A Comparison of E-Response: Two Experiences; One Conclusion
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Introduction
E-response, also known as electronic peer/teacher response and combining some of the best features of oral/written response, is a powerful practice for the writing class. Its potential was first recognized and shared in computers and writing circles a decade ago (Langston & Batson, 1990; Mabrito, 1991; Selfe, 1992).

The two of us, Terry and Frank, have been enthusiastically sharing our ideas about what we call e-response for several years while living and working in different areas. During our sharing, we have often been amazed at both the similarities and differences of our experiences. Recently, we both completed formal, ethnographic classroom studies focusing on e-response, and we have analyzed more thoughtfully and thoroughly what these similarities and differences are and what they mean. In this hypertextual article, we take turns telling the stories of our experiences by comparing a number of components: our audiences, group structures, response guidance, response times, response types, electronic contexts, response applications, implications, and changes made. Then we summarize with our shared conclusion supporting this powerful, pedagogical practice.

Research Overviews
Electronic Peer Response Groups: Case Studies of Computer-Mediated Communication in a Composition Class (Terry)
I conducted my study in a freshman composition class with a mixed population of traditional and nontraditional students at a community college. The students wrote essays and responded to one another’s work via a commercial program called CommonSpace, which had been installed on the classroom’s LAN. My study explored how the e-response affected both the process (community-building) and products (essay-revisions) of the students’ writing. I used a variety of ethnographic data analysis techniques to analyze the students’ essays, e-responses, and revisions as well as their explanations of why they made the comments and revisions that they made.
How E-Response Impacts Second Language Writers’ Revisions (Frank)

I conducted my study on a freshman composition class specifically reserved for ESL students. It was a typical freshman course that included an instructor with TESL expertise. The students wrote essays and responded via an Internet website that housed all of the documents and email. This particular study focused on how the e-response impacted the revisions that the students made. I analyzed the essays, revisions, and e-responses, and I interviewed the students extensively.

**Audience: Native vs. Non-Native**

**Introduction to Audience**

The biggest difference between our two audiences was the fact that Terry’s students were native speakers, and Frank’s students were not. Compared to the native speakers, the non-native speakers had greater ability in communicating in other languages and less understanding of the cultural and academic norms of the U.S. We both found the purpose in college, computer ability, and age to be significant yet similar audience demographics, but each of us also found a distinct audience demographic to have significance in our studies. For Terry, it was socioeconomic class, and for Frank it was geographic region.

**Native Audience (Terry)**

The student participants in my study were all native, or L1, writers. Like most typical American freshman composition students, a few had some knowledge of a foreign language, but none were bilingual. The differences among them were due primarily to their being students in a summer class at a community college. This context resulted in 4 relevant areas of variation.

1. **Purpose in college.** Some students were taking the course to fulfill the writing requirement for a two-year technical degree at the community college, and other students were taking it to transfer to a 4-year university.
2. **Computer ability.** The students had very different levels of skills and interest ranging from those who had never written on a computer to those who were majoring in computer science.
3. **Age.** The students in both of the previous areas ranged widely in age from the traditional 18 year-old freshmen to quite a few middle-aged, non-traditional students.
4. **Socioeconomic class.** Probably most significant to my study were the differences in this area since they had the greatest impact on group interaction. Students ranged from high-school dropouts pursuing their educations under the community college’s “open admissions” policy to local
students attending prestigious universities out-of-state but taking this summer class to earn transfer credit. For me, language differences were not a significant issue, but other audience differences definitely had an impact on the study.

Non-Native Audience (Frank)
The participants in my study included the L2 writers, the instructor, and the researcher as a participant-observer. I selected the L2 participants of this classroom-based study using purposive sampling. These ESL students were taking a freshman writing course at a 4-year state university.

1. Purpose in college. Most of the students were planning to graduate from a 4-year college in the U.S., and this course was a requirement for graduation. A few of the students had also set their sights on graduate school. All of these students chose or were encouraged to take this particular freshman writing course because it was designed specifically for foreign students.
2. Computer ability. Although the computer abilities of these students were varied, I determined that their level of expertise was not significant. All of the participants needed to have some experience with Internet browsers and with email, which everyone in the class had.
3. Age. The average age was 20, and the average duration in the U.S. was 5.2 months.
4. Geographical region. The writers came from several different regions of the globe including Africa (3), Americas (1), Asia (9), Europe (3), and The Middle East (3). The first languages of these L2 writers were as follows: Arabic (2), Dutch (2), French (1), German (1), Indonesian (1), Japanese (6), Korean (1), Mandarin (1), Portuguese (1), Spanish (1), Turkish (1), Urdu (1).

