

Aphorisms for Internationalizing Technical Communication Programs

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Abstract. Online media increasingly allow technical and professional communication (TPC) programs to engage in international collaborations. For such undertakings to be successful, program administrators must address different aspects affecting international online exchanges. Doing so requires effective discussions between program administrators and the stakeholders involved in the internationalization process. Aphorisms that effectively encapsulate core ideas can play a central role in these interactions. This entry presents aphorisms administrators can use when discussing the internationalization of TPC programs with key constituents.

Keywords: aphorisms, collaborations, communication, internationalization, stakeholders

Technical and professional communication (TPC) programs have long embraced emerging communication media as mechanisms for internationalizing courses (see Maylath, 1997 and Gnechhi, Maylath, Mousten, Scarpa, & Vandepitte, 2008). Such approaches provide students with educational experiences that reflect society's global nature at different points in time. TPC programs will likely continue this practice of using new technologies to internationalize classes and curricula (St.Amant, 2017). Yet this process is complex and involves effective exchanges and consistent messaging across different stakeholders.

Aphorisms, or "concise statements of a principle," can help guide

these exchanges (Aphorism, 2022). By encapsulating core concepts into concise phrases, aphorisms

- Convey a consistent message
- Keep discussions focused on core ideas
- Summarize situations quickly (see, for example, Morson, 2004 and Morell, 2006)

Administrators can use such expressions when discussing program internationalization within and beyond their institutions. This entry presents aphorisms that can help facilitate both these exchanges and this overall process.

Technology and Internationalization

New communication technologies have shaped the internationalization of TPC programs by increasing the ease with which students can interact internationally (Maylath, 1997, Mousten, Maylath, Vandepitte, & Humbley, 2010). Yet such situations also create challenges involving how individuals conceptualize, discuss, and use new technologies to internationalize TPC programs (St.Amant, 2017). Further complicating this situation are the different stakeholders with whom TPC administrators must discuss these processes and whose support is central to such undertakings (Nugent & Jose, 2015).

Aphorisms can help facilitate these interactions. By encapsulating core ideas into easy-to-understand terms, aphorisms help focus discussion on key concepts associated with internationalizing TPC programs. Aphorisms can also help different parties readily understand factors affecting internationalization activities at different levels (e.g., individual classes and overall curriculum). An effective use of aphorisms can thus help administrators effectively discuss and address uses of different media to internationalize TPC programs.

Interactions and Aphorisms

Internationalizing TPC programs via technology often encompass three aspects—or 3Cs—of interaction:

- *Contacting*: Using technologies to contact—or access—internationally dispersed individuals
- *Conveying*: Using those technologies to share ideas and information with internationally dispersed individuals
- *Connecting*: Engaging in the meaningful exchanges requisite to learning from internationally distributed peers
(St.Amant & Rice, 2015)

Aphorisms can help individuals conceptualize these 3C aspects and facilitate discussions of how to best use technologies when internationalizing TPC programs (Morson, 2004; Băiaș, 2015).

To be effective, such expressions must note how communication technologies can interconnect 3C items to establish new relationships (St.Amant & Rice, 2015). The resulting message also needs to consistently convey such interconnections across different parties during ongoing discussions of internationalization processes. Accordingly, the more clearly an aphorism addresses the 3Cs' categories per such factors, the more effectively it can foster effective exchanges across stakeholder groups.

In terms of programmatic discussions, the question becomes:

What aphorisms can administrators use to guide the internationalization of TPC programs?

This article answers the above question by providing administrators with aphorisms that can facilitate the discussion central to internationalizing TPC programs. To address the 3Cs' ideas central to different situations, the aphorisms presented here consist of three parts that encompass the 3Cs' dynamics affecting a particular step in internationalizing TPC programs. This three-part structure can also serve as a checklist program administrators can use to guide activities at different points in the internationalization process.

Technology and Connection

At its most fundamental level, the first C of "connecting" encompasses if and how students can "*get on*" online media (e.g., the Internet) to access educational options (St.Amant & Rice, 2015). From a programmatic perspective, this means identifying how widespread online access is to students in certain regions in order to determine with whom students can connect in online contexts.

Once online, the next step of conveying—or sharing ideas internationally—involves evaluating if students can "*log in*" to certain spaces when online (e.g., an LMS) in order to participate in educational exchanges (St.Amant, 2017). Individuals must therefore consider if certain factors (e.g., paywalls) affect if or how students in different regions can participate in online learning environments.

Finally, online educational exchanges often include written text (e.g., discussion board postings, IM exchanges, blog postings, etc.) (Lapadat, 2002). Accordingly, connecting online must address how effectively students can use technologies to "write to," or participate in,

an online educational community (e.g., class, project group, discussion group, etc.) (Aghajani & Adloo, 2018).

Per these factors, the aphorism to guide early discussions of internationalizing programs might be *"Get on, log in, and write to."* This expression highlights 3Cs' dynamics in a way that helps keep initial discussions of internationalization focused on fundamental technical factors affecting educational experiences.

Interaction and Exploration

Discussions of program internationalization should next examine approaches for delivering online education. Specifically, program administrators should identify instructional methods that maximize the benefits of internationalized online environments (St.Amant & Rice, 2015). As a core benefit involves allowing students to interacting with international peers, pedagogical approaches should focus on fostering such interactions (St.Amant, 2017). The aphorism used to discuss this situation needs to advocate instruction that has students

- *Tap in* (i.e., contact or access) to the cultural expertise of peers from other cultures and nations and then have students
- *Contribute to* class discussions by conveying information in ways that allow all involved to actively participate in internationalizing education so students can
- *Benefit from* the unique opportunity of interacting directly with peers from different cultures and nations

The aphorism of *"Tap in, contribute to, benefit from"* keeps pedagogical discussions focused on student-to-student interactions and helps develop programs based upon student-centered engagement among international peers.

