



Bringing the
learning *home*

Communication



A *resource* for studying abroad

Australian Learning & Teaching Council

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Communication

Program goals

- Make both students and instructors aware of potential problems in communication, including communication strategies that undermine other learning objectives while overseas.
- Provide resources and facilitation strategies designed to refine students' writing and other communication abilities.
- Furnish instructors and study abroad facilitators with easy-to-follow advice about reflection assignments, online writing and other forms of assessment.

Rationale

The Communication module is distinctive within the Bringing the Learning Home program. Less a free-standing and independent module like the others, with its own distinctive contribution to educational programming, the Communication module is a resource bundle including a discussion of communication strategies, advice to students, notes on how technology might facilitate student interaction and reflection, and other materials that the BTLH team has found useful. The module focuses especially on the use of weblogs for various types of reflection and discussion, as well as suggesting different components that your international exchange program might use as part of a comprehensive communication and reflection strategy.

Especially if the BTLH materials are to be used by non-teaching facilitators or instructors unfamiliar with the type of reflective activities we advocate, some of these resources may prove of repeated value, as students and instructor alike work through the different modules, and instructors may find themselves going back to elements of the Communication module several times, both in pre-departure and upon re-entry, as these resources prove useful in different tasks.

Mode of delivery

Many of the themes from this module should be raised in pre-departure, especially if part of the curriculum integration will include activities like online discussion or blogging while overseas. We suggest making the resources in this module available to students through either course readers or online, and then referring to them when relevant. In many cases, students will refer back to the suggestions for writing and presentation strategies, and facilitators and instructors can use these resources to prepare students for assignments, writing opportunities, or assessment of various sorts.

Delivery mode will depend upon the nature of your program, whether students are expected or required to engage in reflection activities, and how you will evaluate or respond to their work. As you make use of the activities and assessments in other modules (such as in Cultural Relativism and Analysis or in Education and Culture), you may wish to re-direct students to these resources.

Pre-departure

Highly variable. We recommend encouraging students to read other students' writing in order to become better acquainted with the study abroad experience, possible problems, and the role of written reflection in their overall learning. We suggest you distribute guidelines for any in-country assignments and advice for communication before departure, but we also realise that many students will not recognise that these are important until they are actually abroad and attempting to reflect on their experiences effectively.

Once you've run a full cycle of curriculum accompaniment to study abroad, with activities like reflections, student presentations, blogs and digital stories, you will have your own archive of student-generated resources to show future students preparing to depart. Show the best examples, use them to set a high standard and inspire, and your pre-departure will get students thinking about how to communicate their experiences as they happen.

In country

If possible, written reflection and other modes of communicating while in country are extremely beneficial. Consider assigning some reflection activities and creating avenues for students to share their reflections while students are sojourning abroad.

Re-entry

Many of the elements in the Communication module will prove useful while students are completing the tasks assigned in other modules upon re-entry, such as in the Globalisation and Cultural Relativism modules.

We recommend making these materials available early and then either redistributing them or putting them in some location where they will be accessible to students to consult (such as through your online learning management system like Blackboard or Moodle, if the modules are part of a course, or on your own website if you are providing opportunities for students to write and produce their own media about their international experience). We hope that the materials are presented in an accessible way so that students will immediately recognise their value.

The content of this module especially supports or feeds into:

- ☐ Reflection
- ☐ Transformation
- ☐ Globalisation
- ☐ Cultural relativism & analysis
- ☐ Culture & education
- ☐ Professionalisation





Contents of this module

This **instructor's guide** includes a discussion of the module's goals, rationale and strategies, a thorough presenter's guide, additional resources and readings, and references.

There are **no slides** for this module as we do not suggest using a slide-based presentation to teach this material.

Student handbook contains copies of the handouts, advice sheets, and other materials that we believe will help students to achieve their goals in communicating both during and about their international experience.

If you are preparing your own reader to accompany study abroad, the student guide materials are all made available under a Creative Commons licence. You are free to incorporate the materials into your own reader or course package as long as you clearly attribute the origin of the work (see Creative Commons licence). The creators also include in the licence the option of using the work for commercial gain, although we respectfully ask that the material not be republished and sold (we hope that the workshop materials will be useful to both university-based and commercial providers).

Contents

4

BRINGING THE LEARNING HOME

Instructor's orientation

Essential to virtually every dimension of the study abroad and international exchange experience is the ability to communicate, both face-to-face and in writing. Moreover, when trying to implement a program designed to enhance international experience, like the Bringing the Learning Home curriculum, the organisers and instructors will also run up against communication challenges:

- How do we interact with students when they are abroad?
- What strategies are most productive for encouraging students to share their experiences?
- How do we guide students in their reflection if we want to make sure that they have the maximum possible autonomy to explore what is most relevant to them?
- What sorts of limits should we set on students' comments on what others are sharing in written reflection? How do we advise students who are not strong writers?
- What sorts of technologies are available to us for online reflection and discussion, and what are their relative strengths?

The Communication module is a package of resources designed to help you to plan your own curriculum and to help students to communicate. For this reason, the module does not provide the same type of central pedagogical trajectory which features in the other modules. We do not recommend teaching this material as a single workshop or setting aside a specific lecture for discussions of communication skills. Rather, the material in this module should prove useful as the instructor plans the programming, decides to use tools like blogs or online discussion, assigns assessment tasks or encourages students to write or even publish pieces about their experience.

Specifically, the module focuses first on strategies and ideas for pre-departure communication activities and the factors that program designers and instructors should consider before designing in-country, online activities, like private discussion boards, Facebook 'Groups,' or reflective blog assignments. We offer some advice about choosing which technology, including the relative strengths and weaknesses of each. Ideally, we believe that a comprehensive communication strategy will use a variety of channels for specific purposes, and recapture student reflection through multiple media to better integrate study abroad into campus life. The later parts of the module include reflection questions, non-technical advice to help students to improve the quality of their writing, special activities for students to do at re-entry to share their overseas experiences, and other resources that

might improve student communication skills. Many of these resources are provided to help study abroad program coordinators 're-cycle' student reflection through various channels so that it might be used to inform, orient and inspire later cohorts of students preparing to go abroad. Our own project assumed that we would use student reflections extensively in our curriculum materials, and we believe that this type of peer-to-peer communication is an especially effective way to strengthen student reflective learning and encourage greater interest in international educational experience of all types.

Studying abroad in the internet age

The rise of Facebook, email, and social networking services more generally, the spread of mobile and 'smart' phones, have been among the most important technological changes in communication of the past decade, and our students have been even more affected by these innovations than their teachers. Although we may think of these technologies as invasive, our students often see them as absolutely obligatory, as necessary for their daily lives and social interactions as telephones and other older communication technologies. The landscape is changing quickly; whereas most students did not have mobile phones as recently as 2005, acquiring a phone and local sim card are now among the first order of business for students arriving in their host country for study abroad.

The majority of Australian students sojourning overseas are 'digital natives', having grown up with communication technologies (see Roberts, Foehr & Rideout 2005), and they study abroad in countries in Europe and North America where these technologies are also ubiquitous. Most of our students maintain high levels of connection when overseas, complaining bitterly, for example, if they do not have wireless internet access while sojourning abroad (as do their parents, in many cases!).

New communication technologies are changing the way that students experience international exchange, allowing them to maintain much stronger ties to their home while sojourning abroad, even to the detriment of their international learning goals. Many people working in study abroad are ambivalent about the effect of improvements in communication technology on the international exchange experience. Kelly Holland (2012), for example, describes the over-connected international student, in her case, visiting from the United States to Europe:

Picture yourself a giant: standing tall, straddling the Atlantic. One foot is cushioned in the US – with news of home, drama from school, TV shows and local sports crawling up your leg. Your other foot is perched carefully on the Rock of Gibraltar, scaring away the tourists, not speaking the language and slowly crushing the immersion out of your study abroad experience.

The fear is real, and a balance does need to be struck, but this applies to life at home as well as overseas. (For further discussion of some of the issues relating to student over-connection, see Gordon 2010.)

The same technologies, however, can also be used to encourage reflective learning, exploration, transformation and greater global awareness. A central aim of the Bringing the Learning Home project was to develop strategies to use the strengths of Gen Y students, including their own communication styles, to deepen and enrich cultural and international learning while abroad. Although we agree with some technological sceptics that getting students to 'disconnect' can be a powerful experience, especially when they are overseas or engaged in cultural immersion (and we can well understand why some international programs, especially intensive language study or immersive cultural exchanges with home stays or service learning, might seek to limit student communication or time online), we also sought to explore how new channels of communication might be used to enrich intercultural learning.

Creating a 'third space' through technology

Scholars in the field of intercultural competence, like O'Dowd (2003), advocate the creation of a 'third space,' neither students' home, nor their host culture, where students can be more neutral and comparative, recognising that ways of life and social strategies vary significantly across cultures. As students compare home and host countries, a 'third space' encourages them to see cultural comparison more broadly, with more opportunity to consider various options for cultural adaptation. Especially allowing students to communicate with others who are sojourning abroad in countries that they themselves have not visited, can help them to gain a broader perspective on variations of culture, encouraging them to move to a cosmopolitan 'third space' from which they can gain greater analytical appreciation of both their hosts and their home. (For much more discussion of these and related issues, see both the Globalisation and Cosmopolitanism and the Cultural Relativism and Analysis modules.)

By reflecting publicly on a weblog about what they have seen, students also allow other students on exchange to use their observations to construct this broader comparative perspective. On a shared blog or discussion site, students can read about fellow Australians trying to adjust to classes in Spain, Austria, Argentina, Sweden, Japan or the United States. The shared, multi-directional exchange among peers, on a public forum, can provoke students from other institutions, even members of the host country to respond. By making the forum more open and not focusing on exchange in a single country, we believe that a reflective blog reinforces the value of cosmopolitanism, a global perspective and the 'third space' O'Dowd (2003) discusses.

If you are successful in creating an online 'third space' among students on study abroad, you may counteract some of the pernicious types of interaction in which students sojourning

abroad can engage. For example, an online community of fellow students studying abroad can fight the tendency of students to 'enclave' while abroad, joining with other international students to complain about the host culture. Students can also find support from other sojourning exchange students if members of their host culture and friends back home are not sympathetic. Often, the most willing ears will be other students experiencing similar concerns in a range of places. Students sojourning abroad, eager to compare their experiences, can constitute a receptive, empathetic, inquisitive, and creative audience for each other's observations while abroad.

However, any use of online study abroad support has to be aware that students may not necessarily have easy access to the internet. Although some programs now provide extensive support for student connectivity, even requiring home stay hosts to have wifi in their homes, some programs, especially in the developing world, do not offer the same opportunities. Warn students in advance if they should not expect connectivity to be as easy or cheap overseas as it is in their homes. In some places, they will find that familiar patterns of checking Facebook, calling home, or texting can run up significant bills, for example. Students need to ask returning students, resident directors in the host country, and fellow international students what to expect.

Using the internet to create a 'third space' may be ideal, but, especially if many of the students in your program are bound for places without strong internet links, you probably need to provide strong alternative programming. They may already be anxious about disconnection; you do not want to feed this anxiety. Colleagues leading study groups to field sites in Central and South America tell stories of students who seemed to be experiencing low-grade panic attacks when they were not able to get to internet cafes at regular intervals. Helping students to see the opportunities opened up by travelling more remotely, especially by showing examples of the work that previous cohorts of students did in similar programs, can be one way to combat disconnection anxiety.