Group Structure: Fixed vs. Flexible

Introduction to Group Structure
Even with traditional peer response, the issue of how to structure the groups is still open to exploration. Decisions include who should group the students (teacher or students), how many should be in each group (2-5), and how they should be selected (ability or background; homogeneously or heterogeneously). Our philosophies on this subject led us to take significantly different approaches to group structure for our studies with Terry using a fixed group structure and Frank using a flexible group structure.
Fixed Group Structure (Terry)
Since my research in the literature indicated the importance of establishing a sense of community in order to have successful e-interaction of any kind, I decided on a fixed group structure. After several sessions during which the students got to know one another through a variety of activities, the teacher asked the 15 students to form 5 self-selected groups of 3 students each for all 5 of the peer response workshops. They did so with what appeared to be minimal difficulty, and, their main criterion seemed to be whom they were sitting near. The result was 5 groups containing students with significant mixtures in terms of the audience characteristics I described in the section on audience: purpose in college, computer ability, age, and socioeconomic class.

The results of using a fixed group structure were largely positive. The students in 4 of the groups not only increased both the quantity and quality of their comments to one another but also utilized their peers’ suggestions more extensively and effectively in their revisions with each successive workshop. When asked about the progressive group dynamic, the students emphasized that it was the opportunity to establish a group community—both social and academic—that enabled them to work so successfully to improve one another’s writing. However, the students in the 5th group did not fare so well due primarily to their differences in the audience characteristics, and their teacher had to work closely with them in order to maintain successful group interaction.

Flexible Group Structure (Frank)
As I prepared for this research project, I read accounts of students who were dissatisfied with the responses they received from their peers. Oftentimes these students were more advanced than their peers, and, consequently, they viewed the comments from the less advanced peers as less beneficial. So I gave the writers themselves the option to choose which essays they wanted to read. All of the students read and wrote responses for each assignment. When a particular assignment was to be posted to the Internet, I instructed the students to select 1 or 2 essays of their choosing and write a response to the author about the essay.

The result was that some people received many responses, and others received only a few. The fact that the students could choose was a positive and motivating factor for the class. At the same time students who received few or no responses were hoping for more assistance. At times, they would solicit responses in class from their peers.
Response Guidance: Training & Coaching

Introduction to Response Guidance
Both of us found that one of the most important preparations for e-response was training and coaching the participants in writing effective responses. Following the research of Berg (1999) and Stanley (1992), the students received training on effective response concepts at the beginning of the semester to establish an understanding of appropriate and effective response-writing. According to a number researchers, it is important to prepare students to participate in peer response so that students are confident in their response abilities and can demonstrate the ability to offer specific, meaning-level feedback (Berg, 1999; Tannacito, 1999; Zhu, 1995; Conner & Asenavage, 1994; Stanley, 1992; Mittan, 1989; Witbeck, 1976). We discovered that both of us, Terry and Frank, provided extensive response guidance, and it was essentially of the same two types: training and coaching.

Training and Coaching Response Guidance (Terry)
Since I believe very strongly in the importance of providing response guidance, I provided both extensive training and coaching. Here’s a brief discussion of the primary steps I followed.

Training. For each of the steps in the “training” phase, I used essays written in response to the current assignment and donated for this purpose by generous students from an earlier class in order to share work with realistic examples but protect the feelings of the students in the current class while they became comfortable with the response process.

1. I demonstrated how to use the response application in terms of both technology and content by completing a response on my computer which I projected to the class. Their teacher had already given them an analytical evaluation form that would be used on their final drafts, and I showed them how I used it to provide me with topics for my comments.

2. I encouraged the class to complete a response to a second donated essay with me collaboratively. The class was already so comfortable with one another, with the teacher, and with me that it was not at all difficult to get them involved in this process.

