



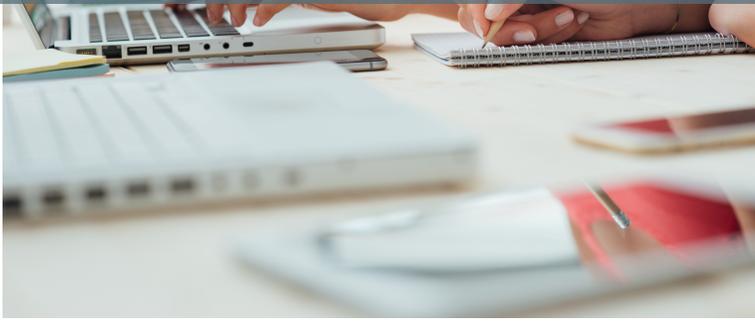
Actively Learn



Transforming Student Writing with the Actively Learn Google Add-On

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Transforming Student Writing with the Actively Learn Google Add-On



- Scaffolding evidence-based writing
- Increasing motivation
- Leveraging annotations
- Integrating writing and reading

The challenge: overcoming the struggle of writing research papers

"Teaching students how to effectively identify, incorporate, and cite textual evidence is one of the hardest tasks I've encountered in my 18 years of teaching freshman English."

For the past two weeks, I've been teaching my 9th grade students how to write a literature based research paper that includes cited textual evidence. While this is an important academic task, the research paper is the least favorite project for my students. Writing essays that include cited textual evidence is a struggle for students. Students often view reading and writing as two distinct skills and not skills that are reliant on each other. Whether it be on paper or screen, the physical act of highlighting is easy, but students lack the stamina and typing skills to transfer the highlighted text to the document in which they are writing. Yes, students can copy/paste, but they don't often understand how or why to use source material in their own writing. Teaching students how to effectively identify, incorporate, and cite textual evidence is one of the hardest tasks I've encountered in my 18 years of teaching freshman English.

The intervention: Actively Learn Google Add-On

We started with reading and highlighting source material in Actively Learn. Students answered guiding questions that were embedded in the texts. Students participated in face to face and online discussions about the material. But when I directed them to start writing an essay based on their ideas, their energy waned. Little did they know that I had surreptitiously been having them write rough drafts of the paragraphs of their research paper in Actively Learn. They had already composed pieces of their essay; all they needed to do was assemble the parts.

Results: students were engaged, interested, and readily writing away

On the day I demo'ed the Actively Learn Google Add-on, surprised shouts of "Oh!" and "Cool!" reverberated through the class. Students were intrigued by the simple magic of the Add-on and the ease with which they could insert their highlighted excerpts, annotations, and answers to questions from Actively Learn into the Google Doc assignment. One quick screencast later posted to Google Classroom (<https://youtu.be/ZdlxSp6XXGA>), and students were "writing" their research papers. The boring and time consuming task of writing a draft and incorporating textual evidence was no longer a hurdle for students. This was not an illusion: students were engaged, interested, and readily writing away on the seemingly most hated, arduous task of the third marking period.

Student responses to Actively Learn's Google Doc Add-On:

"I loved working with Actively Learn. It made the essay process significantly easier."

"It made writing the essay easier, because all I had to do was copy and paste, before I knew it my body paragraph was almost done."

"The Actively Learn Add-on for Google Docs is a great tool that I utilized often while writing my American Dream research paper. It makes it much easier to find the quotes that I need to use in my paper."

"Actively Learn, I really like how it's open to others so you can build off of each other and when somebody liked my response it made me feel good and it does its job very well especially with its integration of google docs."

"Sometimes all it takes is a seemingly simple tool and a well-crafted plan to give students confidence to become better readers and writers. ."