Going public

Upon their return, students who have sojourned abroad are potentially a resource for the whole community, if we find ways of helping them to share their experience. The BTLH team believes, based on our research and first-hand experience, that helping students to communicate about their study abroad and exchange can improve the programming in our international offices, add a new dimension of global awareness to on-campus education, and generally inspire greater interest in other countries. If our programming is successful, and if we guide students effectively, their reflections and other forms of communication should become the most persuasive proof of the power of international education and study abroad. For this reason, we strongly encourage finding ways to make student work public, especially

using new channels offered by inexpensive video production and publishing and the opportunities of Web 2.0 developments.

Making student reflections, photographs, and videos public does involve some risks, for example, that a program might suffer embarrassment or that students will tarnish their own reputations. In many cases, however, programs are already running these risks without recognising them, as students are using the same technologies we are discussing to share photos, comments, and stories with friends and families online. We believe that bringing these technologies into the explicit programming of international and study abroad offices, especially if we can alert students to the issues, refine their abilities, and highlight both the opportunities and risks, will do much more to minimise risks and set clear expectations. Ignoring Web 2.0 technologies does not mean that students will not be using them. We recommend embracing these channels of communication where appropriate and using them to help students achieve their educational and professional goals.



Pre-departure

Depending upon your program, your pre-departure discussion of communication with your students will vary. For example, if you are planning on using student blogging as a tool while they are abroad, you will need to talk to students about guidelines for appropriate posts, advice for giving comments, technical issues to get them started, and likely some suggestions for improving their writing (all discussed below). If your program includes a for-credit course or curriculum unit, you will need to discuss assessment criteria and your expectations with students.

Even if your program is entirely voluntary (as our pilot project was), we strongly encourage you to discuss opportunities that students will have when they return from their international sojourns, such as photography exhibitions or competitions, university publications that accept articles about student experiences, any 'digital storytelling' or writing workshops that might be available for their international experience, or any other opportunities to give public talks or to present in person stories about their experiences while overseas. This kind of foreshadowing, especially if reinforced by reminders through your digital communication, can help students to anticipate and prepare for opportunities when they return home to communicate about their experiences.

Regardless of the opportunities that you are able to present to students upon re-entry, we do advocate that you at least talk to them about the Photo Passport (Exercise Two). In their roles as intercultural emissaries, students may find that having visual aids to show to their hosts about their home culture serves a vital communicative function.

Exercise One

Foreshadowing opportunity

As part of your pre-departure orientation, we strongly recommend that you conduct a brief review with students of opportunities that they will have after their return to communicate about their experiences, and what this might entail upon their return. The student abroad program coordinator or instructor for your international curriculum will need to conduct an inventory of possible avenues for communication, such as:

- Campus publications that accept student writing.
- Publications or promotional materials from your office which feature student testimonies.
- Photography competitions or shows, either generally or in your international office.
- Support for student-produced media, such as film, video or writing workshops.
- Pre-departure or international recruiting activities that could use student presenters.
- Undergraduate research conferences on your campus that might allow 'poster presentations' based on a student's study abroad.
- Local high schools, retirement communities, rotary clubs, or other groups seeking speakers.

If your university offers students few opportunities to share their experiences, consider starting one in your office, especially as part of your recruiting activities. In our experience, small cash prizes, together with public presentation, can motivate students to polish their stories of study abroad into excellent quality work. Coupled with a public exhibition or an in-office publication, these resources can then be used to encourage other students to consider study abroad, and to anticipate similar opportunities to communicate upon return.

For example, consider having a pub 'slide night,' a suggestion made by BTLH board member, Innes Ireland, in which students are given as little as three or five minutes to tell a story with a limited number of photographic slides. The audience can vote for the best story by writing on beer coasters, and then, when the votes are tallied, the best storytellers given small prizes. Students who are considering study abroad can be encouraged to attend, and oral storytelling encouraged as both an art form and a communication skill.

Consider using student presenters as part of your orientation program, but only if the student presenters are helped to succeed and present effectively: too often, we're content simply to have student participation and thus don't want to burden volunteers by having them polish their performances. High expectations and status for these presentations can lead students to invest greater energy and take away a sense of pride at their accomplishments (see the notes on public presentations, and further discussion in the module, Globalisation and Cosmopolitanism).

Pre-departure

Exercise Two

Photo passport

In even our minimal pre-departure workshop, we encourage students to prepare a 'Photo Passport' before travelling abroad. A Photo Passport is a collection of about eight to twelve printed photographs or postcards from their home that the students think best captures the range of their lives: the family, friends, home (however they define it), hobbies, favourite places, and daily lives. The content is left up to the students completely, but we strongly encourage the students not to rely on electronic photographs on their mobile phones or laptop computers.

We have many reasons for suggesting that the students take hard copies, including the practicality of showing the printed photos to other people and the potential to use them to decorate their living space. More importantly, however, limiting the number of printed photos forces the students to cull what may be an enormous visual library, choosing only a very small set of the most important images. Many students will have hundreds or thousands of photos on portable electronic devices. The exercise of choosing a handful to commit to hard copy for the trip encourages the students to prioritise and to communicate visually with greater efficiency. We remind students that few people – even their closest friends, let alone new friends overseas – will want to look through *all* of their photos, so having a short list of the most important will help them to communicate.

The Photo Passport exercise was inspired by the experience of one team member while living overseas. In his rush to depart and the attempt to leave out of his luggage anything that was not absolutely necessary, Greg brought no photos of his immediate family with him when living abroad in Brazil. The people he met in Brazil, especially those with whom he became most intimate, often asked about his family and were surprised to find that Greg had brought no photos of his parents and brother. In retrospect, Greg felt that he was asking his hosts to let him into their lives without being able to return the favour in any meaningful way; photographs of his family and home would have been a most welcome conversation starter and resource for communicating about his life back home.

The Photo Passport is a resource for communicating to our hosts about life in our home, to combat stereotypes, to share more about ourselves, and to act as an intercultural ambassador. Having actual prints means being able to pass them around, share them even when travelling on the weekend without a personal computer, or hold onto them even when a mobile phone breaks down. To record the Photo Passport as part of a course, however, we also encourage students to submit their collection as a PowerPoint or electronic document so that they can be reviewed after their re-entry.

The Photo Passport, for this reason, is also discussed in the Transformation module because the activity is an excellent one for assessing a student's growth and transformation from international exchange. When students return, we ask them, for example, to consider if they would leave out any photos now because they have changed their opinion about how the photos represent their lives in Australia. We ask if any photos taken overseas would have to be added

because they have found new dimensions of themselves. The reactions of people overseas to the photos that they chose may help to inspire discussions of the impressions of Australians overseas, differences in dress or self presentation, or even how the students have changed and matured. The Photo Passport helps students to communicate who they are, but also to remember who they were when they assembled the collection.



Activity

Tell students to assemble a collection of images that they think best represents who they are, what matters to them, and the things that they want to talk about when they are overseas. They might include their family, friends, pets, hobbies, favourite places, home, or anything else that is especially relevant. Students should choose between eight and twelve images and make sure that they have hard copies of these images. Ask that students also submit the images in electronic form, either as a slideshow, or, if necessary, simply arrange the images on a flat surface and take a photograph of the collection before departure.

We strongly recommend that the instructor not attempt to influence the choice of images. Students often choose images that they later find embarrassing; for example, students may become more aware of the stereotypical faces that they make for photographs, the fact that they tend to take pictures of only a small part of their lives, or a range of other issues. We find that students learn more if they are allowed to realise these insights on their own, without much direction except through reflection questions.

As the Reflection and Transformation modules discuss, not every student will have the same learning outcomes from experience-based education. They will reach different stages of development and gain their own distinctive insights while sojourning abroad, and we seek simply to help them recognise and consolidate the learning that has happened, and catalyse continued reflection and maturation. In addition, students are more likely to remain open to change if the forms of reflection are open-ended and shared because they tend to be more comfortable learning from their peers' experiences than from an instructor's prescriptions.

In-country support

New communication technologies provide instructors or facilitators in study abroad with a number of options for engaging students, either individually or as a group, while they are sojourning abroad. The possibility of inclusive, interactive, and asynchronous communication – participants are not required to participate at the same time – makes these channels extremely attractive for teaching purposes, especially with students living across multiple time zones.

For many study abroad offices, the question is, which technology to use. In our experience, the program designer should consider the following questions before deciding:

1. What technologies are available to me, including IT support at my home institution, but also in relation to my university's IT policies (for example, restrictions on what may be posted on University-hosted websites)?
2. What technologies will be available to my students while they are abroad? Will they have frequent, high-speed internet access or only limited connections, or will the group be mixed?
3. Do I hope to create interactive channels, in which students and even people not involved in our programs can participate, or do I wish to have more controlled, closed channels of communication, in which students receive targeted feedback and fulfill course requirements for assessment?
4. What kind of resources do I have to dedicate to in-country support, including time? (As you will read, many of the technological channels are available at no cost.)
5. How pervasive or frequent would I like student participation to be? Am I seeking to get every student involved or only searching for high quality material that might be used for publicity or training purposes?
6. How public do I want student reflections to be?
7. Do I want to be able to screen student reflections before they become public?
8. Will students be compelled to participate, whether as part of their overseas program or for credit in a course, or is participation voluntary?
9. What end result do we seek from our in-country support? Do we only wish to support the current cohort to adjust, cope and learn, or do we want these students to provide materials that might be re-used with future cohorts of exchange students?

As a result of our research and experience with the pilot project, the BTLH team believes that the **best strategy for communicating with students is to use multiple channels**, as we will

discuss. We recommend that instructors strongly consider using email for all essential or detailed communication relating to students' study programs or academic requirements. In addition, consider a weblog or encouraging students to do their own blogs for extended student reflections, and a Facebook 'Group' for more reflective, interactive, or social communication, including promoting discussion of posts on a collective blog or individual student blogs. Although this configuration may sound complicated, students are accustomed to using different communication channels for different purposes. Our suggested communication strategy, we hope, better matches students' own communication practices while minimising the instructor's work and duplication of messages.

If students are enrolled in a single class as part of their study abroad experience, the instructor can use a learning management system (LMS) like Blackboard or Moodle. Use of an LMS is a low risk strategy in that only individuals enrolled in the unit will be able to view the material. However, generating student engagement will be much more difficult, as no LMS has technology or programming to compare with Facebook or weblog host services like WordPress. Whereas students tend to access their Facebook accounts multiple times each day, they are likely to access an LMS for a course only when necessary, unless terribly engaged in course material.

Given this suggestion and the questions above, the following options are available to program designers. Because our comments about Facebook and weblogs are so extensive, these follow in separate sections.

Texting or SMS (Small Message Service):

In a study of teens in the United States, Lenhard (2010) found that 'the cell phone has become the communication hub for the majority of American teens,' and that texting is often the preferred mode of communication with their peers. Although differences exist between young men and women, texting appears to be emerging as the preferred mode of person-to-person communication, sometimes even preferred over talking because texting allows multi-tasking and greater privacy, and many users consider it fun.

For study abroad, however, texting is more useful as a quick, broadcast technology for short messages, reminders, or inquiries (see also Gunn-Lewis and Leenheer 2011). For the purpose of deepening intercultural understanding or students' global awareness, texting is not liable to be a useful technology.

Email:

Among teenagers, the use of email is dropping, as many of the social interactions that might have occurred in previous generations on email have migrated to text (Yoskowitz 2011). Entry into university, however, appears to coincide with a significant increase in students' use of email. Gunn-Lewis and Leenheer (2011), in a survey of university student preference in a study abroad program in New Zealand, report that almost 60% of their students preferred

email as a form of communication. The greater availability of smart phones and tablets with internet access probably means that this number will remain high, as email is increasingly exchanged using mobile devices.