3. We broke into our already formed peer response groups, and students completed a collaborative response on a third essay. We then shared each group’s response to that third essay as a class.
Coaching. My response guidance didn’t stop with training. Beginning with the first workshop, I circulated among the groups to provide guidance and make suggestions in informal individual and small-group sessions. I consider coaching a critical supplement to training and an invaluable part of the response guidance process.

Training and Coaching Response Guidance (Frank)

Training. Training and coaching occurred at the beginning of the semester and took approximately 6 hours of class time. The training process began with introducing and familiarizing the L2 writers with the process approach to essay writing and with effective responding concepts. I explained the process approach to writing as a way of writing that incorporates multiple drafts of the same essay. The focus of the process approach included a 4-step process including brainstorming, organizing, drafting and revising. The L2 writers also received instructions about generating quality responses they would write to their peers after reading drafts that they read. I introduced a comment model I called the hamburger method of responding. The meat and the vegetables of a hamburger are encased in the bun of the sandwich. In a similar fashion, the critiques, suggestions, and advice of a response are surrounded by encouragement and praise. The instruction also included the types of components that should be included in the center of a response including questions, statements, advice, suggestions, alternatives, praise and encouragement.

To enhance the instruction on developing quality feedback, the L2 writers practiced responding by reading previously written multiple-draft essays in small groups and then writing responses to these drafts. The class discussed the appropriateness and value of the responses they wrote. Because they experienced writing responses and considered the value of the responses, the students gained experiential knowledge and understanding of how to write written responses. The training focused on what elements of an essay to respond to and when the response should be given. For example, the participants were instructed to respond to meaning first and to form in later drafts. The training also focused on the proper tact that should accompany a response.

Coaching. Following the training period, the L2 writers practiced creating e-feedback during the development of their first writing task. All of the students submitted their essays by using a web browser and typing or pasting their essays into an Internet form. The submitted form sent the essay to an Internet accessible database website where anyone could view and comment on the essays. After they posted their first essay drafts, I collected e-feedback samples that the participants wrote to their peers from the website database. Some of the responses were well created and contained praise,
criticism, and alternatives. Others were little more than praise. I placed the e-feedback on transparencies and displayed them in class for analysis. The L2 writers viewed the e-feedback and commented on the various components they contained. It took little coaxing for the students to express their feelings and ideas on the e-feedback being displayed primarily because the e-feedback authors were viewing their own responses.

One or two of the writers admitted to being the owner of an e-feedback and tried to explain why they wrote what they wrote. I also asked them to describe how they would react to receiving the e-feedback that I placed on the overhead. Elizabeth, one of the L2 writers, commented on a poorly constructed e-feedback saying, “I do not want to get this response because it has no information to help me with my paper.” I agreed and encouraged the responders to create quality comments according to the format I had introduced. I also suggested that the e-feedback recipients write to their responders and request more information if they felt the responders did not send a quality response.

This analysis session provided the participants an opportunity to review their own e-feedback and discuss which ones they felt were beneficial. One student commented, “It was good to see the responses on the screen. I could see the good responses and the bad ones.” Another said, “I was surprised to see my comments shown to the class. I thought I need to make better comments next time I respond.”

**Response Time: Synchronous vs. Asynchronous**

**Introduction to Response Time**
A new issue that arises with peer response in electronic environments is whether response time should be synchronous or asynchronous. Since one of the advantages of the asynchronous environment is the physical freedom of space, some scholars argue that freedom of time would increase these advantages. However, others argue that synchronous response offers greater opportunities for coaching appropriate responses. Further, it guarantees that students will complete their responses—and at a time when they will benefit the writers who have completed theirs at the same time. Although our reasons were affected by their applications as well as by their philosophies on this subject, Terry and Frank took different approaches here as well. These approaches had effects in areas such as time constraints, reflection and thoughtfulness, pressure, and participation level.
Synchronous Response Time (Terry)
The synchronous response time of my e-response was a result of the application and electronic context I selected. Since the students were using a program that was located only on the LAN in our computer classroom, they completed the actual peer response workshop during the class periods. Due to the long summer-school class sessions and the teacher’s commitment to peer response, however, they were allowed 1.5 hours for each workshop, and, with groups of only 3 students each, they said they had enough time to complete their responses without pressure and with adequate reflection and thoughtfulness.

