



Motivating students to engage with writing at a small town high school

The School:

Three years ago Scribo became an integral part of the Language Arts program at New Waverly High School, a school of just over 300 students in Eastern Texas. Carrie Shevlin, one of the school's four English teachers discovered the AI-driven writing platform while searching for a solution to address student plagiarism. The personalized iterative feedback and real-time insights provided by Scribo significantly increased student writing skills along with the student agency Shevlin witnessed in the years that followed.

“The novelty of getting instant feedback really appealed to students,” says Shevlin. “They no longer had the need to plagiarize because they felt like they now had the tools to create a solid piece of writing.”

The District and Community:

New Waverly, with a 2023 population of 1,040 inhabitants, is a historical town in southern Walker County located 55 miles north of Houston and thirteen miles south SAM Houston State University in Huntsville. Along with the elementary, intermediate and junior high schools, the high school belongs to New Waverly Independent School District.

In its stated mission, the district aims to facilitate experiences in collaboration with families and the community that prepare each of its students to become productive citizens. After graduation, many students make a living in the trades or service sectors which characterize the area. Approximately 350 people are employed through the local [economy](#) of New Waverly. The majority work in jobs related to construction and extraction, followed by public administration positions including law enforcement and thirdly logistics jobs such as transportation and warehousing.

The Challenge:

Teachers in the English department at New Waverly noticed a marked decline in the quality of writing their students were producing about five years ago. The number of assignments turned in with writing significantly different from the students' own work was more than they had witnessed before. To address the problem, teachers took decisive action. During the time the only resource they had available for verifying that indeed a student had plagiarized an assignment was by finding the original text via Google search.



Freshman English teacher Carrie Shevlin recalls those days. A teacher would detect writing that evidently did not belong to the student who turned it in, maybe it wasn't that individual's writing, syntax or word choice, but teachers knew. Then it could take hours or even days of searching until that teacher finally tracked down the source article on some far post of the internet. Shevlin said she remembers thinking, "We can't be investing this much time. This is an eternity in planning and instructional time, there has to be something smarter!"

Over the course of her 20-year teaching career, she has made a point of adapting to twists and turns that come with being a public school educator. Yet the problem with cheating and plagiarism was particularly troublesome. Suddenly, sending home writing assignments did not seem viable because she couldn't guarantee that students actually did the writing themselves. Along with hunting for proof when she suspected students of plagiarism, Shevlin took preventative action by restructuring how she organized her limited class time with students. Where she previously guided reading exercises as a class followed by facilitating group discussion and activities, she now squeezed in all the writing assignments. While this effort reduced the potential for plagiarism, it did not get to the heart of what she wanted students to gain from the class.

Shevlin wanted her students to become better writers by practicing and honing all the different skills that involve and even take interest in the process. She has always used what she calls "an old-fashioned approach to grading student essays." This means giving students very detailed notes and feedback on their writing like professors traditionally give in college.

Yet the vast majority of teachers are time-strapped making it impossible to grade each and every assignment that painstakingly. Unfortunately, not having detailed feedback hinders students' ability to understand their mistakes, learn from them and build their confidence. Frustration with this incomplete feedback loop can lead to students feeling disconnected and less motivated to engage with their assignments. Addressing these challenges would help close the feedback loop, enhancing the learning experience for students and easing the burden on teachers.

The Solution:

Shevlin calls finding Scribo a happy coincidence. It was affordable and compatible with the Microsoft system the school had in place. Once she started assigning students writing using Scribo, her focus moved from behavioral issues to being able to foster the growth her students need in order to become capable writers. Scribo examines many aspects of student writing using AI to support the revising and editing process without doing the work for the student.

"The novelty of getting instant feedback really appealed to students and they no longer had the need to plagiarize because they felt like they now had the tools to create a solid piece of writing," reports Shevlin. "Although I deviated from my original quest, it turned out to be such an



incredible find because the years that we have used Scribo have been the best years of student writing I have seen.”

Students in her classes mostly pursue blue collar work and their interests usually follow those lines. Now watching these same students take interest and engage with their writing to that level was amazing. She had been trying to achieve this on her own. Without the support of Scribo, she had been able to occasionally touch on that engagement, but not as consistently as she was able to with its support.

Shevlin noticed her students being empowered and autonomous in their revising and editing process than when using Google Docs or simply paper and a pencil. “Students bring a lot of uncertainty and self consciousness as juvenile writers,” she explains. “It really makes the difference receiving that quick feedback that we teachers wish we could give, but just can't.”

The Capabilities:

Since Scribo began to be used at New Waverly High School, the platform has evolved significantly. It continues to be used to keep students practicing and upgrading their skills between assignments. The teacher dashboard gives teachers the ability to view the whole class, track student engagement, track student progress and identify common challenges in order to better tailor instruction.

Shevlin is excited that now she can write any rubric which Scribo’s AI will use to create a writing assignment. She can also adjust the grade-level to reflect where her students actually are. To promote students authoring their own writing, Scribo has a feature that allow teachers to disable students’ ability to copy and paste into a document as well as detect Chat Gpt use.

Yet Scribo is so much more than a plagiarism checker and AI detector. The situation at New Waverly is not uncommon, students often turn to such bypasses when they lack confidence in their own abilities. Scribo is designed to foster learning and motivation by helping students improve their grammar, structure, coherence and overall writing quality. Students actually step into their future lives with the ability to write and the process of getting there is much more pleasant for teachers and students than playing cat and mouse.