

Writing in Multiple Disciplines, Three Local Contexts, and One Global Conversation

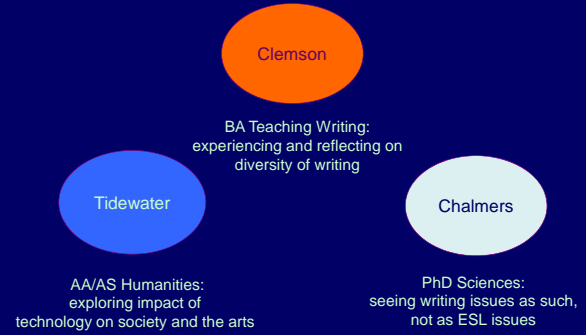
An Online Collaboration Among Swedish and American Students

Computers and Writing Conference 2004

<http://wordsworth2.net/projects/crossculturalcollabs/>

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Three Instructional Contexts



Possibility of New Genres: European Perspective



"Before we know it, the genres we teach today, the essay and the traditional academic research paper may be supplemented with new genres such as hypertext, calling for new ideas on how to teach and how to organize writing instruction."

- Lennart Bjork, Gerd Brauer, Lotte Rienecker, and Peter Stray Jorgensen in their introduction to *Teaching Academic Writing in European Higher Education* (Kluwer Publishing, 2002)

Our Goal

"to encourage self-examination and heightened awareness of the rhetorical situations in which [students] find themselves as writers in the academy and workplace"

- Peer conversations / learning about writing
- Increasing knowledge about language, genres, cultures, disciplines, and technology
- Possibilities of new genres / roles of technology

Discourse Chart

	Personal Discourse	Classroom Discourse	Public Discourse
Function	Expressive Writing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-discovery • Inner speech 	Interactive Writing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversational • Dialectical 	Transactional Writing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informative • Persuasive
Purpose	Explains to Oneself	Explains to Classroom Colleagues	Explains to Distant Others
Audience	Self and Trusted Others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privileges Language of Learner • Accountability to Self 	Classroom Community: Familiar and Known <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privileges Language of Classroom Community • Accountability to Classmates 	Distant and Other: Unknown <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privileges Language of Critical Audiences • Accountability to Public
Genre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journals • Diaries • Logs • Notebooks • Freewrites • Braindumps • Fridgenotes • Post-it Notes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letters • Notes • Questions • Poems • Parodies • E-mail • Presentation Software • Web Discussion Boards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essays • Articles • Reports • Presentation Software • Memos • Multimedia • Web Publications
Response Time	Immediate: Shaping at Point of Utterance	Quick: from "Real" Audience—Visible and Tactile	Lengthy: to Publication or Presentation
Classroom Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social and Collaborative • Respects Diversity and Risk Taking • Active Learning and Interactive Teaching • Motivation for Reading and Writing 			
Developing Knowledge That is Personally and Professionally Useful			

Assignment Design: Letter 1

Letter 1

Letter 1, approximately 350 words, addressed to everybody in the group and submitted by November 5, 11:59 p.m.

Describe an experience that illustrates your perception of yourself as a writer, perhaps a situation in which writing was **challenging or exciting or otherwise important**. As you reflect on that experience, what were your **expectations** about yourself as a writer and what was the outcome of the experience?

Include within your letter one or two sentences that **introduce** you to the group, for example, your name, which class you are taking, and your academic interest or emphasis.

Assignment Design: Letter 2

Letter 2

Letter 2, approximately 350 words, addressed to everybody in the group and submitted by November 9, 11:59 p.m.

Read the letters from all the members of your group and write a personal response about some of the issues raised there. In your Letter 2, addressed to your entire group, refer specifically to at least **two members of the group by name**, identifying the elements of their letters that were of particular interest to you. Comment on ways in which their experiences are **similar to and/or different** from your own.

Before you compose your Letter 2, first read any second letters already posted by groupmates. Try to cite two groupmates whose Letter 1 submissions have not already been cited by others when you compose your own Letter 2.

Assignment Design: Letter 3

Letter 3

Letter 3, approximately 350 words, addressed to everybody in the group and submitted by November 11, 11:59 p.m.