For communicating with students while studying abroad, email appears likely to remain the preferred method. Students use multiple channels for communication, and they associate email with their responsibilities to the university; this division of communication among different media channels means that email should probably continue to be the primary mode of communicating important messages and short inquiries to students while they are overseas.

Learning Management Systems (Moodle, Blackboard):

If a group of students travelling abroad is part of a course, using a university-backed learning management system (LMS) like Moodle or Blackboard is a possibility. Students can have discussions, post reflections and interact with a course instructor. An LMS can make it easy to share resources, such as electronic copies of articles, and even provide support for some kinds of online assessment. Moreover, if privacy is a concern, LMS units tend to be private, with students only gaining access to the content and discussions if they are enrolled through the university in the proper course.

However, students do not tend to visit their LMS sites unless required, even when instructors try to provide additional resources. Lack of traffic and the obligatory nature of discussions can deter many students from participating, although some highly motivated students can make excellent use of LMS discussion boards. However, the inter-cohort dynamics and campus-wide benefits that might be gained by having students post reflections publicly will be lost. In general, LMS support may be of limited use. For the BTLH pilot project, the fact that we were working with volunteers on three campuses made the use of an LMS impossible.

If you decide to use an LMS, consider reposting the best or edited reflections to a blog if you wish to circulate student work. This combination of methods allows strong editorial control of the weblog content, but more direct intervention by the instructor will be required. In addition, as one team member's previous experience had shown, this two stage method was used, before the general availability of free blog hosting. Although the method worked well, editing and posting student work requires significant time investment by the instructor.



Facebook & social networking for international study

Social networking sites allow users to share messages, photos, links to website and posts about what they are doing. Although many alternative sites have arisen for special purposes, Facebook has emerged as the dominant social networking site in Australia. According to Facebook itself, the online social networking service has 800 million users worldwide. Uptake rates are as high or higher in Australia than in the United States, and young people, not surprisingly, are the most likely to be involved. But not only is Facebook pervasive in student populations, users find Facebook useful and engaging; more than half of users log on to their Facebook accounts every day.

In retrospect, the Bringing the Learning Home team did not sufficiently explore the use of Facebook in our pilot of teaching materials, in part because we did not yet appreciate the potential usefulness of the technology at the time. The pervasiveness of Facebook in social network communication has become more evident to educators in the past several years. Integrating a Facebook presence like a Group with a weblog for posting reflection is probably the ideal way in which to handle communication. The weblog could be used for posting students reflections and photo essays; Facebook would serve as the conduit for announcements (including of blog posts), discussions, and circulation of links, photos or videos.

Facebook Page or Group?

If you intend to use the Bringing the Learning Home curriculum while students are overseas, especially, we encourage you to consider setting up a **Facebook Page** or **Group**. Both options will allow you to communicate with students through one of the media that they use most often, including from mobile phones. For essential and official communication, email is still likely to be the preferred method, especially as many students are members of so many Groups and have so many Friends, that getting their attention for especially urgent or important matters can be difficult (see Gunn-Lewis and Leenheer 2011). Likewise, if you have a credit-granting course, and students are required to access the materials, an LMS may serve your purposes. However, if you are seeking to make your program more accessible and engaging, and you are fighting for their attention, Facebook is an ideal forum.

The basic difference between a Page and a Group, is that a **Group** is like a private club on Facebook, with a defined circle of people who can circulate material. People have to ask to join a Group, and someone in the Group with administrative authority (as defined by the person creating the Group) must grant the individual admission. Group status grants the

interactions some degree of privacy although we would hesitate to use Facebook for any communication that was intended to remain private. Currently, Facebook limits groups to 5000 members.

In contrast, a **Page** is an open channel of information, primarily from the Page administrator, almost like a designated 'homepage' for an organisation or entity on Facebook. Students will receive notices any time the Page is updated if they 'Like' the page from their accounts, but anyone can see the content of a Facebook Page and follow new posts by 'Liking' the Page. In other words, a Group is a (loosely) closed arrangement whereas a Page is a kind of public, accessible face for your program. With both arrangements, students will be able to receive messages or share their own posts. Pages provide some additional capacities, such as providing administrators with basic information about traffic to the site, the ability to send messages directly to all followers, the possibility of assigning the Page a personalised domain name, and being indexed by search engines (so that people can stumble across your Page when looking for information)

In general, Pages are more appropriate ways to advertise and promote your program; Groups are better to maintain a limited, private group of students. However, if students are not accessing information through a Group, it will tend to drop off their Facebook news page which means that a Group with low activity can become largely invisible.

We would strongly encourage study abroad advisors and instructors using the Bringing the Learning Home curriculum to consider adopting Facebook in a targeted, strategic fashion. Facebook Groups can be extremely lively, and integrating a Facebook Group or Page for your study abroad course, especially as part of a comprehensive communication strategy used in conjunction with a weblog for longer posts and reflective journaling, can be extremely successful. Because students can easily post photos, links, and short comments, a Facebook presence is liable to create a layer of greater interaction and vitality to exchange. If students are encouraged to maintain their own personal weblogs, or post to a shared weblog, a Facebook Page or Group can be used to post links to new entries, encourage discussion, make announcements, share advice, ask questions, and spread news quickly. A Facebook Page or Group can promote your programs and keep you in closer contact with your students, but it also requires you or someone in the group to commit to finding interesting links so that the Group or Page does not simply drop off students' news feed.

Fred Stutzman (2006) offered ten guidelines for university administrators dealing with Facebook and similar technologies; these guidelines are probably more true now than they were when Stutzman first suggested them. The following are short versions of his longer points.

facebook for educators!

1. **Facebook (or some similar technology) is not going away.**
The technology is useful to our students (and to many of us), so we need to adapt to Facebook as educators.
2. **Virtually all of our students are on some form of social networking service.**
Stutzman found take-up rates of 94%, and although the rate of student participation is likely to vary with socio-economic status and country of origin, the overall rate in Australia is often found to be higher than in the United States.
3. Although students are abstractly concerned about their privacy, **they are not doing much, if anything, to protect their own privacy.**
4. As Stutzman puts it, **students sometimes do 'real stupid things'** on Facebook. Online archives are more permanent than police records.
5. **Facebook has a distinctive culture and style of interaction**, often absurd and unpredictable.
6. **Facebook is producing its own rituals**, some of them even touching and emotionally fulfilling, like online mourning.
7. **Facebook is doing IT better than your university**, providing faster, higher quality service, so why would students use a less powerful and elegant system provided by their university?
8. **Students believe that they are among peers** (that you're not watching), so they are experimenting with their identities online.
9. Because Facebook is pervasive and not going away, **we need to help students craft online selves that they will not regret in a few years.** We need to include online identity management in the way that we teach.
10. **Don't try to use Facebook to police your students** or spy on them. Especially avoid punitive interaction when students are often just revealing what we already know they do (they drink too much, they do stupid things), but which we usually ignore. Clumsy attempts to discipline students can lead them to disconnect or turn against individuals they perceive 'got them into trouble.'

Weblogs

as support for international exchange

The explosion of personal weblogs (or 'blogs') in education has helped to encourage exchange, collaboration, and communication among professionals and students (Churchill 2009). Weblogs are a form of personal publishing, generally consisting of text-based entries or 'posts' that are presented in reverse chronological orders (most recent first, as earlier entries are pushed further 'down' the weblog homepage). Blogs allow users to share personal reflections, photographs, and weblinks while creating a steadily growing archive of earlier posts, which can be searched or accessed by visitors to the site. Unlike fixed web pages, blogs are not generally static as new content does not replace old, but merely displaces it further into the blog archive. Blogs also frequently allow visitor 'comments' as well, creating opportunities for asynchronous discussion. Blogs are part of the pattern of Web 2.0, the shift to platforms that allow user interaction and generation of content rather than just fixed presentation of designers' information. This shift is sometimes characterised as being a move away from 'broadcast' models to more 'conversation'-like structures.

Blogs create distinctive opportunities that are not shared by all online technologies because of their nature and design (for a longer discussion, see Deng and Yuen 2011):

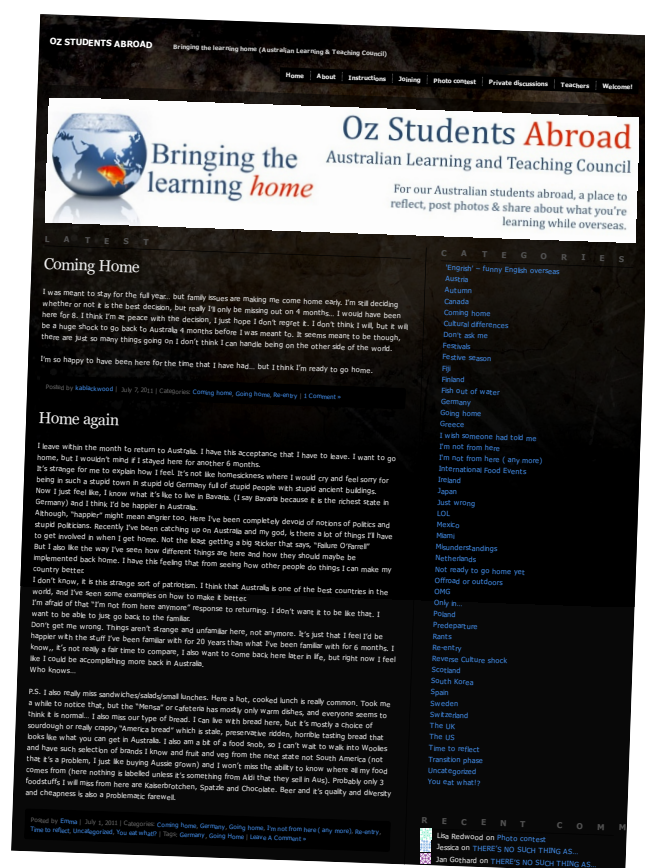
- The **possibility of commenting on and linking to other people's posts** creates forms of discussion, commentary, and interaction that are not available in more fixed forms of online presentation, such as e-textbooks.
- The public or semi-public nature of blogging means that students can **see what each other writes**, compare their insights, and learn from each other, unlike direct electronic communication with an instructor.
- The public or semi-public nature of blogging also allows non-students and others to see what students write, creating potential **interactions with a much broader public** and giving students 'published' examples of their work for inclusion in a portfolio (see the Professionalisation module).
- The **asynchronous nature of blog writing** is ideal for study abroad situations in which students may be scattered around the globe at different sites or have such complicated schedules that organising an online 'meet-up' time might be impossible for live communication and discussion.
- Virtually all blogging platforms allow students to present in their posts **rich media, including photographs or embedded video clips**, although students will probably need a separate host for video (such as YouTube or Vimeo) as the memory requirements of video can be great.
- As a genre, blogging **encourages introspection and more elaborate reflection** than social networking sites like Facebook, although instructors may still need to scaffold student writing and participation initially.

- Blogging and reading other people's blog posts can **provide a strong sense of community**, as students may feel like they are less alone and sharing each other's sojourns, even though they are in diverse countries.
- Commercial and non-profit providers of blog services (see below) have created sophisticated yet intuitive interfaces which allow those without programming or web design expertise to create quite **professional and attractive websites**.
- For an administrator, many of the tools embedded in blogs by providers **facilitate tracking and assessing student work**, and integrating their reflections into teaching or classroom activities.

