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COLLABORATION: HOW JAPANESE POETRY CAN HELP TECH WRITERS

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Abstract: Collaborative writing is often important for interdisciplinary teaching, interdisciplinary research, and technical communication. Interdisciplinary researchers can thus benefit from recognizing several key problems that plague collaborative writing initiatives and identifying strategies for addressing these. This paper draws on the practice of collaboration in Japanese poetry to suggest strategies for dealing with the most common problems in collaborative writing.

Interdisciplinary researchers usually, though not necessarily, work in teams. Interdisciplinary courses often require students with different disciplinary backgrounds to collaborate on projects. One little-discussed challenge that interdisciplinary teams face is the task of collaborative writing. While collaborative writing is a challenge even within disciplines, interdisciplinary collaboration creates additional challenges, given the different perspectives that authors will bring to the writing task. This paper argues that interdisciplinary researchers can learn important lessons from the practice of technical writing, and that both in turn can be informed by an appreciation of collaboration in a form of Japanese linked poetry.

Courses such as technical writing, scientific writing, and business writing are in large part interdisciplinary. In these courses, the students who are not English majors may realize not only that writing is a critical career skill, but also that writing will never again start and end with the writer working alone. Students of English may realize that much of the demand for them as writers

will come from other disciplines. Compared to scientific and business writing—usually forms of writing by scientists and businesspeople—technical writing more often leads to interdisciplinary collaboration between writing specialists and subject-matter experts. As the most common professional-writing course, technical writing typically presents collaboration as normal throughout the writing process as writers collaborate in research, drafting, reviewing, editing, and responding to readers.

Attitudes toward collaborative writing are diverse and often critical. Although the popular response to collaborative writing is dread, universities and colleges try to achieve learning objectives through group work and even teach collaboration *as* an objective, while business tries to supply the necessity for writing with a growing variety of software and systems for collaborating. Often, only two types of people speak favorably of collaboration: those who have software or a system that *facilitates* collaboration and those who have struggled through the difficulties and found the value of the resulting product. The first type at least assumes collaboration is desirable, and the second type is sure of it. Even after one collaborative assignment in a first-semester technical writing class, many of my students report positive attitudes toward the work. On the other hand, a colleague in linguistics and composition and rhetoric hates collaboration, will not assign it, and has bad memories of her own group projects. Most anecdotal comments and many critiques emphasize the problems with collaboration. Rather than reject or downplay such problems, most educational and professional publications simply accept the problems as given and focus on reacting to them.

Is collaboration, therefore, a necessary evil or an arcane talent beyond the grasp of most writers? To begin discussion, we should say “necessary” and “evil” are a defeatist pairing, and the common opinion that only a limited few are capable of group work is not only defeatist but outright contradictory. Collaboration is, in other words, teamwork—a familiar idea. But Western culture, in the United States especially, values individual accomplishment. Eastern culture, Japanese especially for the purpose of this paper, values community. Not only team sports but work and even art include strong communal practice. In the United States, writers accept collaboration reluctantly at school and sometimes at work and generally dismiss it for creative or expressive writing. In Japan, the best-known literary form, the haiku, derives from a collaborative creative writing technique—*haikai no renga*. What does a group of poets—artists each creating his or her own verse—have that a team of technical writers and subject matter experts or a team of students working toward a grade does not have? If poetry, which

Western writers consider a personal form of writing, can be a communal project, then the principles and techniques of *haikai no renga* can potentially provide insight into how collaboration can be best achieved in other sorts of writing projects. While, of course, not every Japanese worker is an ideal collaborator or poet any more than the average worker in the United States is a rugged individualist who writes sonnet sequences, this particular system of Japanese collaboration provides some interesting techniques to consider.

I have identified over 30 problems writers encounter when collaborating.¹ This paper will address several of the more common and troublesome issues. The cultural expectations of Western writers lead to problems with both the process and results of collaborative writing, including work schedules, work distribution and management, and content and style. For each problem, I will discuss an element of *renga* technique, which addresses that problem, and suggest ways to adapt the element to Western use. Such adaptations will provide at least perspective if not always direct practice; although writing skills are generally flexible enough to prove valuable across various situations, interdisciplinary scholarship is obviously distinct from poetic composition.

1. Schedules: Multitasking Versus Coordination

The problem: Most sources, published or anecdotal, cite schedule conflicts as the greatest obstacle for groups trying to work together. Academic services from writing center instruction (“Collaborative Writing,” 2005) to senior-level projects (Young, 2002) warn of the effects of team members missing deadlines; if one member fails to contribute a part of the work, then the whole project suffers. Chisholm (1990) describes a complex system of obstacles: as group members, each wants the group to devote time to the task, but as individuals, each has separate pre-existing commitments that make the group schedule “nothing but scheduling conflicts” (pp. 92-93). When a number of people have a number of events to coordinate, the potential for schedule openings to coincide is small. For two people to have the same meeting time available, the opportunity is coincidental. For three or more to have the same time available, the opportunity approaches miraculous. Further, even if people can meet, Ruggill and McAllister (2006) point out, “not every member has the same amount of time to devote.” Different people with different commitments of different durations complicate collaboration. Certainly members can adjust their schedules to create shared openings for certain amounts of time, but Chisholm points out that many will resist doing

so (p. 92). Adjusting multiple schedules is itself collaborative work, and often team members will have other reasons for resisting the idea of working together—doubts about fair workloads, personal interaction, judgment, and responsibility, for example. All of these complicating factors fold over on themselves in a recursive writing process, which Krohn points out is particularly common in complex transdisciplinary projects (2008, p. 379). In short, for many reasons, team members find it difficult and disagreeable to resolve schedule conflicts, and this problem exists before collaborative work can begin as well as in the course of the project.