Read the second letters from all the members of your group. Based on the letters and your own further thinking, speculate on the impact that communication technology is having and will have on the kinds of writing experiences you and your group have had in the past and may have in the future. Think in particular of communication in local, national, and global contexts.

Incorporate into your letter:

- at least one reference to a groupmate's Letter 2 and
- at least one reference to a Website that addresses one or more of the issues raised by you and/or others. Copy-paste the entire Web address including <http://> and leave a space before and after so that the discussion board will post it as an active link for your readers to follow.

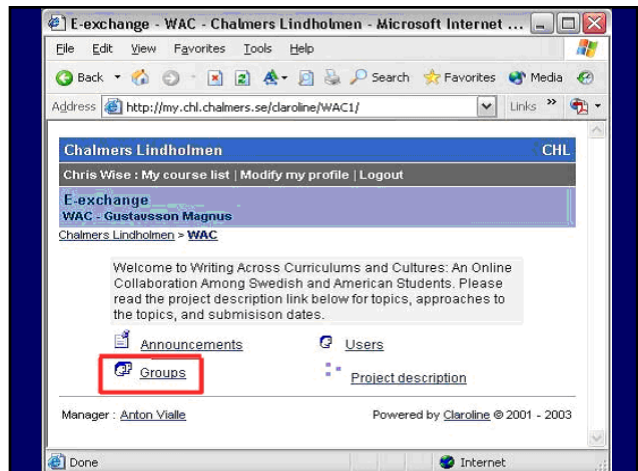
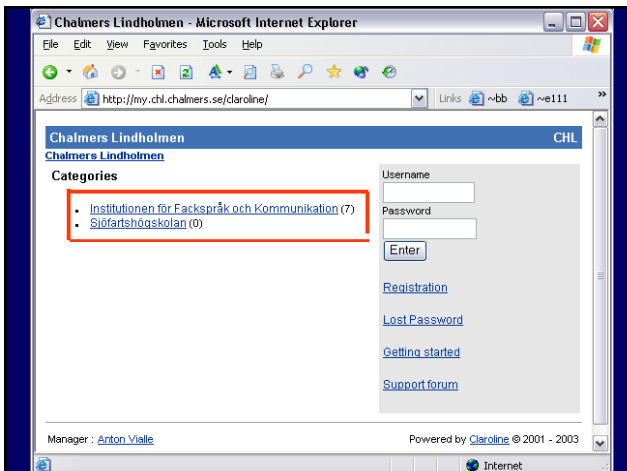
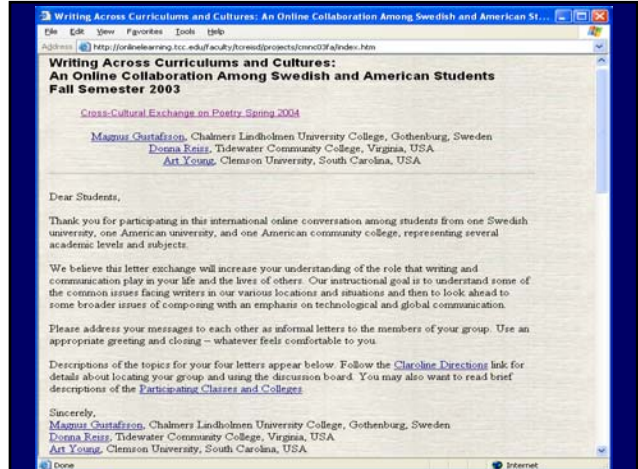
Assignment Design: Letter 4

Analysis and Reflection

Analysis of and Reflection on the conversation, approximately 350 words addressed to everybody in the group and submitted by November 16, 11:59 p.m.

Read the third letters from members of your group. Then **reflect** on the exchange of three letters among members of your group and **speculate** on the key issues.

Suggested topics for your **Analysis and Reflection** include: What are some similarities and differences among the writers in different locations and as an audience for writing? What interested you? What surprised you? What troubled you? What are some benefits and drawbacks of a letter exchange that uses a Web discussion board? What have you learned about your own expectations about writing for a distant and diverse audience?