Australian students have already embraced blogging. As many as a quarter of university students in Australia already post material on a blog, generally a personal one. Even if you are not familiar with blogs, your students very likely are, so the format, including discussion, is likely to be easily taken up, even if you must be clear to shape students' expectations about how they will write and interact.

In support of your study abroad group, you can either open a shared, group blog, or have students use individual blogs for their own travel journaling. A shared blog will require you or someone in your office to administer the site, although these demands are facilitated by quite user-friendly platforms for accomplishing tasks like adding new contributors and screening comments. The BTLH team started a group weblog (OzStudentsAbroad.com), but we also found that some of our students started their own individual travel blogs, or used pre-existing blogs to document their trips.

The BTLH project initially tested blogging extensively as a means of communicating with students and encouraging reflection, in part because of the emerging literature on the use of blogs in education (e.g., Deng and Yuen 2011; Halic et al. 2010; Lee 2009; Top 2012), but practical concerns also shaped our choice. Because the BTLH students were not enrolled in a credit-granting class and were spread across three campuses, we could not easily use an LMS like Blackboard or Moodle. Participation in our pilot project was entirely voluntary, no credit was being offered, so we relied upon student enthusiasm, and our experience was that class-based LMS sites were not attractive to students unless they were required to use them. We hoped that the opportunity to publish their own reflections online, on a strong and attractive collective website, would provide some students with sufficient incentive to participate.



For many, however, a strictly voluntary program of public writing was not attractive. The resulting drop out rate was high, as students became engaged with other activities while overseas, or generally lost track of the weblog, and stopped participating. However, the quality of many of the posts was excellent, as demonstrated by our extensive use of excerpts from student writings in the BTLH teaching materials. If your program is seeking to encourage greater reflection among students and to generate student reflection, even a voluntary weblog might be sufficient to start the process, building a body of articles, photos and other materials that will enrich your campus' international exchange programs.

The practicalities: Blog options

One of the strengths of blogs as an online forum is that free providers such as WordPress.com, Blogger and Tumblr provide excellent tools at virtually no, or very low cost. Opening a weblog on one of these independent platforms is an attractive option, but you will need to consult your university IT office about your university's policies on online publishing.

In general, we have found that Australian universities do not have clear policies about class blogs or educational blogs. Using an independent platform means that you will have control of the content, will be able to post things immediately, but may not be able to use the visual identity of your home university, or imply that your site is official in any way. Hosting your site on an independent platform may become an issue if participation in the blog is a required university activity, so make sure to ask.

Using an external provider, however, also brings a number of advantages. Unlike a university website, blogs are very easy to change and update, and robust design templates make sure that your content generally looks good without the person posting or administering the site needing to have much technical knowledge about web design. External providers, in general, have excellent software and services; WordPress, for example, is not-for-profit with a large number of volunteer designers, and seems to constantly add features. The external host automatically backs up your content and is probably less vulnerable to hacking because providers are in the business of refining the necessary software and security protocols.

For more information about blogs in Education, see the Department of Education, Australia, website on the subject:

<http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/cmis/eval/curriculum/ict/weblogs/>

Students can create special travel weblogs on sites like GoAbroad.net (<http://www.goabroad.net/>) as well. GoAbroad.net is a specialised provider which will synch with a student's Facebook page, and is affiliated with travel support organizations, including NAFSA.

Providers: WordPress, Blogger and Tumblr

Blogs can be hosted in a number of ways, but the primary free blogging platforms are WordPress, Blogger and Tumblr.

Tumblr, in general, will not be appropriate for most educational purposes, as the platform functions very much like a social networking site, rather than an online publication. That is, Tumblr allows quick aggregation of posts, content sharing (and borrowing), and seems to discourage longer reflections (although it is possible to write long posts in Tumblr). The templates are simple and very easy to read, but do not allow much customisation or provide many additional functions.

Material on a Tumblr blog tends to get 're-blogged', as many users aggregate content from other Tumblr blogs, and posts often have an almost 'micro-blogging' feel to them (more like the short posts found on Twitter, which restricts posts to 140 characters). Much of the material on Tumblr is photographs, but even so, we did not feel that the platform was appropriate for the photographic dimensions of our blogging project as we also sought written reflections from the students on their images.

Blogger was first launched in 1999 and purchased by Google in 2003, and is the third most popular platform for blogs. Because Blogger is well integrated with other Google services, you sign in through your Google account (or make one to start blogging), posts are quickly indexed on the search engine, blogs link easily with Google+ and YouTube, and a blogger can even enrol in Google's AdSense program, generating a bit of revenue from traffic to the site. Blogger services are generally free or quite inexpensive, and users report that the interface is intuitive and very easy to learn, although not as flexible as WordPress. Because the interface is so straight-forward, start-up is simple, and even a first-time user can have a blog up and running in a few minutes.

If you are asking students to start their own, individual blogs, Blogger might be the best option, especially for those students who are concerned about the technical challenges of the task. Many first-time users start on Blogger, and, if they continue to blog and develop greater facility with the platform, later may migrate to Wordpress.com.

WordPress is the largest platform for blogging, run by a non-profit company. WordPress consists of two separate options: WordPress.com, the more commonly used, highly structured version of the platform, in which the company also hosts the website; and WordPress.org, a more flexible but technically demanding option, where the WordPress software is used to host a blog on the user's own server. Odds are, if you're reading this module for advice, you'll be more interested in WordPress.com.

Certainly, if you are unfamiliar with blogging and are to administer the site yourself (or a non-specialist in your office will be), you'll probably prefer WordPress.com. If your use of

blogging is part of a more comprehensive strategy at your university, you may find that your institution will want to move to WordPress.org (one team member works through both WordPress.org and WordPress.com on different blogs, and most of what we will advise applies to both systems from the user's perspective, although administration differs).

In part because of team members' familiarity with their software, we settled on using WordPress.com for a number of reasons. You will need to consider the following:

- Although initially free, use of WordPress is likely to entail a small expense for any sustained engagement: a flat fee allows the administrator to purchase a domain (that is, a name that doesn't end in '.wordpress.com') and enrol more than a few dozen users (we enrolled over one hundred in our 'team blog'). Our team probably spent a little over \$150 on our weblog over the course of two years.
- WordPress provides an initial free allocation of 3 GB of memory, more than Blogger (especially important as we were using online photoblogging), and upgrades to greater storage are relatively inexpensive. Very large, high resolution photographs can eat up memory.
- Although not as simple or intuitive as Blogger (which can be an issue for first-time users), the interface for WordPress is relatively easy to learn, which is especially important if you seek to enrol students directly as contributors and authors.
- The templates or pre-prepared designs are quite attractive and professional looking. For our purposes, we found a small number of templates specially designed for photoblogs; these had minimal other visual clutter and additional features, such as being able to upload a gallery at once, rather than having to post one photograph at a time.
- WordPress has very flexible photo editing available in the general menu; that is, a user can easily resize an image after it is uploaded.
- WordPress allows participants to be designated in different roles, amounting to four separate layers of access and authority. For example, in WordPress, students can be made 'contributors,' which does not allow them to upload photos or publish without an editor's approval, or 'authors,' which allows them to publish their own work and to post photographs.

As most instructors who will be using weblogs in study abroad are not technical specialists in online publishing, we believe that the key is to find a platform with which you are comfortable. Blogger may be easier to use, but the extra functions, especially around photographs, and the prior experience of one team member, pushed our project team decision in the direction of WordPress.

For more information on the relative merits of Blogger (blogspot) and WordPress, a compilation of articles comparing the platforms can be found here:

Blogging service shootout: Blogger vs. WordPress

http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/9224441/Blogging_service_shootout_Blogger_vs_WordPress

Many basic and advanced tutorials on different dimensions of working on WordPress can be found online, and WordPress does have its own technical support. If you have specialised questions about either Blogger or WordPress, online searching will likely turn up a forum where that question has already been asked.

Video tutorial: WordPress.com - Step-by-Step Tutorial on How to Blog by Chris Abraham of Appliedblogging.com

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HEWPnHY8D3E>

100+ WordPress Video Tutorials, from Basic to Advanced at Speckyboy.com, design magazine

<http://speckyboy.com/2008/11/17/100-wordpress-video-tutorials-from-basic-to-advanced/>

WP Apprentice also offers instructional material.

<http://wordpresstraining.com/training-index/>

110+ Massive WordPress Video Tutorial Collection at the blog, 1stwebdesigner.

<http://www.1stwebdesigner.com/tutorials/110-massive-wordpress-video-tutorial-collection/>



Ethics of blogging

Blogger Tim O'Reilly, founder of O'Reilly Media and a leader in the open source movement, has proposed a 'Blogger's Code of Conduct' that students and study abroad administrators alike might find a good point of departure for discussing policies and roles, but it tends to focus on problems associated with anonymous comments on posts (see the draft code here: <http://radar.oreilly.com/archives/2007/04/draft-bloggers-1.html>; see also Deubel 2007). We recommend that educational blog administrators exert control over comments and institute a comment policy; abusive comments should not be allowed, not only because they reflect badly on the administrator and the blog as a whole, but because they also can have a chilling effect on student participation. O'Reilly's final principle is perhaps the most important: 'Don't say anything online that you wouldn't say in person.'

Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com/content.g>) has its own code of conduct, especially prohibiting illegal content, hate speech, pretending to be someone else online, and disclosing personal information, and regulating adult content. The Electronic Frontier Foundation also has an online 'Legal Guide for Bloggers' (<https://www.eff.org/issues/bloggers/legal>). For the most part, students overseas will not have to worry about legal liability for what they write online; students travelling to countries with very strict defamation laws or controls on electronic 'speech,' however, need to be aware of these restrictions.

Most students, instead, will need to be careful of less explicit, ethical issues, especially ways that online communication can turn a momentary indiscretion or outburst into a permanent error, archived forever. In our guidelines for students, we recommend that students self-impose a cooling off period if they write in frustration, that they not use a blog to 'vent,' and that they remember that they are guests when sojourning abroad, so they want to recall how it would feel to be treated by visitors to Australia.

However, this advice may not be sufficient. One reason that we advocate a team blog rather than individual blogs for students is that, on a centralised weblog, program administrators can exercise some final control and remove posts or comments if the administrators think that that a post or comment is either unethical or likely to be deeply regretted. With a centralised blog, one of the BTLH team members could act as an over-arching authority, reserving the right, for example, to screen all comments on student posts before they were made public (or seen by the student).

Guidelines for blogging

Although instructors may add their own guidelines, we suggest that students be advised of the following (a student version of these guidelines is in the Resources book for this module):

Don't blog under your full name; using your first name is sufficient to be able to refer to your posts later as part of your professional portfolio, while still protecting your privacy to a significant degree. In addition, we strongly encourage students not to reveal personal details. Students will need to inform program administrators of their screen names, however, if credit is being granted for participation on a blog (on a team blog, some students will have given the full name when they registered to join the blog, but it is possible to register without providing all this information in some cases).

Don't blog anyone else's full name. Especially if you are talking about children or people who do not know you are writing about them, even consider using pseudonyms. The use of pseudonyms is accepted practice in social research, and will do nothing to detract from your stories.

Avoid obscenities. Although Australians may be comfortable with colourful language, a student's host culture may not be. An innocuous curse may translate into something much more serious.