Although it was selected for primarily practical reasons, the synchronous response time had a variety of benefits. The most obvious was participation level. In order to be allowed to submit an essay in their portfolios, students were required to have participated in the peer response workshop on it, so attendance was consistent. Therefore, all students left each workshop with two detailed peer responses completed. Further, since they were all physically present, I was able to start each workshop with an oral component in which each student read his/her essay, and the group made general comments. This oral component gave them an opportunity to start off with general praise that seemed to make it easier to accept specific suggestions during the electronic component. Further, it gave the writers an opportunity to request specific kinds of suggestions and, therefore, more likely to incorporate those suggestions when they revised. Overall, I was pleased with the synchronous response time, and, though I would definitely consider an asynchronous approach in a distance context, I would still want to incorporate strategies to replicate the best features of the synchronous response time if I made such a change.

Asynchronous Response Time (Frank)
The primary reason for choosing asynchronous responding was for the benefit of the foreign students. Studies show that some students feel pressure when they are required to respond during a single class session or in the presence of the author. Therefore, I provided a means for the responders to write a response and gave them as much time as they needed to respond. Responses were conducted in class on a few occasions, but feedback was generally considered homework. The anonymity and the extra time supposedly provided the responders a lower affective filter.

Students told me that they were glad for the extra time and freedom to respond wherever they wanted. They responded from their dorm rooms or in the labs. On one late night excursion to the labs, I met several students writing responses at 1 a.m. Providing students the freedom to respond outside of class was a definite benefit. There were also times when the
students got together in small groups in class and provided oral reviews of each others' papers. I believe that a combination of both distance and oral would be the best format for providing feedback.

**Response Type: Annotated vs. Emailed**

**Introduction to Response Type**
An issue that exists with traditional peer response but is exacerbated in an electronic environment is response type. Although practical matters in various electronic applications often dictate the response type, there are important implications for the responder and, therefore, the writer. Both of us made certain that we were comfortable with the response type enabled by our application. Terry selected an application that enables responses that were specific and connected to a particular part of the text—annotations, and Frank designed an application that enables responses that were more general and apply to the text overall—emails.

**Annotated Response Type (Terry)**
I selected the particular application that I used, CommonSpace, because it was designed to allow and even encourage annotated responses. The writer placed his/her essay in a column within the CommonSpace document, and the essay remained intact. However, the responder highlighted a particular section of the original essay, and clicked in a related response column. The comment he/she then typed in that column was permanently linked to the relevant original essay text. Of course, this didn’t prevent responders from making more general comments. They could make somewhat general comments, about a paragraph for example, by linking to a whole paragraph or to the space between paragraphs. They could also make widely general comments about the entire essay by clicking on space before or after it.

The results of the annotated response type were overwhelmingly positive. Many of the students in my study had participated in traditional peer response before, and they were concerned that they would spend a lot of time on the process but receive little substantive guidance. Whereas the summary boxes for commentary offered by other programs encourage general comments written after the reading of the entire essay, the annotation response column offered by CommonSpace encouraged specific comments throughout the essay. Based on my students’ satisfaction and success with the annotation response types, I will continue to use only e-response programs that allow linked annotations.
Emailed Response Type (Frank)
The students wrote their responses in a standard form in an Internet browser. The responses were sent to the email accounts of the individual authors. Sending the responses to their email accounts allows students to store comments for later use, compare and contrast email comments from various responders, and cut and paste ideas from the email responses to their subsequent drafts. When I analyzed the e-feedback, I discovered that more macro-level changes resulted in the subsequent revisions that the writers drafted. Apparently the written comments (as opposed to oral) encourage writers to make more sentence- and paragraph-level changes.

Students reacted positively to the email responses because of the freedom they provided. One reason students praised was that they could use the email suggestions in their subsequent drafts. Additionally, students could not only get emailed responses from peers in their classmates, but they also received responses from writers from other classes, and even from visitors to the website. Several students contacted their family and friends back in their home countries and asked them to respond. E-feedback in email provides students with benefits that traditional peer response and LAN-based applications could not.

Electronic Context: Networked vs. Internet

Introduction to Electronic Context
Our electronic contexts were very different. Terry’s students were limited to working on a particular network and could not work beyond that room. At the same time, this restriction also meant that the environment was more secure since only the members of the class could read and respond to their drafts. Frank’s students placed all of their drafts on an Internet writing website where anyone could read and respond. This allowed for greater accessibility to the drafts and required the extra security precautions. Students had to create usernames and passwords.