Student Voices

"...I tried to write on a level so that a wider group of scientists could understand our research and give us input from their point of view. When the basic layout and text were finished I send a copy to each member of our group for comments. **My view of what I had written was that it was almost nothing on the poster that they could point out as unclear or unimportant for the understanding of our research.** The response that I got from two of the other three members were **full of suggestions to make the text more clear-cut and easy to follow. I was shocked!** After three more rounds in the ring with my cowriters we finished the poster. **Still licking my wounds I realised that I had some more to learn about academic writing.**" (*Mikael, Chalmers, Letter 1*)

Student Voices

"...Writing is big part of my daily activities and has been for sometime now. **I really enjoy the process** and I find it is a good release when you just need to get some emotions out. When most people that know me hear about my feelings towards writing, they don't see it. They see me as an emotionless being, which I must say I know why. I am quiet and usually very calm....My writing usually takes forms of quick poems or journal entries that I keep in a notebook and out of others hands. **I love to write but I hate writing for other people. Writing is my release, and I don't like to share my feelings.** As long as they are written down somewhere, that's good enough for me....As a writer, one day **I hope to be able to write without fear that someone will tear it apart.**" (*Charlie, Clemson, Letter 1*)

Student Voices

"...All of you have reminded me that writing is a part of everyday life (I've been out of the loop for a few years with my kids). For those of you in the business world, I am sure you understood **Gabriel's reference** to memo writing. That is something they should teach in college. I know I have **ruffled my share of feathers** around the office. From sociology I learned about "report talk" vs. "rapport talk". **Report talk is the exchange of facts and pertinent information where rapport talk is a way of relating information on a more personal level. If we all were able to have rapport with others, then perhaps our reports would be more interesting.** I really enjoy communicating with all of you. I hope you enjoy academic, as well as personal, success." (*Rebecca, Tidewater, Letter 2*)

Student Voices

In Letter 1 Lindsey (Clemson) uses the salutation "Dear **Groupies**," and then in Letter 2 Rebecca (Tidewater) begins "Hello Groupies (I believe we should adopt this as our group call sign)," and then a few hours later, Gabriel (Chalmers) begins "Hello Groupies! (I am supporting **Rebecca's motion**)."

Gabriel's first sentence then follows: "**Guys**, I am really enjoying your letters!" Gabriel then says: "It has not been easy to follow such amount of different ideas, comments and experiences regarding **writing plays, creative writing, maintenance procedures, résumés, memos, formal and informal letters, and other kinds of impressive writing.** I am really learning from you guys."

Student Voices

"...One of the things I noticed during the letter exchange was that sometimes it was **hard to differentiate the age and gender** of fellow group members. I noticed that people referred to **Xing and Erin** as both he and she. Sometimes cultural differences make it difficult to distinguish whether names are feminine or masculine. This is a simple example of the **confusion that internet communication can cause. Without knowing the tone of someone's voice, it is harder to sense sarcasm or humor.** It also becomes difficult to know exactly who you are **talking to.**" (*Lindsey, Clemson, Letter 4*).

Student Voices

"**Hello Groupies, Instantaneous communication across physical borders and political ideologies allows global access to varying perspectives** throughout our world....American publications almost always refer to anti-American Iraqis as insurgents, whereas *al-Jazeera* describes them exclusively as resistance fighters. These two terms have **opposite connotations describing the exact same group to different audiences.** Last week, *USA Today's* website headlined the revelation that Jessica Lynch had been raped by her Iraqi captors....Finally, yesterday [*al-Jazeera*] posted a story quoting Iraqi doctors denying the **USA Today** assertion. Utilizing **multiple perspectives via global communications technology** allowed me to gain a more in-depth understanding. An **open forum with Americans and Iraqis exchanging hopes, dreams and fears may go a long way toward reaching mutually beneficial goals.**" (*Glenn, Tidewater, Letter 3*)

Student Voices

"...Mark also mentions that he has never learned so much about his fellow classmates in other classes. I think we have a **tendency to open up a little more in discussion board postings, etc. The social nature of learning is bound to become much stronger as we continue to develop our communication technologies.**

I found this website that I think might be useful to everyone as we are thinking about the topic of this last letter: http://www.id.iit.edu/visiblelanguage/Feature_Articles/Baron_WritingIntheAgeofEmail/Baron_AgeofEmailPt3.html. It sort of **goes back to our discussion from letter one about email vs. letter writing,** but I thought it fit nicely with this topic too." (*Angela, Clemson, Letter 3*)

Student Voices

"...Two years ago I **meet an Australian girl in a summer course in Switzerland**....organized by Alliance for Global Sustainability and gathers graduate and advanced-level undergraduate students from around the world for a two-week institute exploring the demands of sustainable development. Anyway, this girl and I became friends and we **stayed in touch after the course, mainly by using e-mail.... she is now living with me in Sweden** but that is another story....

