e-mail: The "e" is for Education  2005-2006 NeWP Technology Research Project
I want to continue to use Ralston High School’s e-mail system as a writing tool and a reading tool in my classes. I believe that e-mail can teach students important lessons in Audience, Voice, Sentence Fluency and Organization. All of my students are required to have a First Class account. All of my classes have First Class conferences where I post assignments and supplemental information. This work is my research project with NeWP.

What is First Class?
Every Ralston High School student can choose to have a First Class e-mail account. First Class is “members only” and, of course, the members are only RHS students and teachers. Students with First Class accounts cannot send to people outside of First Class nor can they receive anything from an outside source.

How many years has First Class been used at RHS? at least 4

How many RHS students have chosen to use a First Class account?: about 600/1,000 grades 9-12
According to the school’s lab technicians, 271 new accounts were added during the 2005-2006 school year.

How are those 600 students using their accounts?: Many of the students accounts remain idle. According to the lab techs who monitor student e-mail, students who do use their accounts, use it to communicate with teachers about make-up work, or to send teachers written assignments. These students may also choose to download the “client software” to their home computers. Doing so provides students with an identical at-home interface to their school e-mail. Most students opt to not use the client software and access their accounts via the web, which isn’t as fast or as up-to-date.

Do RHS students have something to learn about e-mail writing? Yes
• I have always appreciated the technical efficiency of e-mail. E-writing teaches an appreciation for organization - especially the reciprocal "trail" that one's writing creates. An e-writer's words are far more public and thus more powerful than those words that float only on paper. E-writing creates a "drift" that the writer is forced to notice - whether good or bad.
• The school “turned off” the First Class “Public Folder” in the fall of the 2004-2005 school year because commentary posted to this student conference ignited tension throughout the school campus. The “Public Folder” has not been reactivated. The Public Folder was added to First Class in August of 2004.

How am I helping them to learn? I started the school year and my NeWP research project with my first semester composition class. I posted assignments to the Composition conference and had students send me some of their writing for editing and grading exchanges using First Class. During first semester, the students never did accept the academic purpose of using First Class. As a result, I talked my study with my composition students and looked elsewhere: my photojournalism and desktop publishing students and my American Literature students. Second semester, my American Literature juniors wrote and read comments on pieces of literature that we read.

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