In collaborative writing, the tensions between individual multitasking and group coordination create scheduling problems that an individual writer does not face. If writers collaborate only irregularly, then the process of collaboration is complicated. Moreover, the result of such collaboration is generally worse than if one writer had undertaken the entire task or if the team had regularly collaborated. Wageman (1995) defines hybrid teams as groups sometimes interacting and sometimes working alone to bring their completed contributions to the group for assembly. She finds that the problems with hybrid groups include uncooperative behavior, poor training (p. 170), team instability over time (p. 177), and outcomes that members found unrewarding and that consumers found unsatisfactory (p. 170). While distributed tasks are better than individual work and fully integrated groups are best, Wageman speculates that managers may create hybrids—the worst of all possible organizations—by imposing some collaborative techniques on a task while leaving many practices of individual work in place (p. 177). Such irregular work styles would be a particular danger in a multidisciplinary approach or a loose assembly of group members from different disciplines with different work habits and expectations.

Haikai: A *haikai no renga* group meets at the invitation of an authoritative poet, who considers his or her choices of writers. Similarly, Damrau (2006) recommends addressing the difficulties of scheduling a collaborative project in the earliest plans for the collaboration:

Selecting the right team members is similar to selecting job applicants. You want your teammates to be self-motivated and dedicated to delivering a quality product with very little management direction. If you have the opportunity to select your team, you can narrow your field of candidates through in-person interviews or an intensive series of telephone conversations.

In some cases, you do not have the opportunity to select your team

members: They may be volunteers or selected by someone else. In this case, I recommend taking the time to talk with team members individually so you can build a rapport with each of them. Try to learn their likes, dislikes, work processes, technology knowledge, and anything else that may affect their participation in the project. (p. 12)

The *renga* host may also invite an experienced poet to act as recording secretary and arbiter of the rules of poetics and composition. As a group, the host and other writers may be professional poets, enthusiasts from various professions, or a mix. The group views the event as a social occasion, of course, but primarily as a writing task. Neither the social interaction nor the writing is a distraction from the other but are complements. This combination of social responsibility, artistic interest, and work obligation gives priority to scheduling the event.

Although Asian culture generally leans toward following rules rather than following individual will, whim, or instinct, the history of *renga* shows freedom from absolute adherence to the schedule. The greatest Japanese poet, Matsuo Bashō, took part in four definitive *renga*. The first, as Mayhew (1985) describes, developed in a “haphazard fashion” (p. 15): eight poets began a 36-verse poem, writing 20 verses and stopping; four new poets in a different city wrote the next 10 verses, starting months later; and four more new poets finished the last four verses in still another city.² Though this haphazard project may not seem to set an ideal example, *Grass and Plum* was completed, and the three subsequent poems usually anthologized with it were written in single sittings by three or four poets (pp. 14-15). In comparison, Higginson and Harter (1985) describe Western attempts at *renga* often ending “in miserable failure” for various reasons (p. 198).

A possible solution: Damrau’s emphasis on preparation begins to address the problem of scheduling by selecting team members according to criteria of motivation, dedication, and capacity for the project. Such preparation is the role of team leaders, or the host and secretary in *renga* terms. However, preparation can extend beyond the participants into the institution. Companies and schools that expect collaboration should have systems in place to promote collaboration. Turns and Ramey (2006) report on a successful system for curricular collaboration at the University of Washington. Their system addresses scheduling difficulties two ways. First, potential group members have flexibility in such matters as selecting groups, joining groups in progress, and choosing the number of credit hours earned, which affects the workload and time commitment (pp. 299-301). Second, participants’

motivation to take part is strong because participants volunteer, choose their own groups and tasks according to their own interests, and earn a course grade based solely on the collaboration (pp. 296–299). Many advocates of collaboration and most of the software for it address the issue of schedule conflicts by promoting asynchronous collaboration using e-mail, internet discussion boards, edit tracking, and Web sites set up specifically for a team and its project. Further, a company or school should make clear to potential collaborators that they will need to set aside time to dedicate to a group or that the institution will provide set times when it will make no other demands on members of a group.

2. Fairness A, The Slacker: Self Versus Community

The problem: Slacking, shirking, call it what you will: Most collaborators have encountered (and some will admit to being) a group member who slips through without contributing. Most discussions of collaborative learning assume there will be students who shirk. On the most optimistic side, Klemm (1997) deals with students who are shy and “prone to avoid intense interactivity with a group” (sect. 5). Interaction with a group may also suffer when the student has no experience and simply does not understand how to contribute to group work (see Turns & Ramey, p. 305). Chisholm (1990) refers to a writer’s experience with “the ‘hitchhiker,’ who goes along for the ride but doesn’t contribute” (104), situates the problem with “immature students [who] are willing to have the go-getter do the work, but the older student soon learns to resent the load” (p. 105), and offers several ways to apply individual grading to the collaborative assignment (pp. 105-106). Howard (2000) suggests a way to penalize a student who shirks, leaving the decision within the group, but consequently reinforcing division: “[T]he groups would decide in advance how a shirker would be graded” (para. 9). The assumption of having an unproductive team member continues into workplace discussions although McTighe (2005) describes “a daydreamer” or “someone who never seems to be around” (p. 23), and Ruggill and McAllister, appealing to the scheduling problem, suggest more forgivingly, “Some folks are simply busier than others, and cannot contribute to projects as much as they might like” (para. 11). In all these cases, the response to the problem involves penalizing the shirkers or working around them. More actively, Speck (2002) advises collaborating students to “counsel weak group members” (p. 79) in order to motivate them; this approach takes a step forward to change weakness to productivity.

