

## ELA: Why Blend?

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### 5.1 Blending in ELA Teaching

The first question you should ask yourself before embarking on the journey of blended teaching is “Why blend?” Teachers who are still searching for their answer to this question may end up spending a lot of time and energy implementing changes that do not serve any larger goal or purpose.

#### Guiding Question: Why Blend?

Teachers must answer the question “Why blend?” It is not sufficient to blend just because it is popular or because others are doing it.

In the two videos below, Dave Lee and Jenifer Pickens explain how blended teaching has improved their classrooms. What reasons might you have for blending?

## Teachers Talk: Blending for Creativity (4:28)



### Blending for Creativity

Dave Lee, Ph.D.

ELA Teacher



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**Reflection Questions:** How did Dave use blended teaching to increase student ability and creativity? How might you do something similar?

## Teachers Talk: Why I Chose to Blend (2:08)



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**Reflection Question:** How can you use technology to help your students be more engaged in learning in your classroom?

## 5.2 Reasons for Blending

There are three primary reasons why teachers choose a blended approach:

- **Improved student learning**—Blended classrooms can increase personalization, allow for more individual and small group instruction, and make better use of classroom time.
- **Increased access and flexibility**—In blended classrooms students have access to materials anywhere and anytime. In addition, they have access to resources and activities that are unavailable to them without an online component.
- **Increased efficiency**—Blended classrooms can help students complete learning activities in less time and with less energy, reduce printing costs, and help students stay more organized (less likely to lose assignments).

Brianne explains how blended teaching allows her to be both more efficient and more creative as a teacher.

## Teachers Talk: Efficiency and Creativity



### Brianne Anderson

At the end of a unit on *The Great Gatsby* we wrote an argumentative essay about who was the most to blame for Gatsby's death. The students had to assign percentages and things like that to who was the most to blame based on their actions. Was the person who pulled the trigger all to blame, or did the other events leading up to it have anything to do with it?

For the students who struggled with writing, I gave them different assignments in Canvas than I did the ones who were more proficient. I could assign each student different assignments that would start where they were and help them grow. For some students I provided sentence stems or base structures for the paragraphs. For other students I asked them to do some crime research and look into some court cases and do some enrichment there. So, in the end, they may each have written the same number of paragraphs—I'm assessing the same standard for all of them—but they each have a differentiated path to get there.

For Trent Mikesell blended learning increased access and participation in an unexpected way.

## Teachers Talk: Sharing Quizlets



### Trent Mikesell

One thing I really like about blended learning is that the students begin to take ownership for their own learning, then they also help others. For example, occasionally, I'll give vocabulary quizzes. Some of the students would make a Quizlet to help them study. It wasn't an assignment, just something they wanted to do. When I found out, I asked them to share the link with me. Then the whole class could access it and use it. Their initiative helped other members of the class as well as themselves. They had assumed for just a moment the role of a teacher.

Oftentime teachers have multiple reasons for blending, but almost always one of these three reasons is primary in their minds. Table 1 below shows some sample ELA examples and how they might help the teacher to achieve multiple purposes simultaneously.

**Table 1**

*Examples of multiple purposes for a blended ELA activity*

## Blended Example

## Blended Purpose

Facilitates student collaboration and feedback during the writing process.

**Learning Effectiveness:** Sharing online writing eliminates the need for students or teachers to create hard copies of student writing to receive feedback. Because feedback is easier to provide, students can receive more detailed feedback. Students learn collaboration skills as well as the ability to rethink, rewrite, and revise their writing.

**Access & Flexibility:** It is also easier for students to respond to recommendations and revise their papers online.

**Increased Efficiency/Cost:** It saves the effort and cost to make physical copies of student papers. Using collaborative online documents can also make the collaborative process and providing feedback more efficient.

Creates a space for discussions that involve all class members.

**Learning Effectiveness:** Many students struggle to fully participate in class discussions for a variety of reasons, and others dominate these conversations. Online discussions give everyone the opportunity to participate (meaning they have time to discover what they think and write about it), creating more robust, reflective, and divergent discussions.

**Access & Flexibility:** Online discussions allow *all* students to voice their ideas.

**Increased Efficiency/Cost:** Online discussions efficiently give every student a voice. They also free up classroom time for other activities.

Promotes differentiated instruction in grammar, usage, spelling, punctuation, reading fluency, and reading comprehension.

**Learning Effectiveness:** Based on student data, students can be assigned learning activities specific to their weaknesses in the different areas of language arts. Students who don't need to work on capitalization don't have to. Students who don't understand how to use possessives can receive instruction and activities designed to help them learn this concept.

**Access & Flexibility:** Students have access to instruction specifically targeted to their needs. They have the flexibility to access the content they need and which they have not already mastered.

**Increased Efficiency/Cost:** Students don't waste time where they are already proficient. They don't have to wait for other students to catch up or worry about being behind.

Think about why you would like to blend your classroom. In your blended teaching workbook, write your thoughts, creating your own purpose.



### Blended Teaching Workbook

Write a brief statement about why you want to blend your classroom. Which purposes and outcomes are you most interested in for your blend? Access your Workbook [here](#). Make sure you save your copy where you can access it as you go through the social studies chapters.



## 5.3 Common Challenges to Teaching/Learning English: Problems of Practice

All teachers face challenges. It's part of the nature of sharing a learning journey with a large number of young people. For many teachers, like Todd Jepperson, below, blended teaching helps them address and overcome some of those challenges.

### Teachers Talk: Why Kids Need It (2:43)



Why Kids Need It

Todd Jepperson  
ELA Teacher

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**Reflection Questions:** What reasons does Mr. Jepperson give for blending his classroom? How can you create the same advantages by blending your classroom?

