# Using Google Suite in LIN 200: How to Create Your Own Language

Andrew M. Byrd
*University of Kentucky*, andrewbyrd@uky.edu

### Recommended Citation

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Andrew Byrd

*Department of Linguistics*
*College of Arts and Sciences*
*University of Kentucky*

Two years ago, I developed and implemented a new introductory Linguistics course, "LIN 200: How to Create Your Own Language", which is designed to be offered both online and in person and to satisfy the "Arts & Creativity" UK Core requirement. For these two reasons, it has rapidly become a popular course among both majors and non-majors alike.

In the course, students learn about the basic properties of human language, such as sound systems, words, sentences, and writing systems, which they apply to the creation of their very own, original constructed language with a small group of classmates. The focus of LIN 200 is creation: students are not only tasked with creating their own language (known as a "conlang") and invented society, but also with creating a product that showcases their ideas, such as a poem, a video, a scene, a video game, a comic. They get to choose what they want to produce.

As an online course, or as an in-person course during the COVID era, LIN 200 faces a challenge in that many students miss out on the in-class group dynamics and the ability to collaborate in person with their instructor and peers. Through working with CELT and the Teaching Innovation Institute

(TII), I learned that effective use of technology can bring students together, helping to make them feel part of a cohesive group.

The success of a course such as this, one that is offered online and requires students to complete a group project, hinges on an intuitive Canvas course shell. The syllabus, the course modules, and the assignments themselves must be organized in such a way that makes sense to the students. The structure of the course is relatively straightforward. Students are asked to watch a short video about a topic and then take a quiz that gauges their understanding of the materials. After engaging with a handful of these, they then apply that knowledge to the creation of a specific component of their language. There are five components: (1) creating an invented culture; (2) creating a sound system; (3) creating a word system; (4) creating a history and writing system; and finally, (5) compiling all the previous components and constructing an original composition in the invented language.

When students log into the Canvas course shell, they are directed to a home page with an image reflective of the intellectual journey ahead. This image, often featuring a scene from a fantastical universe like that of *Lord of the Rings* or *Game of Thrones*, encourages students to think of this course not just one about conlangs, but also one where they struggle together with their peers to complete a large, seemingly overwhelming task. Everything that the students need is right here on the front page: the schedule of the class, the group project, the gradebook, and where to go for help in the class.

When the student clicks on "Group Project" (see fig. 1), they are directed to a list of folders in Google Drive. One of these folders has been specifically designed for their group, in which they will find a Google Jamboard file and a Google Doc file.
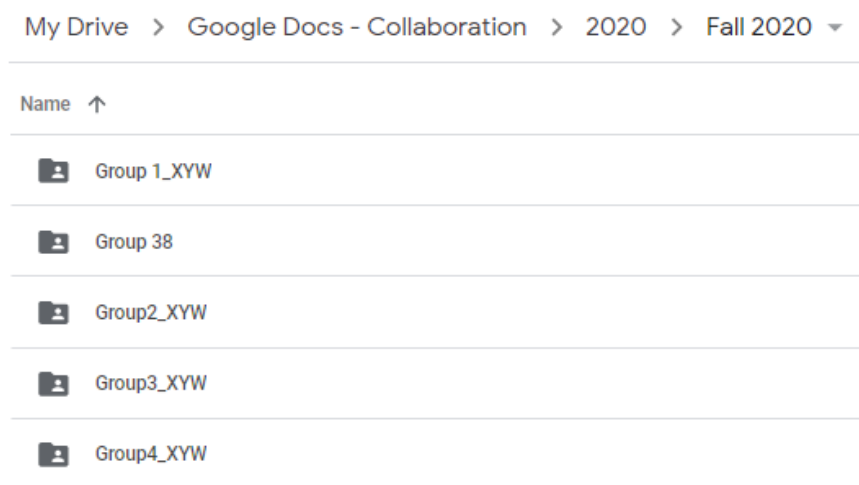


Fig. 1. LIN 200 Google Drive

Following an assignment prompt, students use the Jamboard file (see fig. 2) to sketch out an idea for their invented culture using text and images. Students then make a pitch to the other students about