Why do shirkers shirk in the first place? Game theory offers one explanation and, unfortunately, projects a greater failure of productivity than simply the loss of one member’s contribution or the resentment of others who make up the slack. Though the classic Prisoner’s Dilemma involves just two “players,” the principle can be extended to larger groups and even groups of groups, such as nations (Axelrod, 1984, pp. 7-19). If two prisoners are interviewed by guards, each prisoner has two options, assuming confession is not an option: remain loyal to the other and deny being involved in any bad behavior, or implicate the other. Hypothetically, the result of both remaining loyal might be a three-year sentence reduction for each (3 years + 3 years = 6 points). The result of the first prisoner remaining loyal while the second prisoner implicates the first might be no consideration for the first prisoner (the “sucker”) while the second gets a five-year reduction for denying involvement and cooperating (0 years + 5 years = 5 points); of course, the same penalty applies if the first implicates the second, who remains loyal. Finally, both prisoners could implicate each other and each get a token one-year sentence reduction (1 year + 1 year = 2 points). Individually, the ideal score for either suspect is the highest possible sentence reduction; however, getting five years depends on the other prisoner being the sucker, and the other prisoner probably wants the ideal five-year score, too. Therefore, if both prisoners play for the five-year score, then they both end up with a measly one-year each. Since both are selfish, both are likely to get the next-worst result. On the other hand, the total reduction, if both remain loyal, is higher than the highest individual score. The ideal selfish result is better but improbable as long as the other player is selfish, too. The individual loyal score (3) is worse than the ideal selfish score (5) but better than the probable selfish score (1) and better than even the total selfish score (2). In a collaborative writing project, everyone could hypothetically be selfish and create the worst result, but someone in the group will want the grade or want to work, so the Prisoner’s Dilemma is not as likely to go as wrong as it could. Axelrod also points out that knowledge of future collaboration—ongoing collaboration, frequent collaboration, subdivided steps within collaboration—increases the likelihood that members will cooperate; of course, he also cites penalties as strong motives to cooperate (pp. 129-133).

On a practical level, as in Game Theory, the result or score is not the same when the work is shared equally as when the work is redistributed among all but one or two members. The total amount of work is different. Even one shirker not only leaves his or her work for others to pick up but also increases the workload by creating the step of redistribution. If work-

ing members try to influence the shirker or do not realize the shirker is not contributing until too late, then the result is even worse. Irritation, resentment, and confusion further worsen the result. Another stressful dilemma that Chisholm points out arises from a team member's conflict between the value "Equal Pay for Equal Work" and reluctance to inform on a shirker and so take part in imposing penalties on a peer (p. 104). The desire to be fair connotes helping others, and so working students may feel guilty even for not overcompensating to cover for others.

In short, if one collaborator fails to contribute, then the distribution of work is unfair. Changing the distribution also creates more work, among other added difficulties. And individual rewards and penalties contradict the basic premise of collaboration.

Haikai: *Renga* composition proceeds in turns, with each writer given a set task to prepare a verse responding to a preceding verse. The time, place, and sequence are predetermined. While each verse is original and creative, the writer has criteria to follow, providing both guidance and restriction. The writer takes responsibility for writing to those criteria but may consult the host or secretary.

The creative and social qualities of *renga* lessen the risks of low motivation. The writers wish to write, and the host chooses who will take part, presumably leaving out unmotivated writers. However, the sequential composition does mean that if one writer stops, the poem can stop. This breakdown stops many Western attempts at *renga*. Japanese or Western, shy writer or hitchhiker, whatever the situation, if one team member does not contribute, then the team does not work at its greatest efficiency. Yet *Grass and Plum* lost two sets of poets without ending in failure; far from failing, it led to three more *renga* projects. The new poets knew the rules of composition, accepted the previous work, and wrote their own verses.

Socially, of course, Japan places more emphasis on maintaining relations with others than the West does, with the West's emphasis on competition and higher expectation of social mobility—granting the aphorism about being nice to others on the way up the ladder. Expecting continued social relations motivates collaborators to work together in good faith, as Game Theory explains. Furthermore, Japanese society historically includes a system of obligations, as Benedict (1974) relates in her classic study, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, including first, "Duty to one's work," an obligation that cannot ever be fully paid; second, "Duties to... persons... on work contributed (as a 'work party')"; and third, general obligations "received in all contacts in the course of one's life" (p. 116). If team mem-

bers *owe* their contributions to each other in any sense, then choosing not to contribute is less an option.

A possible solution: Penalties are the most common approaches to dealing with shirkers, but, however effective, different treatment for different team members contradicts the principle of collaboration. Chisholm does in fact contradict himself. Early in his article, he tells instructors, "Announce clearly that you will give one grade for the group's project" and "Explain that the purpose of collaborative writing is to produce an integrated final report, not merely a collection of parts. Then grade as you said you would" (p. 94). Later, however, he suggests, "Assign an individual grade to some portion of the project" to enforce fair work distribution and then allow students to parcel out credit for the work (pp. 105-106). The principle of collaboration, however, depends on togetherness.

In light of the Prisoner's Dilemma, workplace collaboration should succeed more regularly than classroom collaboration because with each new semester comes a new group of classmates and so the motivation to lay solid foundations for future collaboration is weaker. Indeed, workplace collaboration is a given while the extent of classroom collaboration varies department by department, professor by professor, and assignment by assignment. I have had students receive collaborative assignments and promptly secede from each other. In either environment, time and repeated experience should lead potential shirkers to see the greater payoff in cooperation and help those who always contribute to overcome their bad experience of being played for suckers. The West recognizes the value of community and strives to build teamwork and trust, often with exercises on top of actual projects. To shorten the curve to fuller collaboration, the projects themselves can incorporate socializing elements. Stokols et al. (2008), Schelling et al. (2008), Hollaender et al. (2008), Bergmann and Jahn (2008), and Burkhardt-Holm (2008) identify techniques and objectives for such socializing in early group meetings and work plans. Among their suggestions are pleasant shared workspaces (Stokols et al., pp. S100, S105) and general, open agendas for encouragement during early work sessions (Schelling et al., p. 286). Although strategies and techniques like these might seem more natural to creative-writing gatherings than to a professional environment, such socializing can improve work outcomes. Even more than with making room in work schedules, *interested* collaborators should all be willing to cooperate and less likely to shirk. These sorts of strategies not only form a social bond between team members but also serve to highlight the social expectations involved in teamwork. While Western collaborators will not have the same

ingrained sense of obligation and duty that the Japanese may have, they can respect a contractual explanation of responsibilities at the beginning of a collaboration. As individual work is most Westerners' default expectation, they must be made consciously aware that collaboration proceeds according to a different system even if working together seems self-evident. Habit can speed team members' development of collaborative skills, so the system should show consistency from project to project.