Avoid 'text-speak' or SMS abbreviations. Blog writing is formal writing, even though it's conversational, engaging, and – we hope – fun. Texting abbreviations are inappropriate for formal writing. In addition, the audience for a blog post includes, not only people from different generations, but also individuals who may not speak English as a first language. Too many abbreviations or too much slang can exclude members of the potential audience for the post.

Imagine that your grandparents or potential employers are likely to read your posts (which might be accurate). Students shouldn't write anything that they wouldn't want to say during Christmas dinner.

Don't vent on your blog. Blog posts are not a good forum for 'venting' if a student is frustrated or upset. We liken the situation to having a fight with a friend; a person wouldn't want to preserve a tirade online, for everyone to see, archived forever. The same is true for a blog post.

If a student writes something extremely emotionally charged, we strongly recommend a 'cooling off period.' Ask the student to wait 24-hours before posting, as once something is posted, it will be quickly cached and unable to delete. If you are moderating a post and it appears intemperate, we suggest temporarily 'unpublishing' or moving the post to 'private' so that the student might have a chance to reconsider. You can 'de-publish' without deleting the post, and bring your concerns to the student's attention (Note: this option is only available on a team blog.)

Think carefully before posting identifying photos. Photos pose less of a problem for personal identity, ironically, because they are not able to be searched for online without an

accompanying text or tag. However, we would suggest encouraging students to get photos for their blog that capture the scene, distinctive elements from the environment, and other aspects of life overseas without necessarily always posing in front of whatever is being photographed. (See the discussion of photos below.)

You're representing 'your people' as well as your host country. Students should also remember to put their best foot forward as they are representing both themselves and their own country. If a visitor came to Australia and did nothing but whinge about Australians, complain that everything wasn't the same as home, or focus only on problems and not the great strengths of the country, their Australian hosts would quite rightly feel that the visitor was being unfair. Students may regret later being ungracious, especially if a temporary frustration gives way to a greater sense of satisfaction and belonging.

Writing a reflective journal online

'It is important for the facilitator to remember that the goal of reflection is for the participant to construct meaning out of their experiences ... [and the] discovery of new connections' (Dickson & Gray 2006:44).

A blog entry, in the context of exchange experience, is an opportunity for facilitated student reflection. Writing for a blog enables the student to reflect on their overall learning experience, in class and beyond, and to share that with others, either peers or a broader public. A written piece can serve as an opportunity for debriefing, enabling students both to share with others and to learn vicariously from each other's experiences. If they are able to read other students' posts prior to departure or while sojourning, the exchange of reflections might help students to learn that some of the seeming disasters and tragedies they face are not confined to them alone; nor are the personal triumphs. The sharing of written reflection is an opportunity to learn from the good, the bad and the ugly, in the company of people who are in the same situation.

Research on the integration of blogs as a tool for reflection shows that the process can be successful, but that profound reflection is not an automatic result. Students tend to get more sophisticated and insightful the longer and more frequently they blog, and seeing other students' posts can allow them to gain a greater sense of what they are trying to accomplish (see Deng and Yuen 2011). Students should be encouraged to write regularly, but also to take the time to read and respond to other people's comments. Blogs also allow students to integrate interaction into their own writing, linking to other students' posts, for example, or comparing their own experiences to each others'.

Lee (2011) concludes that a number of factors are required for student blogging to be successful in international learning. Tasks must be well-designed, students trained in effective

metacognitive and critical skills, and internet access good at the host university overseas (see also Lee 2012). We suggest talking to students about what makes a good blog post, but then also commenting on posts publicly in ways that use the concepts and reflection questions below. When students read their peers' posts, these questions and prompts will help them see how their peers are being encouraged to reflect more deeply. Seeing how reflection is being elicited may actually be more valuable when the interaction is between the instructor and other students.

The feedback rubric (below) is a guide for students on what makes a good post, though it could also be used by an assessor as a marking guide.

Exercise Three

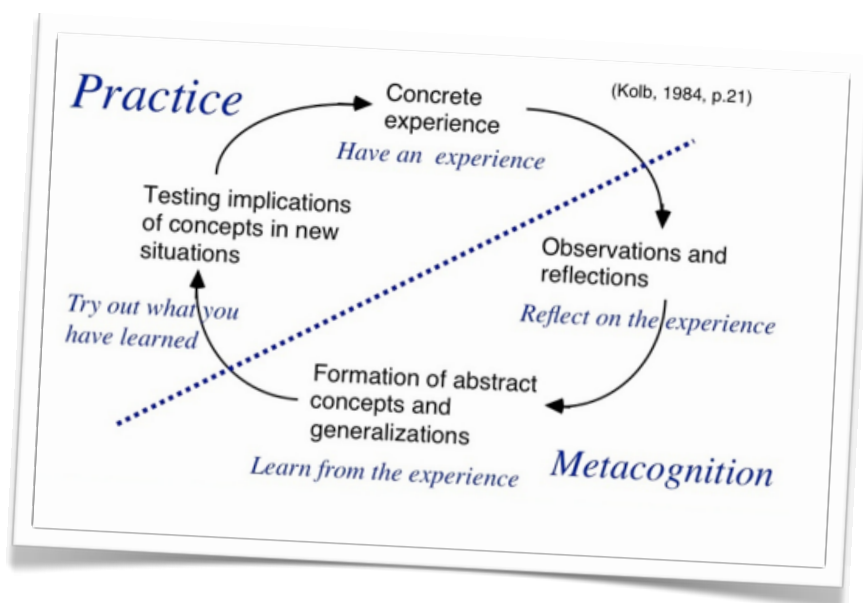
Blogging as we go: Online reflection & journalling

Encourage students either to start their own weblogs for journalling while overseas, or enrol students in a team blog for the course of their study abroad experiences. If the students are enrolled in a for-credit course, students can be required to blog and comment (for example, students can be required to post at least one blog post a week and five substantial comments). In-country blogging can support virtually all the subjects covered in the various other modules in the Bringing the Learning Home curriculum, so we've included guiding questions below that might feed into the other modules' key themes, such as Globalisation, Cultural Relativism, Adaptation, and Education and Culture.

What makes a good blog entry?

Think about Kolb's key tenets of experiential learning when writing a reflective journal entry (see the Reflection module starting page 8 for much more discussion of the cycle of reflection):

Students will no doubt be accustomed to sharing ideas, impressions, thoughts and experiences online already, typically through social media such as Facebook. The challenge for the instructor then is not just to prompt sharing of experience,



but rather to encourage deeper reflection and discourage some types of problematic sharing (such as snap judgments or overly stereotypical and hackneyed forms of expression).

Kolb's cycle, however, points to a more interesting process: encouraging students to reflect on or review what they observed or experienced and bringing about conscious change. The more that students seek to describe what they experienced, review what happened, and think about its significance, the more they will move beyond first impressions and shallow conclusions toward deeper learning. We then use probe questions, especially if students are not seeking to take away abstract or generalisable points from their experience (see below for examples). Finally, we can ask them what they might do differently, how they are learning from and adapting to what they experience.

The intention behind the blog is to encourage students to engage in reflection leading to growth and personal skill acquisition, but also greater knowledge and awareness of the world. Although self transformation is a crucial potential outcome of study abroad, unless we also seek to address themes like Cultural Relativism and Globalisation, we may find it hard to justify the necessity of going overseas to achieve our educational goals.

Concretely, then, what sorts of things differentiate a reflective journal entry from a one-dimensional catalogue of things done and places visited or a snap judgment or first impression of a place? Here are some other suggestions, written directly to the student audience:

Content

In your writing, start with concrete examples and catalogue the things you have done, the people met, the places visited, the new environment. But give details, too – who, what, where, why, when, how ... and in what ways does it compare with alternatives that might seem more familiar back home? That is, serious reflective journaling focuses on details, not just general impressions; on the sources of our opinions, not just our final assessment. What is it specifically about a person or an encounter that seemed odd?

Attitudes and feelings

Write about how you are feeling about our new environment, your excitement and anticipation, but also any fears and reservations. Then ask yourself, why am I feeling this way? Our feelings are an important part of our impressions of a place, and by examining them, we might be able to see when feelings are bleeding over from one part of our experience into another or indicative of some deeper issue. For example, frustration or shame with myself for not being able to speak the local language might be stopping me from appreciating other dimensions of daily life. Or I might be getting angry with people because they have very different beliefs about the proper conduct of men and women.

Learning or coping strategies

Write about how you are learning and adapting, about things which perhaps you didn't understand at first, but then came to understand, and the strategies you have developed in order to manage. The learning process is part of the adventure, not just your final point of arrival. And write about things you don't 'get', especially as you first arrive. You won't have all the learning strategies worked out when you first touch down, and even after you have been away for a while, moments or incidents will remind you that you are still a long way from home. Those first impressions, when you see a place with fresh eyes, are valuable and may record details that later become so commonplace to you that you stop seeing them.

Connections and extensions

Think and write about how the experiences you are accumulating might influence your life when you return home. Think about how home looks from a distance. Do you see it any differently now? How are your habits and customs, ways of dressing, news from back home, and other things you brought with you, interpreted by the people you meet? This kind of reverse reflection ('How do I look to the people I meet?') is a good opportunity to think about some of the issues that may have been raised in pre-departure sessions, for example, about how Australians are seen as stereotypes from abroad, how others may misinterpret our forms of communication, and how we can adapt to new contexts.

In general, try to step back from snap judgment and, even though you will inevitably compare home to host countries, try to have understanding for both. Remember, each culture looks completely natural to its own members. If you can see from both sides, you have developed a powerful analytical ability, being able to switch perspectives.



An example: moving from judgment to reflection

With the right kinds of rethinking and re-examination, even a snap judgment or critical point can be transformed into a much deeper reflection. An example from an Australian student in Europe shows critical comparison being used on the student's home culture, how cultural comparison can lead to reverse criticism:

I love not having to wear bike helmets here! Australia is such a nanny state - they really treat us like babies. People here make their own decision and are given credit for taking responsibility for themselves.

Certainly, the student is recognising a cultural difference; but is the judgment the whole story? Is the difference between Australia and some of the more bicycle-friendly urban areas of northern Europe, such as the Netherlands and Denmark, simply that the Australian state is too protective?

A more balanced and careful reflection might come to a different conclusion, realising that a whole context is different, not just one dimension of a situation:

I love not having to wear bike helmets here! But I guess at home, the situation is so different: in Australian cities we don't have the terrific cycle paths they have here, and everyone here seems to be so much more bike conscious. It kind of makes sense that we have to wear helmets in Australia – though I don't miss them.



Prompting greater reflection

Even if participation in online journaling is required, questions designed to prompt at relevant moments in a student's sojourn (including both before and after their sojourns) might be appropriate. In the project team's experience, blog interaction and reflective journaling is most successful where students know each other reasonably well before they go away, or if they are required to participate. The process of posing prompt questions can begin before departure and continue after students' return. As Russell and Valade (2010: 104) point out, asking questions of students before they depart can increase the 'intentionality of the consciousness' of their experiences; and a facilitated approach can deepen the benefit of the students' experiential learning throughout their sojourn.

If student posts are not terribly reflective, good questions can both help them to refine and sharpen their perceptions as well as give them a greater sense that their work is being read carefully, a key component to producing the sense of community necessary for successful blog-based learning. As you are reading student posts, asking good questions can push students to greater exploration and intercultural understanding. Some of the same questions that we use as general prompts (see below) can be tailored to individual reflections that students make.