Networked Electronic Context (Terry)
I conducted my study in a computer classroom containing 20 IBM compatibles connected by a local area network that contained a commercially available peer response program: CommonSpace. Although CommonSpace was also available for individual purchase, the community college chose to purchase a classroom license in order to avoid additional costs for students. Having the LAN as the electronic context meant that all e-responses were stored on the classroom server. This feature increased security but decreased accessibility. The decreased accessibility had 2 primary results: the students did all their responding in the classroom, and they printed copies of their peers’ responses
in order to incorporate them into their revisions at home. The students seemed to like both these features of the e-response, though. They liked having an oral component to the peer response, and they liked having the hard copy to manipulate as they revised.

Internet Electronic Context (Frank)
My study was primarily conducted in an Internet-accessible classroom where the participants studied and practiced academic writing. All of the essay writing and responses were written directly into a form using a standard Internet browser. When submitting the form, the students sent the draft to the database-driven website, which I had developed. The database housed all of the essays and responses, and the interactive website displayed the drafts. The information was secured using personal accounts and organized on a few easy-to-manage web pages.

Response Application: Commercial vs. Developed

Introduction to Response Application
We selected different applications for our studies, but the applications we selected satisfied the requirements of the study and our personal philosophies. Terry selected a commercial application specifically designed for electronic feedback. Frank worked with a programmer and developed an Internet web-writing application.

Commercial Response Application (Terry)
I was the faculty member who introduced e-response to my department, and, after trying another commercial program for a year, I selected CommonSpace as the application for the community college to purchase. CommonSpace worked differently than the earlier and very popular program I had tried, and I considered those differences to be pedagogically beneficial. In this application, the writer imported the essay into a column, and the responder opened a column adjacent to it. Then, the responder highlighted a section of the essay on which he/she wanted to comment, clicked in the response column, and typed in a comment.

In addition to maintaining the integrity of the original document, this application not only allowed for traditional general comments but also enabled beneficial “linked” comments. A year after I introduced CommonSpace to the college, the students in my study found in it the same benefits described by my own students. Although they loved the general comments they received on their essays, frequently praise, they felt it was the linked suggestions that provided them the most help in revising their essays. Further benefits of
CommonSpace to the students were its lack of cost to them and ease of learning for them. For me, its “comparison” feature was very helpful in my research as it enabled me to isolate and examine each change between drafts.

A screen-capture of a sample workspace in this program, containing essay and responses, is depicted in Figure 1:

![A CommonSpace essay and response.](image)

**Figure 1.** A CommonSpace essay and response.

**Developed Response Application (Frank)**

An integral component of my study was the software. I examined a number of commercial software packages including Dadaelus, CommonSpace, Redline, and Textra, but decided that they did not fit my vision for an Internet-based writing application. That being the case, I worked with a computer programmer to develop an Internet-based writing software application that would allow the participants to interact via the Internet. The web application, Awe-som (http://awe-som.com) allowed instructors, using a standard
browser, to set up course parameters that included the number of students, the number of essays, and the number of revisions allowed for each essay. Once the course parameters were established, the students could access and login to the site.

The application operated through a standard web browser and allowed students to perform a number of writing activities, including drafting, revising, and responding to drafts written by other students. The Awe-som website included student accounts which allowed only the author of an essay to modify and revise it. Instructors could delete an essay if the content was deemed “inappropriate,” but they could not access and modify the contents of an essay. So all of the authors could modify and revise their essays, and peers, teachers and website visitors could read and respond to essays posted to the website. Figure 2 is a screen capture of the class webpage, which includes all of the students in the class and the essays and revisions they posted. All of the red numbers represent links to drafts that students posted.

![Figure 2. The class webpage.](image)

Accessing the site was simple: anyone could go to the website and read essays. Members and visitors to the site who wished to respond needed to login by supplying an email address and a password. The visitor password is “visitor.” Figure 3 depicts the response page. Notice that the essay is in the top frame, and the response form is in the bottom frame. This setup allows
responders to cut and paste from the essay to their response.

