

A few simple guidelines for successful (tele)collaboration

Dear Students,

Intercultural telecollaborative projects are complex contexts in which a lot of work and communication is happening between people from different cultural backgrounds, which makes them prone to misunderstandings. The shape of such exchanges depends largely on you, your commitment, and the quality of your participation. In order to ensure smooth and efficient collaboration with your partners, consider the following guidelines, please.

Be transparent

Always inform your partners about any circumstances that can have impact on your work or communication, such as having a hectic time at your uni, being unwell or working extra time. Being transparent about your intentions helps others understand your motives and actions and, thus, prevents misunderstandings.

Communicate, communicate and... communicate

Do your best to ensure smooth and fluent communication with your partners. Mind that online communication, either via email or through other channels, implies immediacy of reply. Being out of touch for a few days is commonly perceived as rude and inconsiderate. It is also very confusing for your partners as they cannot carry out their tasks. If you know you might be offline for some time, make it clear to your team beforehand.

Consistent communication with your partners is the best way to make sure the partnership is going in the planned direction.

Respect diversity

It is very likely that your partners will have values and beliefs very different from those that you are familiar with. Unsurprisingly, the most sensitive areas are those connected to religion, politics or gender, but there may also exist differences in one's perception of learning and timely work, attitude to cooperation, educational model etc. What seems natural or neutral to you, may have a heavy emotional load to someone else, so be prepared. In case of any problems or misunderstandings it is better to ask openly than to be sorry. This may sound obvious but experience shows that it is not.

Explore new tools and solutions

Telecollaborative projects are always mediated by various technologies: some of them are well known to you, whereas others might be utterly new. Even if you feel very confident about technology as such, spare a few minutes to learn how project tools work. Mind that their functionalities may differ from those that you are familiar with. In particular check if:

- your work is automatically saved;
- all group members get notified when someone responds to postings or contributes in other ways;
- the tools enable communication (if so - of what kind?)

Collaborate

Successful teams are all about relationships and the right blend of complementary skills. Working in such a team will help you achieve standards and quality which you would never be able to achieve working solo. However, this is only possible if all the partners respect each other and share the workload, even if their contributions can be of different types. Splitting the workload evenly between all team members regardless of their individual strengths is not a good model for collaboration. Instead, try working together and use every partner's unique potential.

Always acknowledge your collaborators!

Plan and manage your time well

In a telecollaborative project you are working with other people and this usually takes a bit more time than originally expected. Each of you has their own tightly packed schedule, so it is better to overestimate the time needed for task completion in order to ensure on-time submission, even if unexpected delays happen on the way. Mind that good planning and getting your tasks done in a timely manner shows respect to your partners. There is nothing more frustrating for your collaborators than to have to throttle their progress while they are waiting for your contribution. Always inform your partners if you cannot make a previously agreed-upon deadline, so that other arrangements can be made.

What if something goes wrong?

It happens that, after a very promising beginning, the excitement wanes and the first hurdles appear. This usually means lack of communication and, consequently, a progressive lack of interest and focus to get the job done. To avoid the subsequent frustrations and resentment, give a chance to your partners to get back on track. After all, they could just be having a difficult time for reasons outside of their control. However, if you think this partnership has turned sour and cannot be saved, seek advice from your teacher.

Enjoy your projects 😊