To increase the sense of community and interaction (and to model interaction for the students), respond to a very good student post by incorporating it as the prompt for a class-wide reflective assignment. For example, if one student writes an excellent post about gender roles, make reference to that post when asking a prompt question to all the students. Not only will the student who wrote the post get a much greater sense of helping to create the curriculum, but also the rest of the group will have a great point of departure for intercultural comparison: not just a comparison with home, but also with a particularly well constructed post by another student. Encourage students to link to each other, to use their posts to say, 'I've seen something similar here, and this is what I think about it,' or 'I read your post and was amazed because I'm finding things in my host country different in another way.'

Students may also become more receptive to leading questions after they have been in their host country a little while and have gained in confidence, so not all questions can be posed in pre-departure sessions. Observing student comments on a study abroad Facebook page, or reading their reflections in blogs, can help the instructor to recognise opportunities to probe with questions that are particularly well suited to the students' own concerns and stages of acclimatisation to their host cultures (although, inevitably, students will be at different stages in development and comfort levels). If you are using a comprehensive communication strategy that includes a Facebook Group, you can post links to students' posts, offer comments there, and use their reflections as points of departure for broader discussions.

One of the virtues of directed questioning is that it can move students beyond a focus on self-reflection to engage in cultural reflection and discussion of intercultural relations, leading to growth in global awareness, and from focusing on obstacles and complaints to a greater recognition of personal growth and transformation. We suggest that you review the models for encouraging reflection, recognising transformation, and analysing cultural difference that are found in the appropriate modules (Reflection, Transformation and Cultural Difference and Analysis).

The following questions draw on topics from virtually all the other modules, which we indicate after them. Using these types of probing questions, especially for in-country activities like reflective blogging, can prepare students for the re-entry portions of the BTLH modules and give instructors specific examples to discuss in seminars from the students' own experiences. Make sure to include specific tags for posts (see below) in the menu so that you can easily refer students to their own writings on the topics you wish to address in re-entry.

Sample prompt or response questions that focus on different dimensions of students' potential learning while abroad might include:

Pre-departure

- What are you hoping to gain from undertaking study abroad? (Transformation, Exploration)
- What differences are you expecting to encounter in your host country? (Cultural Differences, Globalisation, Stereotypes)
- How do you think you will cope or deal with these differences? (Adaptation)
- How prepared do you feel for your sojourn? (Reflection)
- What do you expect to miss most? (Adaptation)
- What impact do you think your time abroad might have eventually on your career or future professional choices? (Transformation, Professionalisation)

In country

On arrival/first two or three weeks

- What differences have you noticed since your arrival? (Cultural Differences, Education)
- Consider food, housing, transport, architecture, pace of living; but think also about aspects like smells and taste, climate; clothing.
- Have you faced any particular challenges? Give some examples. (Adaptation, Transformation, Professionalisation)

- Have you had to deal with any ambiguous situations, or situations where you felt unsure about how to respond? How did you deal with this ambiguity? What strategies do you find helpful in coping with unfamiliar situations? (Adaptation, Cultural Difference, Professionalisation)
- How have these differences affected your understanding of yourself and of this new culture? (Transformation, Reflection)

Questions for the main part of sojourn

- The experience of 'culture shock' is sometimes seen as a journey from a state of euphoria (the 'honeymoon stage') to a place of uncertainty, as differences become more apparent and one's capacity to cope is more obviously challenged. Ultimately, the process is believed to lead to a renewed state of confidence as one acquires new skills and attains greater competence in the new culture. Does this trajectory fit in with your experiences so far? If so, where would you locate yourself on this path? (Adaptation, Reflection)
- How are you going about communicating with friends and family at home? Are there any issues? How easy is it to communicate your experiences to people at home? Do you feel you are keeping up with what's going on at home? Do you feel you need to? (Adaptation, Communication, Transformation)
- If you use Facebook, Skype, email, texting, letter writing, or other types of communication, how much time do you think you spend on this daily? How do you think this impacts on acclimatisation in your host country?
- Did you have a 'bucket list' of things you wanted to do in our host country? How many things have you ticked off? Has it changed since your arrival here and if so why? (Exploration)
- What are you learning about the country you are living in? Do you think you could speak with authority about its politics? Economy? Culture? Society? How does it compare with Australia in these areas? (Exploration, Globalisation)
- Have you had any particular experience which have really brought home to you the fact that you are in a different country? Give some examples and explain what you learned from those moments, and how you coped. (Cultural Difference, Education, Reflection)
- Do you feel like a foreigner? What is that experience like? Why? What do you think it feels like to be a foreigner in Australia? (Cultural Difference, Globalisation, Stereotypes)
- Have your experiences to date caused you to view other people and cultures differently? How? (Stereotypes, Cultural Difference, Globalisation)
- Have your experiences to date caused you to think about Australia any differently? How and why? (Globalisation, Education, Transformation)
- Describe some of the local practices that surprised you most at first. (Cultural Difference, Adaptation)
- What events or places have you been to that you would use to tell someone back home what your destination is like, especially how it is different to your home? (Communication, Cultural Difference, Globalisation)

- How are similar institutions different to the same institutions back home? For example, how are global franchises (McDonald's, Starbuck's, H&M) different to what you expect? Are any basic institutions – pubs, banks, post offices, trains, student unions, police – different to what you expect? (Globalisation, Cultural Difference)
- Where are locally sold clothes, manufactured goods, food, or other items produced in your host country? What sort of industries seem to dominate the local economy? How do these compare with Australia? (Globalisation, Cultural Difference)
- *Why* do people do things differently? How do you understand this particular local practice, place, or phenomenon? (Cultural Difference, see especially the interpretation stage of the DIVE model)
- Is the case of cultural difference that you've described part of a pattern? Do you see the same forces or considerations that produce this particular phenomenon causing any other differences? (Cultural Difference, see especially the verification stage of the DIVE model)
- What do local people say about the cultural phenomenon when you ask about it? (Cultural Difference, see especially the verification stage of the DIVE model)
- Now that you've seen a pattern or verified your interpretation, why do you think this difference might exist? Is there some broader pattern of difference – history, social relations, religion, economic considerations – that might support this difference? Is there some smaller pattern – the school system, how families interact, social life – that the cultural difference either supports or might be caused by? (Cultural Difference, see especially the explanation stage of the DIVE model)



- Do you feel confident that your explanation is not simply a stereotype but might be accepted by your hosts? (Stereotypes, Cultural Difference, see especially the explanation stage of the DIVE model)

In preparation for re-entry

- How do you feel about going home and why? (Reflection, Transformation)
- Do you think you have changed? How and why? (Transformation, Adaptation)
- What sort of changes do you anticipate at home, if any? (Transformation, Adaptation)

Re-entry

- Was your return home the way you expected? Had things changed or were they still the same? How and why? How did you feel about those external changes? (Transformation, Reflection)
- Had you changed or were you still the same? Give examples and explain how you felt about this or dealt with this. (Transformation, Reflection, Adaptation)
- How have your attitudes to Australia changed, if at all? (Transformation)
- In what ways do you think your time overseas has helped you to understand different cultures and people, both overseas and at home? Give some examples. (Globalisation, Transformation, Cultural Relativism)
- What sorts of skills do you think you have developed while on exchange? Give examples. How do you think these might be relevant to your future professional or career life? (Professionalisation, Globalisation)

Final questions

- Review your original answer to the question you responded to before you left: 'What are you hoping to gain from undertaking study abroad?' Were you successful in gaining what you hoped to gain? If not, why not? (Reflection, Transformation)
- What else did you gain that you were not expecting?
- Have you lost anything?

In general, we remind instructors that reflective writing is a learned skill; students may not be in the habit of analysing cultural differences or examining their own changes. In fact, some behavioural patterns and expectations within our home culture can make these tasks very difficult for some of our students. But this difficulty is all the more reason to persist. As we discuss in the Transformation module and elsewhere, the sojourn abroad is an unusual opportunity to reinvent the self; making reflection and greater analysis of what students observe and do part of that process can give them greater control over and consolidate the transformation. A key principle of experience-based learning is that powerful experiences create opportunities for individuals to reassess themselves, discover new abilities, and change their view of the world. Encouraging students to make this process more conscious and directed is an important part of what we are doing.

Advice on writing for students

In general, with reflection, we tend to encourage students to focus on content over form, but even blog writing should be legible and easy to read. The tone on blogs and other forms of reflection tends to be conversational, as we want to encourage students to express themselves, but we also try to refine and polish their writing skills as well as the acuity of their reflection. In some cases, students will be more motivated than in their normal coursework to apply themselves to discussions of their overseas experience, so international experience-related writing is an opportunity to direct their enthusiasm to develop greater skill in communications.

Improve your writing without sweating the details

We could give you a lot of advice about the techniques of writing, but students' eyes tend to glaze over if we start talking about grammar and overly specific tips. So we suggest the following as very basic ways to improve writing without worrying too much (more on how to write good description follows).

Write quickly. Save your time for rereading and revising your own work. If you exhaust yourself on the first draft or make it an excruciating process, you won't want to revise or write another post. Also, remind yourself that if your fingers are not on the keyboard or the pen in your hand, you're not writing. Don't let the task intimidate you so much that you don't start. Just dive in and start writing. You'll clean it up later. Blog writing can be informal; if you get something really good, and the feedback is great, you may want to revise a piece and submit it for publication.

Get to the point. Your reader can stop reading at any time, so don't waste their time. Students sometimes think that dramatic writing needs cliffhangers, sentences that don't really tell the reader what they're about but rather postpone, tease and promise that the reader will eventually be told something. Better to simply get to the point and then discuss it.

Use active verbs and real nouns. Run a search for the phrases, 'It is...,' 'There are...' and 'This is...' Get rid of them where possible, replace them with actual subjects (that's a thing) and a real verb (that's an action). Especially get rid of 'It is ____ that...' where the blank is some adjective like 'interesting,' 'crucial,' or 'critical.' The real sentence starts after the word 'that.' Let the reader decide that something is interesting after you tell them something really interesting.

Don't write from a feeling of fear or inadequacy. Don't try to impress the reader. Write from your own sense of excitement, your passions, and interests. Just try to share with the reader what you care about. If you try to impress, you'll use pretentious, stuffy language and overly

stiff, complicated structure. Focus instead on what you want to share – like an unforgettable experience while travelling overseas – and on being generous to your readers, giving them the juicy details up front so that they can savour the story.

Edit your own work. For some students, this sounds really difficult. The best way to improve your editing, however, is simply to read what you've written out loud. Most students are not really in the habit of reading carefully what they write; reading out loud forces the writer to hear what the prose sounds like. If writing sounds good when you read it out loud, it's probably well on its way to being better edited.

Challenge yourself to cut your draft down. Most first drafts are wordy. Elegant writing is direct, uncluttered, and economical. Forcing yourself to cut 20% will generally improve your writing as you'll take out repetitions, weaker ideas, and unnecessary details.



Tips for better description:

Because blogging about life overseas will require good description, we have special, additional advice on capturing experiences vividly. The over-arching thrust of our suggestions is to try to get description so that people feel like they have shared a part of the experience rather than just the author's interpretation or feelings about the experience. You don't need to do things that are fake or artificial; for example, writing in the second person, as if the reader actually had the experience ('You go to the subway station...' or 'You see a woman...'), is weird and off-putting. If anything, authors will find that the closer they get to the original experience, the more that they strip away unnecessary elements, the more immediate the description will be.

- **Close your eyes and try to describe the scene to yourself.** Observation and description live from each other, but they are often difficult to do simultaneously.