**Figure 3.** The response webpage.

**Implications of Our Two Experiences**

**Introduction to Implications of Our Two Experiences**

Even though we were using e-response with different audiences and in different ways, we found that we had basically the same findings and,
therefore, implications. This was fairly surprising to us since we really expected at least some of these differences to affect our outcomes significantly. Although we worded them a little differently in our findings, we discovered that we share 3 primary implications:

1. Our students liked using computers for e-response.
2. Our students gave writer-affirming compliments.
3. Our students gave essay-improving suggestions.

As a result of these very positive implications, both of us, Terry and Frank, strongly recommend that teachers of both native and non-native students utilize e-response to improve students’ writing.

Implications of My Experience (Terry)
The first finding of my study and, hence, implication of e-response, was that my students liked using computers for e-response. It was fascinating to me that many of them liked computers more than writing, and all of them seemed to believe that using computers for responding would improve their writing. Of course, some of them were somewhat anxious about learning the technology, and this was reinforced by their teacher’s anxiety. However, my confident approach and constant guidance seemed to make the experience a positive one. I consider the implication that computers have a positive impact on the writing process to be clear from my study, and my belief was reinforced by Frank’s similar finding.

The second finding of my study was that the students felt they built extremely close and supportive communities in their e-response groups. Building community was a special talent of their teacher, and she facilitated their community-building through a variety of whole-class and small-group activities that she began during the first class. When the students broke into their e-response groups, they began with an oral discussion of each writer’s essay during which the sense of community was clearly reinforced. They told me repeatedly during the course that the closeness with their peers made it easier for them to give and receive honest and, therefore, helpful, e-responses. Because of this, I believe that traditional classes should retain an oral component to peer response and that online classes should simulate an oral component with a synchronous chat before asynchronous and more detailed e-response.

My third and fourth findings, ones that Frank also found, were very significant to me since they connected the process benefits to the product benefits. I found that my students gave one another both writer-affirming compliments and essay-improving suggestions in their e-response groups. I was expecting the latter, but it seemed that the sense of community they had developed encouraged them to begin their e-responses with compliments (about 1/3 of comments) and then follow them with suggestions (about 2/3 of comments).
The students told me that the positive tone of the compliments made them much more receptive to their peers’ suggestions, and that leads to my next finding.

My fifth finding was that the revisions the students made in their essays were closely associated with the suggestions their peers made in the e-response workshops, and, amazingly, that all the peer-suggested revisions were effective. The process by which I analyzed the data and made this finding is too complex to share in its entirety here, but this finding was very strong. Analyzed from 2 different perspectives, the associations were equally strong: about 2/3 of the suggestions resulted in effective revisions, and about 2/3 of the effective revisions were peer-suggested. This finding certainly reinforced the validity of e-response and implies that teachers interested in improving their students’ writing should definitely utilize the practice.

A final finding I had that went beyond Frank’s was that both the quantity and quality of the comments and revisions improved with each electronic peer response workshop. Comments made by the students and my own observations led me to believe that this was a result of having the same groups work together over time and, therefore, become increasingly comfortable with and effective at working together. This has made me decide to maintain the same groups throughout an entire course—with minor membership adjustments if problems should occur.

**Implications of My Experience (Frank)**

My study was more directly applicable to ESL students and, therefore, some of the implications I identified relate primarily to them. First, e-response was more universally incorporated than other forms of feedback like oral, or writing centers. So instructors can incorporate e-response into L2 writing courses regardless of the geographical origin of their students. Adding this type of feedback will not favor one group over another since all groups use e-response in similar fashion. L2 writing instructors can include this more universally used response format in their classes.

At the same time, using e-response as the sole source of response is a limiting factor and should be avoided if possible. The use of multiple forms of feedback seems to be a have a greater impact on influencing revisions than using only one form. Instructors should consider using peer and teacher e-feedback in conjunction with other forms of feedback to gain a greater impact on revision.

Second, instructors can use e-feedback to help L2 writers move away from smaller-level changes to larger-level changes like sentences and paragraphs. This research suggests that e-feedback had a greater impact on influencing
changes in revisions in larger blocks of text and changes that added new content to the essay. Instructors interested in encouraging their L2 writing students to focus feedback on larger text blocks can use e-feedback to encourage larger, or macro-level, changes.