why their proposed conlang culture is interesting, and then together the students choose their favorite cultures, for which they will invent their languages.
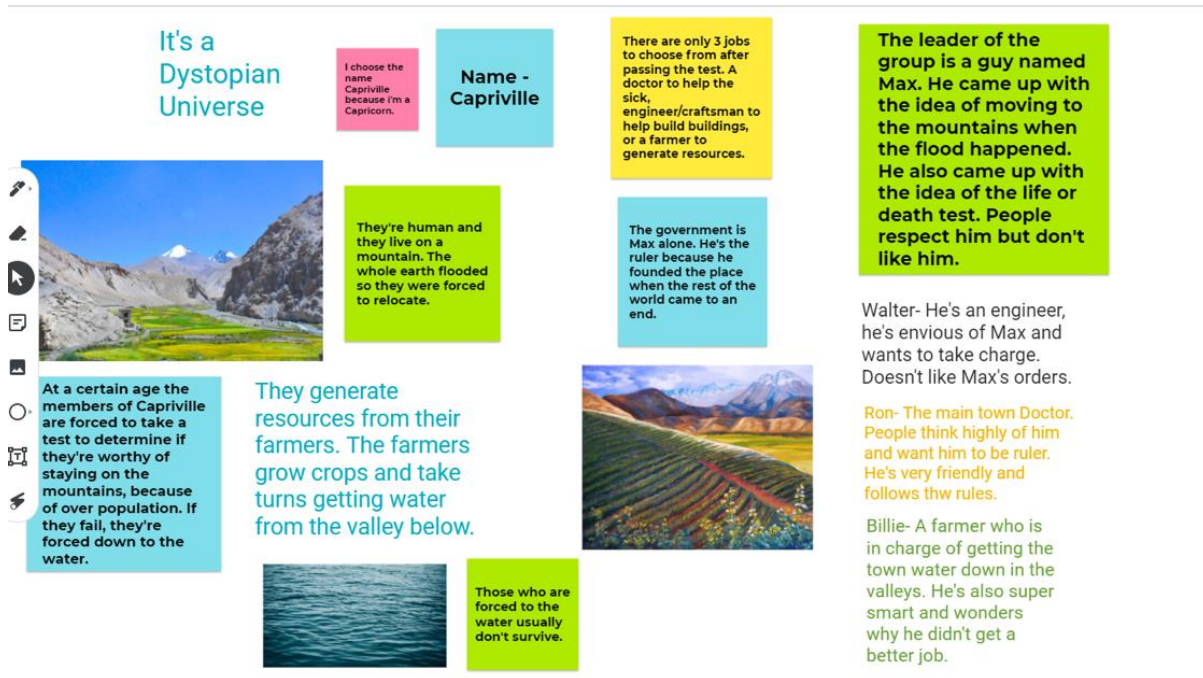


Fig. 2. LIN 200 Jamboard activity

The instructions and models found on the Google Doc are the guiding point for the course, guiding all five of the project components, including a sample group contract that students are expected to complete at the beginning of the course term. In figure 3 below, I have included an example of a section of component two, which asks students to invent their conlang's sound system. Aside from the course videos and comprehension quizzes mentioned above, pretty much everything they need for the class is in this document.

## Component 2: Your ConLang's Sound System

For this project component, you will identify the core features of your language's sound system. There are eight questions total, two for each characteristic as discussed in the course videos. A brief example has been given to you, based on English's sound system.

**For this component you will:**

I.    Edit the google doc to answer the questions listed in this component ("Component 2"). There is no need (or way) to submit a file on Canvas. Your instructor will look at your work within the Google Doc.
II.   Delete any instructions so that each number only includes your answers.
III.  Fill out the "Group Evaluations" assignment on Canvas once you're done with the component.

We *strongly* recommend that you work on this assignment together at the same time, using an app like Zoom (https://uky.zoom.us/). If this is not possible, use Google comments / track changes in your work. You can also @ your instructor in a comment (ukconlang@gmail.com) if you have specific questions about your project.

## Consonants

1. For this question, you'll need to think about the consonants in your language. Begin by visiting https://www.ipachart.com/, scroll down to the consonants (pulmonic, non-pulmonic, other symbols, and affricates). **Choose ten consonants, whose sound you really like, and then as a group narrow it down to five.**

Next, recall the six principles discussed in the video. How do the five consonants you've chosen fit with the most common sounds found in natural languages? Ensure that your system is balanced, though there may be exceptions.

Which places and manners of articulation will be distinguished among the consonants? Will voicing be a contrastive feature of consonants? Will length be a distinctive feature of consonants and/or vowels?

Fig. 3. LIN 200 Project Google Doc

The benefits to constructing group projects in such a way are numerous. First, since implementing the individualized Google drives, there has never been any confusion among the students about what they were supposed to do or where they were supposed to do it. Second, students have been able to collaborate remotely in the Google Doc itself, which is a useful tool for students and allows instructors to see what has been added and by whom, via the document history, which is an excellent way to keep tabs on which students are doing the work, and which ones are not. Finally, the Google Doc also serves as a simple way for students to interact with the instructor and vice versa, using the "@" feature in comments.

Since I implemented the use of Jamboard and Google Docs in this course, performance, and engagement of students with both instructors and their fellow group members have increased noticeably. The value of clear, scaffolded instructions along with the interactive and collaborative capabilities of Google Suite applications allowed students to engage with each other, even during a pandemic.

Media

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