Programmatic change often brings new challenges for administrators, faculty, and other stakeholders at an institution (St.Amant 2017; Gneccchi, Maylath, Mousten, Scarpa, & Vandepitte, 2018). A central challenge to internationalizing TPC programs involves perceived distance and its effects on international exchanges. The relative ease of online exchanges can prompt participants to forget they are interacting with persons from different cultures and nations (Tu, 2005; Papacharissi, 2009; Moore, McKee, & McLoughlin, 2015). This situation can result in individuals forgetting online peers might have different norms, attitudes, and expectations for a class topic, the nature of education, or online learning in general (Thorne, 2003). If not addressed, such issues could affect the internationalization of TPC programs.

These situations often result from the tendency humans have to

communicate (e.g., write) according to the rhetorical norms of their native culture unless instructed otherwise (see Ulijn, 1996; Thorne, 2003). This factor can be exacerbated by written exchanges that often erase non-verbal cues indicating individuals might have different rhetorical expectations (Thorne, 2003; Kern, Ware, & Warschauer, 2004). As a result, individuals might project the communication norms and expectations of their native culture onto others when interacting in international online contexts (Kern, Ware, & Warschauer, 2004). This factor could affect how students create information for and perceive messages from international peers in online contexts. Such situations could lead to miscommunication, confusion, or offense and counteract the benefits of international peer-to-peer interactions.

Addressing such dynamics is essential to effective education in global contexts (St.Amant & Rice, 2015; St.Amant, 2017). Instructors should therefore make students are aware of how cultural rhetorical factors can influence the creation and perception of online messages. Doing so involves teaching students the aphorism “Don’t forget about, project onto, and try to,” or the tendency for individuals to

- *Forget about* the fact they are communicating with other cultural groups when interacting online
- *Project onto* such groups, often by default, the student’s own cultural rhetorical expectations for crafting and interpreting messages. This situation often prompts individuals to
- *Try to* create messages according to the rhetorical norms of one’s native culture and expect others to do the same when interacting online

Such factors seem simplistic, yet the lack of physical presence—combined with often restrictive nature of online interactions—could unintentionally lead to such behaviors. This cautionary aphorism reminds students of these factors so, ideally, they can avoid such behaviors when communicating with internationally distributed peers online.

Learning and Doing

Other aphorisms can help students in TPC programs address these issues and maximize the benefits of international educational contexts. At the start of the term, for example, educators in TPC programs can ask students to compose a reflective essay explaining the communication norms of their native culture (e.g., “In my culture, this is how we often conceive of audience as..., We often approach this genre as follows...”). Students can then exchange these texts with international

peers and use them to discuss cultural communication expectations.

These discussions could include suggestions for how to adapt messages from one culture for another (e.g., “Here is how you could adapt your message for members of my culture.”). Such interactions help students learn about culture and communication expectations directly from their peers. They also help students understand how cultural perceptions, value systems, and other factors (e.g., national laws) shape rhetorical practices. Such interactions should include some guidance to ensure these exchanges represent meaningful educational experiences that foster an understanding of and appreciation for other cultures. An aphorism can help guide such processes.

Per using an initial reflective essays to discuss cultural differences, the aphorism to guide these exchanges would be “Write about, interact with, and learn from.” That is, instructors would ask students to

- *Write about* the communication norms of their own culture and then use those initial texts to
- *Interact with* peers from other cultures to compare, contrast, and discuss such approaches in order to
- *Learn from* those peers about different cultural expectations and about how to communicate more effectively with members of other cultures

This aphorism can guide student interactions within and across a program in order to maximize the benefits of internationalized educational contexts.

Application and Collaboration

Internationalized TPC courses and curricula often require program administrators to foster or maintain key relationships (Nugent & José, 2015). The relationship-building process often starts by reaching out, or forging alliances with, individuals in other cultures in order to create educational spaces where internationally distributed students can interact (Moustén, Maylath, Vandepitte, & Humbley, 2010). Doing so often means collaborating with international counterparts to create such educational environments (Gnecchi, Maylath, Moustén, Scarpa, & Vandepitte, 2018). These interactions might encompass creating shared assignments that foster meaningful international interactions (e.g., exchanging reflection papers to discuss cultural communication expectations). They could also involve creating joint courses and connected curricula that foster meaningful international interactions across programs.

Effective practices relating to such situations can be a valuable resource for other administrators wishing to internationalize their TPC programs (St.Amant, 2017). Accordingly, TPC program administrators should seek to share successful practices, resources, approaches, and materials with members of the field. Doing so can foster effective program development in and (ideally) a more consistent set of skills associated with TPC programs.

An effective aphorism can help guide such activities. Specifically, TPC program administrators should focus on the approach “Reach out, work with, share among,” or

- *Reach out* to international colleagues and prospective collaborators to forge the partnerships essential to internationalizing TPC programs
- *Work with* collaborators to develop joint interactions, assignments, and curricula focused on international peer-to-peer interactions
- *Share among* different institutional and disciplinary communities successful practices for collaborating to internationalize programs

This approach can help TPC program administrators engage in the collaborations central internationalizing learning experiences.

Final Thoughts

The idea of internationalizing TPC programs can seem overwhelming, yet such programs can better prepare students for today’s globalized society. Achieving this objective requires effective interactions with stakeholders who play a central role in achieving this goal. TPC program administrators can use the aphorisms presented in this entry to engage in the interactions essential to this process. Ideally, these aphorisms can facilitate the international educational experiences that benefit students in TPC programs and foster wider discussion of such processes in the field.

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