A third interesting thing I discovered that applies to all students was that, while doing this research, the excuses for not having their homework that students often presented in a writing class disappeared. Students could not say that they forgot their paper or that their computer disk was corrupted and their essay could not be retrieved. All of the students had their papers online in the web application. In the past I had to delay class activities or allow students to leave class to get their paper. But because the documents are placed online and available from the computer classroom, this did not occur.

Fourth, managing paper documents and writing in the small margins was no longer a problem. I see instructors carrying an armful of papers to their office or home to write comments. E-feedback eliminated the need to collect all of the documents and carry them around. Additionally, since the comments were typed into the web application, students did not have to try to decipher the handwriting of the instructor.

Changes We’ve Made

Introduction to Changes We’ve Made
As mentioned in our introduction, the two of us, Terry and Frank, had casual conversations while preparing for our studies, conducting our studies, analyzing our data, and reporting our findings. Even more, while collaborating on this project, we’ve been even more thoughtful about our own practices and their implications. Although more changes are always a strong possibility, these are some changes that each of us is already in the process of implementing. For Terry, changes include new applications, paperless responses, and new grouping. For Frank, changes include new grouping and a new environment.

Changes I’ve Made (Terry)
I’ve made several changes in the way I utilize e-response as a result of my research and my collaboration with Frank.

New applications. The primary change I’ve made in my current use of e-response is in the application I use. Although similar applications have reached the market, CommonSpace is no longer available. Further, at my current university, all students are required to purchase Microsoft Office, and it is available under a special program at a greatly reduced price of $10.
Therefore, my students do all of their writing in Word, and I’m using one, the other, or both of two integral features for e-response: the “track changes” tool and the “comment” insert. It’s important for me to emphasize, however, that I would never select these or any other commercially developed application if I did not believe that it supports totally my pedagogical goals, and these do. In both cases, responders are able to make frequent, linked annotations to specific elements in writers’ documents. In addition, they can make as many general comments as they would like.

**Paperless responses.** A second change I’ve made is that my students and I share all our responses electronically. Via email, we send our responses to one another in small groups as Word attachments. I’m sure that some students print their responses, but they don’t need to. Further, they like the flexibility of being able to access them via their email accounts anywhere they might be when they’re ready to revise.

**New grouping.** Although I was generally pleased with the results of my fixed group structure, I was troubled all along with its lack of the flexibility allowed by Frank’s system. I decided that a hybrid would be the perfect solution, and I’m planning to utilize it this year. I will still have fixed groups of 3 students, but I will also require that each student respond to a document written by someone different outside his/her group with each workshop. This way, writers will have the benefits of responses from people they get to know and the benefits of an additional response from a different person for each workshop. Now, of course, I’m interested in doing research on how the responses from fixed group members and the flexible (and variable) group members compare with one another.

**Changes I’ve Made (Frank)**
I made a number of changes in the design of classes that incorporate e-response as a result of my research and because of my discussions with Terry.

New grouping. I am convinced that small groups of 2 or 3 students to conduct responses is vital to developing a good community among the writers. At the same time, giving students the freedom to find papers that interest them is vital to establish productive responding. So in the future I hope to have small groups coupled with giving students the option to choose which essays to respond to. In other words, I plan to have small groups where the group members would be required to respond to the essays of the other members in the group. Additionally, since the groups are small, the students will also respond to other writings of their choice. It is my hope that this grouping system will establish community and keep interest.
New environment. The Awe-som web writing application (http://www.awe-som.com) is being revised to include greater flexibility and ease of use. I anticipate this site being operational and ready for use in January 2003.

One Conclusion

Now that we have explored our two experiences, we present our one conclusion: e-response improves students’ writing.

We believe that e-response is an excellent form of feedback that is currently under-utilized. It offers responders the flexibility to think through and write down comments in a private environment, and it offers writers the opportunity, again in a private environment, to decide if and how to incorporate comments into their revisions. Although it retains many of the best features of traditional oral and written responses, both of us—Terry and Frank—believe that it transcends them.

We recommend the following:

• Using Internet-accessible e-response applications that can be secured according to the needs of the class;
• Using e-response in conjunction with other forms of feedback;
• Using semi-fixed e-response groups;
• Including e-response training and coaching;
• Performing more research on e-response—particularly in regard to its impact on writing.

In the meantime, we both continue to use e-response, and, given its potential to improve students’ writing, we enthusiastically recommend that any teacher interested in this goal utilize e-response as well.
Bibliography