Your choice to blend will be more meaningful to you and your students if it helps to address challenges that you and your students face in the traditional non-blended classroom. We refer to these challenges as “problems of practice.”

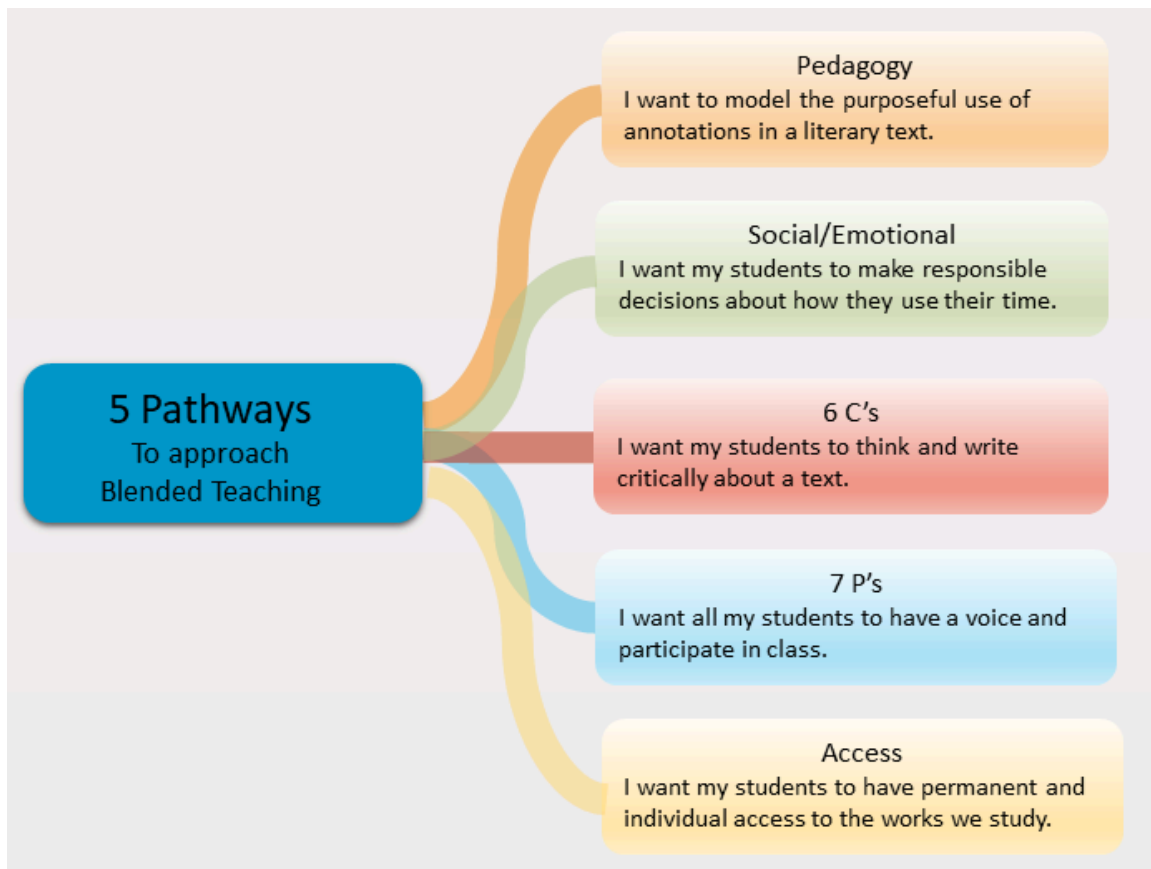
### Definition: Problem of Practice

A problem of practice is a current problem or challenge that you believe could be improved through blended teaching.

Problems of practice can fall under any of the three purposes outlined in section 1.1. However, the most meaningful and powerful problems of practice for teachers deal directly with improving learning outcomes for their students.

**Figure 1**

*Problems of Practice in English Language Arts*



Five Pathways to Approach Blended Teaching

These five pathways are a powerful tool to help you think deeply about problems of practice that are relevant to you. Once you identify specific challenges in your current approach to teaching, you will be able to begin to explore what online approaches may be combined with your in-person approaches to make a better experience for your students and you alike. This process energizes you and your teaching. Teachers who choose to blend often find that they enjoy teaching in new and fulfilling ways.



## Teachers Talk: Burnout



### Jenifer Pickens

Teacher burnout is a real thing! One benefit we have seen for teachers who have chosen to blend their classroom is a renewed energy and enthusiasm for teaching. This benefit doesn't extend to teachers who are forced to blend against their wills, but is reserved for teachers who begin to see possibilities for addressing persistent challenges and choose for themselves to innovate their classrooms.

I believe my classroom is a petri dish, a place of experimentation and discovery. So I always try new things every year. I get very bored if things are stagnant. So even if I'm teaching the same subject, I won't teach the same materials year to year. Blended teaching just naturally lends itself to constant development and change, and I love that process!



### Todd Jepperson

Blended teaching magnifies and improves my ability as a teacher. Because I am learning to personalize instruction and step out of the way of my students' learning, I am constantly revising my approach to teaching. I am constantly learning, and that is exciting!

## Finding Your Problems of Practice

Now that you have reviewed the five pathways to identifying problems of practice, it is your turn to look at your own practice and try to identify a couple of challenges that you can consider as you continue throughout this book. What student outcomes and teaching practices would you like to improve? What stands in the way of your teaching having the impact you would like it to have?



### Blended Teaching Workbook

Identify 2-3 problems of practice (PoP) that you can use as you consider blended options for your classroom.

Note: You should identify several problems of practice (PoP) because not every PoP has a good blended learning solution.



If you haven't already opened and saved your workbook, you can access it [here](#).

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