

**Writing in Multiple Disciplines, Three Local Contexts, and One Global Conversation:
An Online Collaboration Among Swedish and American Students**

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

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During Fall Semester 2003, three teacher-researchers from Sweden (Chalmers Lindholmen University) and the United States (Clemson University and Tidewater Community College) coordinated a writing project in which asynchronous communication technology enabled students from three different academic contexts to communicate online with a common emphasis on effective communication within and beyond their disciplines. Students focused on their own literacy practices for a diverse, responsive audience. They articulated their understanding of the tools with which they communicate and reflected on themselves and others as communicators in contexts broadened across international borders by information technology. The many metacognitive responses in students' online postings reveal personal, social, rhetorical, and educational dimensions to their online writing that can inform future practices for writing and digital media.

Assignment Design

We designed a sequence of four letters that progress from personal to public and from narrative to expository, culminating in synthesis and reflection on the process as well as the content of the discussion. Five groups of approximately 10 students each participated in the discussion.

Letter 1, approximately 350 words, addressed to everybody in the group: 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.

Letter 2, approximately 350 words, addressed to everybody in the group: 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.

Letter 3, approximately 350 words, addressed to everybody in the group: 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 (1) at least one reference to a groupmate's Letter 2 and (2) 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.

Letter 4, Analysis of and Reflection on the conversation, approximately 350 words addressed to everybody in the group: 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?