules second. Nearly 7 out of 10 respondents (69%, $n = 18$) said the program was easy or extremely easy to use, while 19% ($n = 5$) reported it was difficult to use, and 12% ($n = 3$) said it was neither easy nor difficult. Another question on the instrument asked how often students used their textbook to help with quizzes, which had varied results. Slightly more than half ($n = 15$, 58%) of respondents used the book on 50% or more of the quizzes, while 42% ($n = 11$) of respondents reported they used the book on 30% or less of the quizzes.

Students responded to two open-ended questions to determine the most and least beneficial components of LaunchPad Solo. The same benefits were mentioned throughout responses and included ease of use, accessibility, the short length of quizzes, the reinforcement of “tricky” rules, immediate feedback, and that it directed students to corresponding book chapters when an answer was incorrect. When prompted to share the least beneficial components, students largely mentioned the same component – that the quizzes did not indicate why an answer was incorrect and provided no feedback other than where to find the answer in the book. About half the class considered the book-correction approach beneficial and about the same amount considered it a negative and instead wanted the quiz to describe the remedy. Other grievances included technical errors and general confusion about using another website for the course in addition to the learning management system. Slightly less than half of respondents (47%, $n = 12$) agreed or strongly agreed they would recommend using LaunchPad Solo again in this class, while 31% ($n = 8$) neither agreed nor disagreed and 22% ($n = 6$) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Future Plans/ Advice to Others

Instructors should evaluate their instructional tools to ensure they are helping meeting student learning outcomes and producing graduates with the necessary industry skills. We will continue to use this resource in this writing-intensive course to access interactive quizzes which reinforce important grammar, spelling, and punctuation concepts. The book has been required for more than a decade in the course, so the addition of this online resource is a natural progression. Instructors should provide some extra credit quizzes so students can have more practice and not be as anxious about the scores on the quizzes. Finally, the system allows instructors to explore what questions were frequently missed so they can review those confusing areas with the class.

Costs/ Resources Needed

Enrolling in the course required students to purchase both a six-month online access code to LaunchPad Solo for Journalism and a copy of the 10th edition of the book *Working with Words*, which together cost \$75.99. To complete the quizzes, students needed to have a device with internet access.

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