- **Use all your senses, not just your eyes.** When Ray describes the fur as 'like chocolate' in the description of the Bau Haus in the Cultural Relativism and Analysis Module, he's doing more than telling us it's 'brown.'
- **If you're taking photos, take them of details**, of commonplace objects, of gestures, and of other people, not just yourself, or the landmark scenes you can find on postcards. Think of your photographs as capturing moments, objects, and events, not just posed scenes. Little details that are different between home and the place you are staying will help to convey the texture of everyday life. (See our photo advice below, as well.)
- **Events and actions are often better descriptions than adjectives and adverbs.** Don't tell us a street was 'busy', describe the cars stopping and starting, the drivers grinding their teeth, and the people trying to cross, and we'll get a clear picture. Henry David Thoreau wrote: 'As to adjective: when in doubt, strike it out.' Similarly, for adverbs, instead of say something was 'very,' pick a better and more vivid adjective, and you won't need 'very.' To say that a dog 'needed a saddle in addition to a leash,' is much more evocative than saying it was 'very big.'
- **Description works better when it's sensory rather than evaluative.** Tell us about the deep, almost-ocean blues and gold leaf dulled by generations of candle smoke of the cathedral ceiling, not that it was 'pretty' or 'ornate.' Tell us that your heart pounded when the bulls were let into the arena and that you worried the walls wouldn't hold them, not that it was 'exciting.' NEVER say something is 'interesting,' the least interesting adjective in the English language.
- **Describe things that matter to your stories;** description can bog down the action of a story, if it's tangential. Important details, vivid details, not random details, are crucial.
- **Long words, long phrases, and complicated sentences are seldom better than precise, clear, fast-moving writing.** In description, fight the tendency to get overly wordy; three sort-of good words are not nearly as good as a single, perfectly-chosen word.
- **Try to tell us *how* you know things, not just *what* you know.** Give us the evidence, not your conclusion. For example, instead of saying someone 'is nervous,' describe her fidgeting, her darting eyes, the way she keeps licking her lips or shifting in her seat.
- **Consider your audience.** If you're writing for your classmates, you can use text-speak or slang. But if you seek to write for a broader audience, consider their expectations. Imagine you are going to read your description to your typical audience member over the phone; most of us know instinctively how to change our language when talking to our mum or grandmother.
- **Write in the past tense if you're describing events that have happened in the past.** Students sometimes think it's more exciting to write in the present tense, but it can just get confusing. For the same reason, don't do something confusing by narrating events that have happened to you using 'you' as the subject (the 'second person'); although it may seem like a good idea, the reader can often find it really distracting and disorienting. Calling yourself 'I' (first person) is fine if events happened to you.

For example, writing, 'You were in Venice...' when the reader may never had been in Venice can be really confusing. It's okay to say, 'I was in Venice...'

- **That said, students' writing can often be excessively focused on themselves.** Give the other characters in your description some lines and actions. Shifting away from how you felt to description of what caused those feelings can make the reader feel much more empathetic to the author. For example, don't tell us you were angry; tell us all the frustrating events that led up to that point, and we'll feel angry for you.

Photography in study abroad

As part of our pilot project, we encouraged students to post photos online and to reflect on their meaning. One of the great opportunities of new technologies, in addition to advances in connectivity and communication, is the profound way that digital photography has transformed our ability to capture images. Members of our research team could recall in their own travels abroad the difficulties of carrying rolls of film, trying to get them developed, the cost of printing images, and the many frustrations that now seem distant memories of bygone technology. Digital technology has put cameras, even high definition video cameras, well within reach of students; many technologies that used to be expensive options for the specialist are now basic features on mobile phones, laptops, and tablet computers.

Photos can offer us rich, powerful representations. They are a way of recording the things that surprise, shock and startle; they enable us to remember both the moment of the taking, and the person we were at the time. Talking through a visual image or representation encourages introspection, reflection, dialogue, self-discovery, interaction and personal development (Harper, 2002). As a versatile and powerful reflective tool, photographic reflection has also been incorporated into psychotherapy and counseling (Martin, 2009; Wang, 1999), and we believe that photo-based reflection is a wonderful resource for study abroad programming.

Photography can be an art form, so we don't hope to present all that can be said about getting good photos, but we do try to offer students some basic advice, especially based on our experience with student photo-reflections. Some people seem to get great travel photos, while others, no matter how often they push the button, find themselves dissatisfied with the results.

1. **Tell stories with your pictures.** Don't just take a photo of the view from the lookout; rather, take photos along the way – the signs indicating the path, the bench you rested on, birds along the trail, smiling people coming down the opposite direction. Think of your photos as being in a sequence to accompany the story of the event. For example, a photo of crowds pouring off buses, another of a festival parade, then close-ups of individuals in costumes, night scenes, and even

scenes of discarded masks or exhausted revellers resting on the curbs at the end of the night can pull together a memorable night.

2. **Combine wide shots and close-up shots.** Don't take all your pictures from the same distance. If you're in a particularly rich area, don't be afraid to take a shot of the whole space and then zoom in on some details. You'll give a really rich sense of the place.
3. **Don't always put the focus of the photo in the centre of the photo.** And get closer to the things you want to photo. Although you can crop photos later (especially with digital photos), nothing beats just taking a few steps closer to really get in and get a sense for an object, face, or scene. Photographers talk about 'the rule of thirds': a photo is more dramatic if the key focus is one-third of the way from one of the edges, not in the middle (one-half).
4. **Move around and snap again if you're not sure about a photo.** Take the same object or scene from a slightly different angle, and the light might be better. Don't be afraid to use your feet to get better photos. If you really like a subject, odds are you should take multiple photos, and not just from the same position with everyone in the same pose.
5. **Capture local details,** especially signage, signature objects, graffiti, and other elements of your immediate space. Details, such as the inside of a sleeper car, the colourful packaging on local products, torn posters in unusual scripts, street signs, and other elements of the daily world can really enhance our ability to communicate the texture of everyday life. Don't be afraid to get close-ups, or to photograph objects. There doesn't have to be a face in every photo, nor does it have to be a scenic shot of a landmark.



6. **Get local people in your photos**, not just yourself. Don't be invasive or sneaky, but also don't be afraid to sit in a public space and get a photo of a local man playing with his dog, fans heading for a soccer stadium, street vendors, or other people going about their lives. The human element in photos can invite all kinds of discussion.
7. **Be polite.** Don't take photos when you shouldn't be taking photos. If you feel like you need to be sneaky, don't take the photo. Sometimes a simple hand gesture and questioning face will clarify instantly whether someone will be annoyed if you try to take their picture. Smile when you ask, and even when they say, 'no.'
8. **Don't go (always) for the same we've-seen-them-before shots of you in front of famous places**, or the same group of people standing in front of whatever scene. If you're at a famous place, sure, take the must-have photo, but then turn around and notice what else is happening, what other photos you can take. You may capture a detail that's really powerful, like the expressions on other tourists' faces or the bored guides waiting for work or the vendor with thousands of toy replicas of the landmark. Try to catch people doing what made the day memorable, or their immediate reaction. Better than a shot of your friend standing stiffly in front of the café is the expression on her face as she bites into the pastry for the first time.
9. **If you're going to shoot buildings, don't always take the same shots you can find on postcards at landmarks.** Aim for details: people in these buildings, textures, the way that the light was coming in. You can always buy the postcard, so you don't have to recreate the postcard shot; and your photos, capturing the way a famous place was when you visited it – the wall of buses in front of the museum, the sea of tourists taking photos of the same paining or all standing in front of the temple – will probably be more memorable.
10. **Learn to see visual effects, like colour, symmetry, line, and size.** Some photos capture simply an amazing green of lush foliage, or the symmetry of a reflected mountain in a still lake, or a dramatic slashing line from a fallen tree, or the immensity of a tower, looking up from below close to the base.
11. **Take photos of your meals.** Turn off the flash, and, especially if you want to tell someone about something you ate, get a photograph of it, even if it's half eaten. You'll get some dud photos, but you'll also get some brilliant ones.
12. **Get simple gear that you know how to use and won't be afraid to use.** And then wear it out. Even a simple camera in a mobile phone can take images that you will share over and over again. And the more you use it, the more you'll realise what works for you. You don't need a lot of expensive equipment.

Adapted and expanded from Valerie Jardin
'8 Tips to Take Better Travel Photos' Digital
Photography School site ([http://digital-
photography-school.com/8-tips-to-take-
better-travel-pictures](http://digital-photography-school.com/8-tips-to-take-better-travel-pictures)).

Feedback rubric for reflective journal (adapted from Jan Herrington)

The following guidelines might be useful in giving students feedback as to what constitutes a good reflective journal piece. If participation is required, the guidelines could also serve as an assessment guide.

Additional points to consider:

- Excellent writing and presentation style.
- Responding to other students.

Unsatisfactory	Pass/Satisfactory	Credit/60+	Distinction/70+	High distinction/80+
Description/Content				
Few blog entries; limited reference to experiences; limited or no reference to pre-departure classes, resources or discussion questions.	Some description; only short entries; very limited ref to pre-departure classes and readings	Regular entries; largely descriptive; some ref to pre-departure work and resources	Evidence of reflection on experiences and awareness of larger issues; regular entries; references to and awareness of pre-departure classes and resources	Evidence of more subtle ideas and linking to larger process of reflection; regular entries; significant evidence of understanding of pre-departure themes and discussions
Attitudes & feelings				
No references to own thoughts, feelings or attitudes.	Some reference to own thoughts, feelings and attitudes	Regular references to own thoughts, feelings and attitudes	Substantial references to thoughts, feelings and attitudes	Extensive, reflective and analytical reference to own thoughts, feelings and attitudes
Coping strategies				
No ref to interaction or discussion with others, or of seeking out solutions	Minimal ref to interactions with others and seeking solutions	Regular ref to problem solving strategies	Substantial ref to problem solving and coping strategies	Extensive, reflective ref to problem solving strategies and evidence of initiative
Interpretation				
No attempt to interpret or simple value judgment. Highly charged, biased interpretation.	Minimal interpretation at shallow level or flawed interpretation.	Growing capacity to interpret incidents or cultural traits on their own terms.	Substantial interpretation of high quality; student draws connections among different events or practices.	Excellent evidence of sophisticated interpretation, multiple interpretations, or noticing surprising patterns.
Verification				

Unsatisfactory	Pass/Satisfactory	Credit/60+	Distinction/70+	High distinction/80+
No attempt to verify interpretations or check interpretations in substantial way.	Little attempt at verification or vague assertion or implication that verification attempted. Verification only with fellow sojourners.	Some indication that student looking for verification in host culture or previous experience.	Strong attempt to verify interpretation, including finding collateral evidence, such as related practices, patterns or incidents.	Significance evidence attempts to confirm observations; other's observations included; interaction with host country to confirm
Explanation				
Incidents, events, or situations not placed in any larger context. Student not drawing general or abstract conclusions from experience.	Some conclusions drawn or attempted, but may be flawed, overly general, or have other issues.	Student attempts an explanation that is plausible, unbiased & reflects evidence.	Student offers strong, developed explanation of experience, events or observation.	Highly developed capacity to place incidents into larger contexts, larger patterns of social and cultural phenomena
Visuals or links (if appropriate)				
No photos posted. No links or other references	Few photos posted with descriptive comments only; visuals don't demonstrate careful eye for detail; minimal or inappropriate links.	Several photos posted, with some interpretive comment. Good link or links.	Several photos posted, showing substantial interpretation or excellent eye for detail. Links are very strong, appropriate and demonstrate engagement with other reflections.	Several photos or excellent photos posted with extensive interpretation; photos demonstrate strong exploration; links show substantial engagement.