Renga rules are complex, and though writers assimilate them through practice and study, the host and secretary also serve as guides to proper collaborative technique. Lunsford and Ede (1990), authors remarkably in favor of collaboration, cite many cases of successful writing processes. On one hand, they describe "a complex and highly collaborative process" (p. 31) in a construction equipment company involving many writers from many backgrounds and credit the "specificity and formality" of a corporate style guide (p. 30). On the other hand, in a smaller group of writers in a city sanitation office, they report a team member saying, "We don't have any formal procedure" but referring to the manager's "effective leadership and especially his ability to motivate his co-workers" (p. 36); the manager and the executive secretary of the office follow a formal procedure so that the writers do not have to (p. 37). In each case, a system is in place; in the larger group the system is institutional, and in the smaller it is personal.

3. Fairness B, The Boss: Ambition Versus Harmony

The problem: Many sources that discuss the team member who evades work then discuss in the next sentence, or the same sentence, the team member who assumes authority. This authority becomes a problem when the "boss" is not officially a team leader. Like shirkers, a self-appointed boss hurts the group effort by complicating the task of distributing tasks and by creating resentment. This effect is especially likely in an egalitarian society where collaborators often interact with their actual managers and instructors on a first-name basis and view them as facilitators rather than supervisors. In an interdisciplinary project, Wiesmann et al. (2008) say, "Major difficulties also arise if integration [of information from team members] is delegated to one of the participating disciplines only"; one group of collaborators may feel singled out unfairly if handed the task of assembling others' work (p. 437). Twenge (2006) points out that this worldview is becoming stronger among those born since the 1970s in the United States, despite necessary hierarchies in workplaces and schools. Any group of peers from any genera-

tion of Westerners is likely to reject a usurper whether they object on procedural grounds of an unfair grab for power or simply on personal grounds reacting to an aggressive, domineering equal.

A contributor to Sanders's (2002) discussion on collaboration suggests controversially that the term itself "implies submissiveness to superior power, structural deception, inappropriate manipulation, and covert intent. In its most positive usage it remains nostalgic. I think we should reinstate the concept of co-operation." Surely most people would not have this contradictory connotation of manipulation and superiority for the literally cooperative term collaboration, yet this contributor has a fully formed distinction between collaboration and good cooperation. Another, similar negative connotation attaches to "collaborator" in its wartime sense when collaborator is a synonym for a traitor working with an unjust authority.

In a Western environment, competition and ambition often serve as workplace motivators, and promotion serves as a reward. With these factors in place, at least one team member is likely to show initiative and aim for an unplanned position of authority. Further, many intended collaborators bring habits of solitary writing to the group effort and assume their own ideas will lead to the same conclusion whether other points of view enter the consideration or not. Naturally, a team member who believes he or she has the right answer will expect others to recognize it and cooperate. If this self-appointed boss gets his or her way, then the intended collaboration has failed and turned back into an individual project.

Without necessarily desiring to control the collaboration, team members may still disarrange a project by volunteering for more or different tasks. Western workers may find assigned roles restrictive and wish to stretch their talents. One team member may take care of a task, not realizing that it has already been covered in the project plan. Or a collaborator may help another out at risk of interfering or of neglecting his or her own assignment.

In short, a team member who takes a leading role without authorization creates many of the same problems as a team member who does no work. The self-appointed boss does not exactly do his or her intended work, creates the task of redistributing tasks, and causes resentment. Additionally, a self-appointed boss may block the contributions of genuine collaborators.

Haikai: Japanese culture takes less issue with the idea of authority, but the basis of the Western objection to self-appointed bosses is not so much having a boss as suffering an unjust boss. *Renga*-composition groups avoid unauthorized authorities simply by working at the invitation of a participat-

ing host. However, other factors than this clear chain of responsibility work to prevent any one team member from becoming bossy.

While ambition and competition are not alien concepts to Japan, respecting convention has priority over taking initiative to change the system. Just as Japanese social obligations encourage workers to live up to their responsibilities, Benedict identifies a “duty to fulfill the Japanese proprieties, e.g., observing all respect[ful] behavior, not living above one’s station in life” (p. 116). Traditionally, a responsible worker will not overreach but will find confirmation in a clearly assigned role.

While the conservative hierarchy of Japanese society honors higher places, roles are not absolutely rigid or universal. While a *renga* host or secretary is likely to be an expert and leader, the leader can reverse roles with a guest for future collaboration. Bashō gave up his social rank as a member of a minor samurai family yet led the wealthy and the powerful in their studies of poetry. As an illustration of how a specific group may structure itself in response to social rank, Sen Soshitsu (1979), a master of tea ceremony, describes an ideal response to a complication introduced to a planned gathering. Tea ceremony, like *renga* composition, is an artistic social activity guided by complex tradition. Sen shows that social rank does not trump a particular group’s community:

Once Rikyu [the master who defined the modern Way of Tea] hosted a tea gathering to which he invited a merchant. While the gathering was in progress, a powerful lord visited Rikyu on business and, upon learning of the gathering, requested that he be admitted as a guest. Rikyu answered that the merchant was the principal guest, but if the lord found a lower position in the room acceptable, he was welcome to join. The lord had no objection to such an arrangement; without the least ill-feeling, he took the last place and the tea gathering continued congenially.