I was there to work together with a researcher. I meet him at a conference last year and we stayed in touch afterwards. **In our communication we used e-mails a lot to send documents between us in the purpose of planning my project there. The project was very successful and we are now working on a journal paper about our findings.**" (*Stefan, Chalmers, Letter 3*)

Student Voices

“...When **Christine Robinson said** "Many people are talking about putting medical records on a large data- base" - this frightens me. I think this will **leave us to be vulnerable in the most sensitive way**. Our health information will be available for the next hacker to exploit us. On the other hand, it can be a good thing. It will slow down the phones in doctor's offices if more things are handled online. Here is a good **article about an online medical practice**: <http://www.healthmgitech.com/archives/0703viewpoint.htm>.”
(Karen, Tidewater, Letter 3)

Student Voices

“...Finally let me try to express my fillings regarding writing to people of different cultures and backgrounds. It has not been easy because after Letter 1 I realized that **you guys know much more about writing than I do. I am a scientist and I have been writing for long, but technical papers, nothing like poems, plays or novels**. What we have been doing here is completely different, because is related to emotions, personal experiences and opinions. It **scared me but at the same time it taught me a lot**. Cheers, “ (Gabriel, Chalmers, Letter 4)

Student Voices

“...I am studying to be an English teacher but what I do for a living is community organizing to prevent child abuse and neglect.... to put into place a variety of social supports for parents of young children who are isolated as they cope with the overwhelming responsibility of raising their children....by **trying to recreate the sense of neighborhood**. When I was a young child, the people on my block knew who I was, knew my parents, and were available for help and comfort.... In every way imaginable, we are trying to reconnect parents to their neighbors with the hope of building this type of mutual, reciprocal support that has eroded with the pace and mobility of modern life. What we have done in the WAC forum has been to relinquish our isolation as individual students and enter into a transaction with students across vast distances in the same sort of mutually supportive way. **Group 2 has created a small virtual neighborhood** and this is a powerful thing.” (Tom, Clemson, Letter 4)

What We Learned

- Communication technology offered functionality on a topic of mutual interest and enabled conversation and learning.
- The conversation moved from narrative / personal to expository / reflective.
- Peer-oriented conversation enhanced students' self-perception in a rhetorical situation enhanced by international communication.
 - “...beneficial because we were required to consider our own experiences and then relate them to others. This provided self-insight and and awareness of others.” (Mark, Tidewater, Letter 4)
 - “...the information you gain, but even more important, you get some self-esteem from noticing that people are actually interested in your thoughts.” (Anders, Chalmers, Letter 4)

What We Learned

It's the **writing** that did it!

- ❑ Students expressed thoughts and shared experiences and emotions they probably would not have done in a face-to-face classroom.
- ❑ Students grew comfortable exchanging ideas within a Web discussion board: interactive, asynchronous, communal, conversational, professional, playful, and thoughtful.
- ❑ Students recognized linguistic cues and cultural implications of their writing—an online discussion with a quality of “talk.”
- ❑ Students were motivated to write and read letters for a responsive audience.
- ❑ Students demonstrated their understanding of the rhetorical factors of writing for a particular context and purpose.

What We Learned

- ❑ Socialization was enhanced by personal stories, conversational language, and the genre of letters.
- ❑ Reflection was integral: reflecting on writing while writing; reflecting on communications technology while using technology.
- ❑ Emphasis on process, learning, and communication (rather than product—not on “what makes a good letter?”) stimulated interaction among disparate groups.
- ❑ Students from each location who were at first noticeably different in choice of topics and diction moved toward “a middle ground” in approach and tone as the discussion evolved.
- ❑ Students shared issues across cultural and institutional boundaries as well as time and place differences, facilitated by technology, by small group interaction, and by conversational discourse: “**...we are united in this universal concern....**” (*Daniel, Clemson, Letter 4*).