Final thoughts on Web 2.0 in study abroad

If you are setting up a blog for in-country reflection, we suggest you consider the following:

If you are concerned about propriety or students disclosing too much information...

A team blog may give you a balance between public dissemination and greater administrative control over the content of students' posts. On WordPress, for example, you can enrol students as 'contributors' rather than 'authors.' 'Contributors' cannot publish a post or comment without an 'editor' or 'administrator' approving the item. If a student is given 'author' status, he or she can publish reflections without editorial review; you might make a certain number of posts and comments a pre-condition for 'promotion' to 'author.'

If you are just too concerned about controlling student publications – for example, if your program has had bad experiences with student blogs or if you have sensitive relations with overseas partners – you might consider a pre-screening. Students write posts as assignments, submit them to the instructor (either through email or in on LMS), and then, once they have been reviewed, the students can post them. This process will make the interactions less dynamic and involve more work for the administrator, but in some situations, sensitivity is so important that such safeguards may be appropriate.

In the pilot project, we did not have any negative experiences with our weblog, but sensitive material, once published, cannot be fully deleted, even if it is removed from your blog. If students authors are part of a team blog, your administrator will retain the ability to remove posts and review comments; the size of your group, however, may make review onerous.

Do not expect students to generate highly reflective engagement in their own comments on each other's posts.

Deng and Yuen (2011: 448) found that students really appreciated comments made on their posts, and were disappointed when no one did comment, but that even so, they did not themselves have the insight to post more comments. Research on the use of blogs in education has repeatedly found that students, by and large, do not comment on each others' posts unless required to, and even then, do not get as much out of comments on their own posts as they report deriving from reading other students' posts (see Ellison and Wu 2008).

A comprehensive communication strategy, especially integrating discussion on Facebook with blogging, may allow the administrator and teacher to publicise student posts to other students, highlight links and generally increase engagement with student blogs or a team blog. The instructor will have to foster a community of critical reflection (Yang 2009), but the

outcome can be a self-reinforcing positive cycle among students, even stretching between cohorts.

Create keywords that correspond to topics that you wish to use during re-entry so that appropriate student material can easily be relocated to use in your programming.

Students may not attach keywords to their posts, but these can easily be added by an editor or administrator. A little thought in advance will help you to recycle student reflection directly into your re-entry curriculum, which will make the material much more immediate and useful to them. For example, if you have categories for subjects like 'cultural differences' or 'I never thought I would...', you can easily find examples for your re-entry activities in the Cultural Relativism and Analysis and Professionalisation modules.

You may decide that each student should create his or her own weblog.

If that is the case, consider creating an aggregator site, where automatic feeds from all the students blogs get placed in a central location. For example, you might consider using Paper.li (that is the company's address), a free online service to publish your own daily electronic 'newspaper.' Read more about Paper.li here (<http://paper.li/introduction.html>), but the idea is that you can create a single place where blogs that you designate, twitter feeds, even Facebook postings appear.

Students may get a degree of emotional and social support from a blog or Facebook group.

This non-academic dimension of internet-based action can have positive spill-over effects in the way students feel toward your class, the investment that they make in reading and commenting on each other's writings, and a host of other benefits. Do not underestimate the indirect ways that communication strategies can benefit the program, including recruitment, alerting administrators to issues, and building up interest in re-entry activities. Posting travel advice, recipes, photos, and other announcements on a study-abroad office's Facebook page may not seem to advance your academic agenda, but the student support and interest generated this way can feed directly into your programs.

Ultimately, however, you need to be prepared to commit to these platforms if you decide to use social networking or blogging in your study abroad and international exchange programming. Administrators will need to interact with students on these media. The students alone will not provide enough discussion or feedback, and students are accustomed by the use of Facebook to getting rapid feedback, even if this is only their friends 'Liking' a post or photograph. Without feedback, your comments, and discussion, students will very likely

abandon the network you are trying to establish, searching elsewhere for contact with their friends or fellow travellers.

The best predictor of student satisfaction with blogging used as a classroom technology, according to Top (2012), is 'sense of community'; students gain this sense of community from the experience of reading and commenting on each other's posts, and receiving feedback in turn. Instructors need to model this behaviour and provide unflagging commitment to exchange.

We believe that having students online in places where the instructor or study abroad support services can interact with them and observe what they are doing is beneficial. We would encourage the instructor to probe students with questions if they appear to be gaining only a superficial understanding, try to head off negative dynamics (such as students in culture shock reinforcing each other's criticisms), and generally keep track of how they are doing.

Exercise Four

Student presentations

Students can develop their oral presentation skills through their study abroad experience, as many of them will find in their sojourn compelling subjects to present to a number of audiences. However, the BTLH team thinks that students often prepare badly for public presentation, especially if they don't have experience giving public talks or class presentations. Students should be set up to succeed, and to give compelling presentations, so that they have good experiences, give their audiences something valuable, and go away from the experience with greater poise, confidence, and communication skills.

You can tailor the following advice to suit the forum that you are offering to students, but here's a starting point with advice that we give students who are preparing to present publicly:

Tell a story. Ask us a question. Pose a problem. Get us engaged at the start. Your opening is probably strongest if you give us the story from the start, diving straight in. Don't start with a list of what you will eventually get to: an outline of your presentation is only appropriate for a long talk, and you can do it after you've drawn us in with your opening.

Respect the clock. If you have a time limit, you must obey the time limit. Going over time may annoy your audience, impinge upon another presenter, throw off the schedule, or even get you cut off. Leave the audience wanting more, not hoping you'll soon stop talking.

Don't be too strident or preachy. Although the audience will love your passion, no one wants to be harangued or scolded, so even if your topic is moral, political or passionate,

leave some breathing room by keeping your tone calm. Often, we can inspire the most outrage or desire for change, not by yelling at people, but by presenting the facts or images that make us want change, and then letting our audience have its own reaction.

Do not prepare too much material – too many slides, too many pages of text – but do prepare enough. That is, write your presentation or prepare your slides, and then rehearse enough so that you're really comfortable with your presentation. Rehearse out loud so that you have an accurate sense of the time it takes to get through the material. If you can, get someone to listen to you give a run through; they may notice things that you simply cannot perceive.

Don't let slides take control of your presentation. Simple slides with your images or a few words work best. Putting your whole script on the slides and then reading them off is dreadfully boring. Some presentation coaches advocate no more than 25 words on a slide; in some cases, even this can be too many.

Don't talk to your slides if you're using them. Talk to your audience. Slides are background or illustration so you don't need to face them and read them. Unless you're really confident that the technology will work, have a back-up plan. If your presentation matters to you, you want to be able to do it no matter what happens to the technology in the room.

Get in the habit of studying people's presentations, including your teachers, officers in clubs, politicians, ministers, and anyone else who presents publicly. What works for them, and what doesn't? Imitate the styles and techniques that you find effective, as long as they feel comfortable, and avoid doing things that annoy you. Surprisingly, many students who complain, for example, about other student presentations being 'too long,' will similarly not respect time limits when given the chance to present.

Finally, remember that **everyone who is a good presenter started out nervous and uncertain.** You'll get better every time you do it. Take a deep breath before you start, be glad that you have an audience for what you want to say, and let them see why you care about what you're saying. Never apologise for some inadequacy you think you have; just do the very best that you can, and the audience will generally appreciate what you've done.

Exercise Five

Digital storytelling: Photos & voice

Another technique used with great effect in study abroad communication is digital storytelling. British photographer Daniel Meadows has described digital stories as ‘short, personal multimedia tales told from the heart.’ Digital storytelling uses computer-based technologies to create very short, two- to three-minute audio stories with visual accompaniment. Some can appear to be narrated slide shows, although the capacity of home video editing software can also open up other, more sophisticated visual and audio techniques.

In a digital story about study abroad, students carefully craft very short scripts – usually only a few hundred words, depending upon the time – and place these together with a series of photographs, short video clips, or other images (such as slides created on a presentation program like PowerPoint or Keynote). Music or animation can be added to these short multimedia presentations to tell a key story from their international experience. (For examples of excellent digital stories, see the links below, including Doug Reilly’s Prezi about digital storytelling in study abroad, listed below.)

A digital story is a short video which the maker often narrates first-person with a simple voice over. As the student returning from study abroad tells a story or offers a reflection, for example, the viewer may also see a series of mostly still images or photographs that slowly pan or zoom. The effect can be quite powerful, but it depends upon careful crafting of the story itself (usually through a writing workshop), selection of images, and compilation of the whole video. Digital stories can be shared online through free video-sharing sites like YouTube or Vimeo, or posted on your study abroad website or blog.

Digital stories, although quite simple to view, are a demanding genre. The very spare requirements – a few hundred words and accompanying images – force students to be very efficient in their communication. Stories often require multiple rewrites as the core themes and images become clearer. Video editing, although now accessible to most computer users, can still be an exacting process, requiring investment of time and patience. The good news is that the resulting product can be so compelling, and so easy to circulate, that students will often apply themselves with great intensity to crafting a digital story about their study abroad experience. Moreover, the resulting stories can be especially concise, visually powerful, and deeply engaging; they may become one of the most powerful testimonies for the efficacy of study abroad, conveniently sized and presented in a way that lends itself to a host of formats.

Because of the versatility and power of portable computers, many students have all the software and equipment that they need to make digital stories installed on their computers,

even on iPads, for example, using the built-in microphone on their computer and simple software such as iMovie (for Macs), Movie Maker or Final Cut Express. Digital storytelling is often taught in an intensive workshop format, with students learning how to make a digital story and completing their own in the course of hours.

If you would like to investigate the option of holding a digital storytelling workshop, especially as part of your re-entry programming, we strongly recommend that you contact the media or communication department at your university or other local institutions. Although the technology is readily accessible, teaching the art of digital storytelling requires a diverse range of skills from the instructor. On the other hand, many of your students will already have many of these skills, so an open 'digital story' contest might help you to locate potential mentors or instructors in your own student body.

Links

Center for Digital Storytelling

<http://www.storycenter.org/>

The Center for Digital Storytelling also has its own YouTube channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/CenterOfTheStory>

Telling Lives, the BBC (the site has been shut down, but the tutorial can still be downloaded as a pdf)

<http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/raw/pdf/tutormanual.pdf>

Information Age Education, website on Digital Storytelling

<http://i-a-e.org/articles/46-feature-articles/50-digital-storytelling.html>

Examples of digital stories from study abroad, Beloit College (USA):

http://www.beloit.edu/oie/off_campus/admitted/photofilms/

The Educational Uses of Digital Storytelling, University of Houston

<http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu/>

50+ Web 2.0 ways to tell a story created by Alan Levine

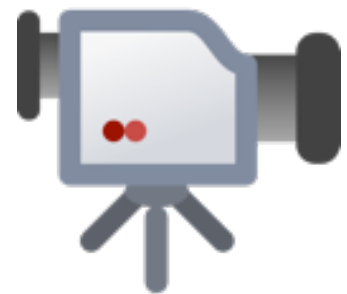
<http://50ways.wikispaces.com/Home>

A great resource with many suggestions about how students might use new technologies and different internet-based platforms to create stories about their overseas experience.

Crossing Borders, Creating Stories: An introduction to Digital Stories

<http://prezi.com/t1g-ofhbmtmi/crossing-cultures-forum/>

A Prezi about digital storytelling by Doug Reilly and Tom D'Agostino at Hobart and William Smith College (for the 2012 Forum on Education Abroad conference).



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