One feels high regard here for the dauntlessness of Rikyu, who refused to flatter the powerful and, observing the spirit and rules of Tea, put a great lord in the last seat because there already was a principal guest, although that guest was but a merchant. At the same time, one cannot suppress admiration for the lord, who willingly accepted the last position and enjoyed the tea.

In this story we can see two aspects of the spirit of Tea. One is that quality in which, however distinguished or humble people may

be, as human beings they are equals. Social standards of high and low, rich and poor, have no place in the tearoom. The other aspect is the seventh rule, “*Give those with whom you find yourself every consideration.*” Neither host nor guest acts merely as he pleases, but both act with mutual consideration.... (pp. 39-40)

This example may be Sen Soshitsu’s specially selected effort to introduce Tea to a democratic Western audience; however, Sen Rikyu’s seventh rule, “Give those with whom you find yourself every consideration,” is canon, along with the first rule, “Make a delicious bowl of tea,” and the fifth rule, “do everything ahead of time” (Sen S., pp. 30-31). The 16th-century master had only Japanese practitioners as his audience and, nonetheless, preferred care for the members of the group over exaltation of traditional or situational authority. In the Japanese system, a leader has as many responsibilities or more to the members of the group as group members have to the leader, and each one accepts everyone’s role: “Neither host nor guest acts merely as he pleases, but both act with mutual consideration.”

A possible solution: A genuine authority should make the organization of a collaborative group clear. Whether the manager is an active member of the group, does not participate directly but designates a chair or organizer, or establishes the group as a peer organization, members’ roles should be defined, fair, and substantial. Turns and Ramey (2006) emphasize the benefit of “vertically integrated” groups with faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates working together (p. 299) because each type of participant brings skills that other participants lack (p. 305). Any project that actually requires collaboration will include roles that are important enough to satisfy ambition or prevent bored meddling. In a collaborative project, even redundant roles serve a purpose of preparing for unknown problems or unexpected absences.

With perhaps more sense of hope than of realistic expectation, Grabill and Simmons (1998) propose that technical writers act as leadership in integrated teams because “the technical communicator may be one of the few professional workers trained for both the multidisciplinary perspectives and user advocacy necessary to help dissolve the boundary between assessment and communication” (p. 434). Such user advocacy would be a means of meeting the necessity of considering life-world actors and involving them in participatory research and problem-solving as Hirsch Hadorn et al. describe (2008, p. 35). Although the transfer of authority from executives or experts to literal authors might face hierarchical or territorial opposition, this idea

is compatible with democratization of writing teams and the approach of coordinating rather than supervising collaborators from different fields, described by Killingsworth and Jones (1989). They identify a trend away from managed projects that divide tasks among collaborators by their specialties toward cooperative projects that integrate all collaborators in recursive stages of writing. In this pattern of work, managers are participating members of the team rather than superiors, and writers and illustrators take part in the process not only as early as planning documents but even as early as product design and engineering. Stokols et al. (2008) call for a leader to be “supportive, democratic, empowering, and committed and [to]... encourage cooperation and engage the support of others,” (p. S104) but mostly to be empowering (p. S112). Such a democratic, cooperative, coordinating, inter- or transdisciplinary leader should empower would-be bosses by effectively integrating all group members’ roles. Yet the manager retains the managerial role in such a way that would-be bosses would have less opportunity and less desire to usurp power.

4. Liking: Unsure, Suspect, or Buddy Relationships Versus Standard Relations

The problem: Conflict often interferes with a group’s ability to collaborate smoothly; conflict may arise from dislike for shirkers or self-appointed bosses but may also reflect friction or subdivisions in the group based on personalities or pre-existing grudges. Members of different disciplines are likely to view themselves and others at different levels of a hierarchy, as Holdstein (1990, p. 31) points out, and a sense of different rank or value will stand in the way of cooperation. Even if all members contribute in good faith, alternative ideas or processes may become difficult to resolve. Or, on the contrary, the group may get along too well and be distracted from the work.

In discussing the behavior of “compliance professionals”—typically sales professionals but also other persuaders like politicians or doctors and generally any trendsetters—Cialdini (2001) discusses one technique that applies particularly well to group behavior: likability. Likability in turn derives from attractiveness, personal similarity, use of praise, familiarity, and association with positive contexts. Surveying a variety of compliance techniques, Cialdini demonstrates liking with two examples of groups working together (whereas most of his examples for other techniques depend on one or two persuaders acting upon a person or group, not strictly collaboration).

He explains Sherif’s study of two groups of boys at a youth camp in terms of liking. Fundamentally, the boys cooperated within their own groups and competed fiercely with members of the other group, but after a change of task allowed them to view the other group as similar, familiar, and associated with positive accomplishments, cooperation overcame competition. Cialdini also cites studies showing that racially integrated classrooms develop their own segregated cliques based on, of course, similarity and familiarity (and thus dissimilar and unfamiliar students are often viewed negatively). Such divisiveness can also depend on other distinctions than race; Cialdini cites hostility between students who like to answer questions and those who do not; the same could go for girls and boys, athletes and band members, or children who grew up together and children who just moved to town. The corrective that can bring effective collaboration to this environment is not just breaking the cliques into integrated groups but into groups in which everyone is clear on how he or she can contribute. When students were assigned different components of a lesson to learn and then teach to the group, collaborative learning and friendship both improved. Collaboration and likability are mutually reinforcing: improved collaboration led to friendship, while the fact that the student was likable—had a similar knowledge level, could praise and be praised as a fellow teacher and student, became familiar, and was associated with success—made the collaboration work.

Cialdini’s discussion of the campground and schoolroom examples can illustrate collaborative writing for the workplace as well as schools in the West, especially in North America, and especially in the United States. Is everyone at work likable? Coworkers may be different not only in racial, gender, political, or religious background, but also in professional training and experience. Praise may not be readily forthcoming or, if too freely given, may seem insincere, an impression which Cialdini points out generally prevents compliance. People may become familiar with others at work but only as a result of working together. And, as with bad educational experiences, unless collaboration goes well to begin with, the other collaborators are going to be associated with a negative experience.

A group may subdivide by personal or disciplinary characteristics and so obstruct collaboration. Oshry (1996) analyzes obstacles to collaboration arising not only from top, middle, and bottom ranks splitting off from each other but also from counterproductive interaction developing within each subdivision. The subdivisions by rank obstruct work for the obvious reasons: dislike or distrust among the ranks, ineffective or unfair divisions of work, resentful perceptions that work has been assigned ineffectively or

unfairly, and rough aggregates of individual work rather than smooth collaboration. Oshry characterizes the internal failings of each rank differently although each subdivision is also susceptible to common group problems. The top rank is particularly prone to territorialism because members of the top rank are used to having authority (p. 133). Members of the bottom rank over-identify with each other so that they become less cooperative with the other ranks and less innovative in their own work habits for the sake of conformity (pp. 135-136). Members of the middle rank do not identify with each other or their appropriate tasks and so take less interest in the collaboration (pp. 134-135).

When a group is divided by discipline, Stokols et al. (2008) identify trust as key (pp. S103-S104, S106, S110). To build trust, they recommend such strategies as locating collaborators in close work areas, frequent face-to-face meetings in a comfortable environment including meetings to socialize, an initial face-to-face meeting for distance collaborators if possible, regular communication by any means, and reinforcing messages about team successes.

Conflict, friction, alienation, and mistrust are not the only hazards affecting the collaborative project when diverse team members come together. Almost stereotypically, a group of friends trying to work together may too easily be distracted by socializing with each other. However, even collaborators who are happy with their team members and are determined to stay on good terms may emphasize the process of interacting at the expense of the product. Howard warns, “the comfort of self-chosen groups could sometimes result in poor decision-making, with too much consideration for established relations and not enough for the collaborative project” (para. 6). Besides the increased chance of bad decisions, a group formed on bases of familiarity or similarity can decrease the group’s knowledge and perspective; Stokols et al. cite findings that “homogenous teams, although more socially cohesive, do not perform as well as heterogeneous teams on certain kinds of tasks, especially on creative and intellectual tasks” (p. S100).

In short, friction within a group adds conflict-resolution to the necessary tasks. If a few members are excluded from the group for whatever reason, then effectively they have been forced to shirk by a group of self-appointed bosses, or the subdivisions may still not be effective work units. Finally, a group that gets along very well must be sure not to be friendly at the expense of work.

Haikai: Asian culture in general and *renga* groups in particular offer correctives to many of these requirements for liking collaborators and, therefore,

being able to succeed at collaboration. Going back to Bashō, a traditional *renga* group tends to be all Japanese, all writers, and all one social class. However, as the subordinate lord in the tea ceremony shows, even class distinctions are not necessarily sources of conflict. Often group members will already know each other well, but even if not, because of the Asian value on community, the group members would be comfortable with a conventional social relationship to a stranger. A *renga* group is associated positively with poetic creation and with a social preference for working with groups.

A possible solution: Western writers, not having these built-in prompts to collaborate effectively, can work to like co-writers and to be liked, in a professional sense. Holdstein notes that researchers who consciously position themselves in an interdisciplinary mode define themselves as equals and so defuse the sense of greater and lesser ranks and its consequent incompatibility (pp. 32, 39). As with the issues of shirkers and would-be bosses, deliberate introductions of group members to each other and to each others’ points of view can lead to knowing and liking collaborators better, especially when such deliberate communication confirms the common goal of the group. Professionalism is an expectation a team leader can reasonably propose, but it should be proposed in the beginning rather than enforced in response to conflict. Although discussing ground rules including the expectation of professionalism may seem like stating the obvious, an explicit orientation directed to all group members is better than a reprimand directed to a specific member or members. A general team-building statement or even a hypothetical warning may prevent subdivisions but should not further isolate and differentiate transgressors.

5. Ownership: Independence Versus Community

The problem: As most Western writers consider writing to be a creative or expressive act and feel that the author of a work is its owner, they are not comfortable making changes to what another writer has produced and may not be comfortable producing work derived from others’ efforts. Western writers are comfortable enough making suggestions about other writers’ punctuation or spelling but keep their hands off the writing itself. In fact, Western writers often focus comfortably or too comfortably on the copyediting—marking commas and verb forms even when reading early drafts or when asked to comment on other aspects like organization or fact-checking. Hart (2006) points out that such copyediting can waste the time of subject-matter experts who are supposed to be checking the information (p. 19). In

fact, Western writers (especially students) often mark corrections that create errors—adding an apostrophe to a simple plural noun, for example—and this problem is an issue to examine later. In contrast to marking according to external, abstract, objective, impersonal rules, marking changes to content or diction or organization seems to relate to mishandling someone's property. The writer or the commenting collaborator or both may feel this way—on the one hand resenting comments or on the other not wishing to cause resentment.

Especially in professional and educational situations, Western writers will want credit for their writing. As McTighe points out, the rules tend to support “Do your own work” (p. 22). Woodmansee (1984) identifies the concept of an author who owns his or her original writing as a particularly Western concept and a relatively modern one motivated by financial reasons. It is justified by the idea that, although content might not be original property, artistic expression is (pp. 427-431). Although relatively modern—having started with Alexander Pope in the 18th century—this view of the author as owner was well established by the time of William Wordsworth in the early 19th century, and so authors' ownership of their writing is now popularly and professionally accepted. Although in general behavior is more rule-governed in Asian cultures, the West is strongly categorical about the rules of writing, and writing is personal property. Academic and legal lessons reinforce the idea that a writer's work is personal property. Since the Jayson Blair and Stephen Ambrose plagiarism scandals in journalism and historical writing, a Western writer may steer wide of any suggestion of misusing another's writing.

In Western schools and offices, the distribution of writing tasks may cause competitive tension, and such tension may affect the written product. As discussed above, fairness provides two forms of tension. Some writers will, of course, seek to avoid their shares of work. Others will reach for more work motivated by perfectionism, credit, eagerness, or generosity toward fellow writers. Writers avoiding their shares disrupt the collaboration, and overachievers may also. However, even if team members are not seeking to do less or more than their own fair share of work, competition for particular tasks based on perceived prestige or personal aptitude can disrupt the cooperative mood. Territoriality can disrupt consensus decisions and lead to a mismatched, fragmentary document or duplicated efforts.

The sense of ownership is an important issue to reconcile in collaboration. While most Western writers think of creating a document as a personal act, Repko (2008) defines creation as integration of previously unrelated mate-

rial. The original disparity of the material leads to the most creative aspect of interdisciplinary work because the materials and perspectives do not come together as a matter of course (pp. 116-119).

In short, Western writers expect sole authority over writing. They will resist working on the writing of another person, resist changes to their own, and resist dividing the task of writing.

Haikai: Although each verse is one writer's contribution advancing the *renga*, writers expect the host and sometimes the secretary to have the authority to select and modify verses. Writers trust that they can ask the host or secretary for help when composing a verse. Being the author yet yielding authority is not contradictory for *renga* writers, in contrast to the more proprietary Western view.

Haiku and *renga* flourish under their rules. In addition to the host writer and guest writers, a *renga* group may have a refereeing secretary to identify the rules of composition as the writing proceeds. Mayhew explains:

Writing *renga* is not easy (some experts say that twenty years is hardly sufficient to learn the craft), and the rules make the task appear that much more formidable. There are so many of these that for hundreds of years it was the tradition at gatherings of *renga* enthusiasts to have a “*renga* master” keep them in mind and be the final arbiter of whether verses qualified or not, since it was felt that simultaneous attention to rules and to the creating of verses was too inhibiting. (28)

The writers will have a good working knowledge of the rules or they would never be able to create any acceptable verses, but a writer may need help with remembering if a firefly image, which is limited to one use in a hundred verses, has been used recently, for example. The writers respect the authorities of the host, of the secretary, and of the rules themselves.

In *renga*, one standard technique for adding to the work is *omokage* or mental image, which builds its image with techniques like metaphor or allusion. Japanese literature as a whole is highly allusive, from Murasaki Shikibu—who wrote the world's first novel, *Genji Monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*) around 1001 to 1011, alluding to older Chinese and Japanese poetry—to current author Murakami Haruki, whose *Umibe no Kafuka* (*Kafka on the Shore*) (2005) alludes to Kafka, Japan's Soseki, and *Arabian Nights*. For that matter Japanese culture and language are referential, indirect, and high-context (Hall, 1983). A *renga* writer may contribute a verse that is successful expressly because it makes a well-known allusion or follows a convention.

A Western writer may view allusion as a literary technique, inside joking, or elitism. Even further, Japanese literature aspires to meet conventions, in contrast to Western writers' goals of originality. While Murasaki's novel was literally novel in its approach to character and story, it followed earlier tales in the well established *monogatari* tradition; and up to the 20th century, Kawabata Yasunari, the Nobel-winning novelist, innovated by applying haiku spirit to fiction. Finally, in contrast to Woodmansee's description of ownership and in direct reference to *haikai*, Bashō worked as a master poet writing haiku as opening verses to share with his followers.

A possible solution: Cultures, Asian and Western, are constituted of rules. In the United States, the attitude toward rules is complex; while egalitarian fair play means playing by the rules, the colonial and frontier spirits emphasize freedom. The Constitution has had many amendments, but these rules more often guarantee rights than impose limits—an exception being the 18th Amendment for Prohibition, and it did not last. Crediting individualism again, an individual wants guidance and wants to rely on a social contract, but the individual expects freedoms to be the reward for following rules and respects those who rebel against arbitrary rules. The United States shows great ambivalence toward rules, the idea that rules are meant to be broken, the value and authenticity of unwritten rules, and changes in the rules. While rules, law, and order are valued, they are also restrictive. On the other hand, in Asia, rules are a given. Bowing is governed by rules: different degrees of incline for different social grades of the recipient. Mastery of subjects like calligraphy, flower arranging, or tea ceremony (in Japanese, *sho-do*, the way of writing; *ikebana*, giving life to flowers; or *cha-do*, the way of tea), requires acquisition of strict rules. Although some experts in these fields advocate following the spirit of the art rather than constantly and blindly adhering to rules, they do not go so far as a *laissez-faire* attitude; the spirit of the art is still the guide.

Writers who are familiar and comfortable with boilerplate and templates are less likely to resist the collective ownership aspect of collaboration. The rule of corporate ownership is that if a writer's company owns one document, then that writer is not plagiarizing when using it to prepare a new document. Repko (2008) discusses a process for establishing clearly defined, shared ownership by taking steps to identify the most relevant disciplines from which to recruit team members (p. 169) and steps to determine the scope and kind of material they will contribute to the project (pp. 189-190). More generally, the interdisciplinary research process advocated by Repko provides a set of expectations guiding collaboration but leaving each collaborator the opportunity to identify creative solutions to the guiding question.

Lunsford and Ede (1990), who focus on the successes of collaboration, cite a case study "Technical Writers in a Construction Equipment Firm." The moral of this study is the benefit of a strict style guide. Although the guide, which uses a simplified technical vocabulary, "acts as a primary constraint on the technical writers," it more importantly "allows them to establish an intricate international collaboration" (p. 30). Rules provide guidance rather than restriction, and as Robert Frost said of poetry, writing without rules is like playing tennis without a net. The rules give direction to work in ways that a writer might not imagine if working alone or unguided. Within such rules, therefore, the writer gains directed opportunities to create.

To create a communal sense of ownership, the team needs not only rules to establish the community but also an acceptance of the rules as valid. Arbitrary rules for rules' sake will not work. Valid, sensible rules can come from the manager's consideration and use of team members' particular skills when constituting the team, from democratic (not anarchic) discussion, and from clear publication of the rules. Interdisciplinary teams can benefit from being able to use interdisciplinary best practices rather than each interdisciplinary team having to reinvent such rules as they go along.

6. Variety: Need To Vary Versus Need To Blend

The problem: Western writers value expressing individual writing styles. Style, including editing, is one area writers are often most comfortable sharing opinions about. Having a collaboratively written document read in one style, as if composed by one voice, is a need often noted in technical writing texts and guides. Without directly saying how to achieve this unity, Lannon (2006) notes, "The final version should display one consistent style throughout—as if written by one person only," but he does discuss group members' roles including "one person writ[ing] a complete draft" or "one person alone do[ing] the final revision" (p. 98). Many corporate documents display the failure to consolidate different writers' styles. Any document with a history is likely to reflect changing opinions on the use of first-, second-, or third-person pronouns; passive voice; contractions; formal or informal tone; diction; fonts; list format; indentation; *shall*, *will*, and *must*; capitalization; commas; sentence and paragraph lengths; and every other measure of style imaginable. A document that breaks down by such style markers can hardly be called a successful single document.

In particular, interdisciplinary writers face potential conflicts among their disciplines' different styles. Killingsworth and Jones (1989) point out that a

consequence of traditional collaboration strategies for a complex writing process can be “fragmentation... further abetted by the development of specialized ‘discourse communities’” (p. 210). Wiesmann et al. believe serious obstacles arise when “integrative concepts are too stringently designed and do not leave room for participating disciplines and researchers to manoeuvre” (2008, p. 437). For example, Repko indicates collaborators will want to fall back on defining matters according to their own disciplines’ concepts and terms (p. 145). Admittedly, some traditional stylistic differences are fading with the spread of Plain English. For example, Wydick has advocated Plain English for lawyers from his *California Law Review* article “Plain English for Lawyers” in 1978 to the most recent edition of his book *Plain English for Lawyers* in 2005—against the stereotypical yet traditionally true style of legalese with its redundancies like “null and void” or “give, devise, and bequeath” and its lawyerly diction like “aforementioned” and “hereinafter.” In 1998, Plain English and the law gained Clinton’s directive for government writing. Similarly, in scientific writing, the stylistic correlative to objectivity that avoided first-person pronouns often by placing all actions in passive voice has generally broken down to allow the author to appear in pronoun person and use active verbs when appropriate (for example, Goldbort, 2006, pp. 18-21). However, different styles continue in different disciplines, from supratextual issues such as the scientists’ IMRAD (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion) organization versus the business writers’ all-important executive summary plus a bunch of ignorable pages of report, down to the humble apostrophe—from the Associated Press’s style (or “the Associated Press’ style,” in that style) (Goldstein, 2002) with no “s” after the possessive apostrophe added to a proper name ending in “s” to the Modern Language Association’s style (Gibaldi, 2003) with “s” after *any* singular proper noun, ending in “s” or not.

Discussions regarding style and editing can, of course, lead to theoretical disagreement and personal conflict. If the issues are not resolved, then the final product will keep its clashing styles. However, not all resolutions are good resolutions. Grow (1988) points out that computer-based collaboration leads more often to additions of new and different styles by different writers rather than actual revision (pp. 217-218). If existing text is changed, the reasons for change or the resulting compromise may make the writing worse, as Chisholm describes:

From time to time, we run into students who give others bum advice and others who receive it eagerly. One student wrote “choppy” in the margin beside a fine paragraph written by a colleague, and the writer

did not have the sense to leave the paragraph alone. A student told another student to put an apostrophe in “Dickens.” Lack of experience is a serious problem, all right. (p. 97)

As the issue of ownership shows, copyediting is an aspect of writing that collaborators are often comfortable with since spelling, grammar, and punctuation depend more on objective, impersonal rules, even if the editor refers to a faulty rule. Collaborators may feel any other suggestions would infringe on the rights of the writer.

In short, a group of different writers may produce bad writing in one of three ways. The writing may turn out as a conglomerate of conflicting styles. The writing may resolve style conflicts by layering on new writing rather than addressing the problems. Or if writers do address the problems, they may not choose the best revisions or edits. These three errors in turn generate two bad results for writing—mismatched styles or the worst common style.

Haikai: Although the Japanese say, “The nail that sticks up gets hammered down,” *renga* reveals a contrary value regarding identity in the culture. Although the sense of community does encourage people to identify themselves with the group, Japan also places value on individual accomplishment. The Japanese love the team sport baseball, but *sumō*, where each wrestler competes for the championship, is the native sport. A *renga* does not grow as one extended poem. Each verse added must combine with the single preceding verse to create a new poem; the rules of composition require these changes and even limit the number of times certain images can appear in a *renga* to enforce variety. Admittedly, these rules may be in place to counteract any natural tendency to conform. Further, Keene (1993) insists, “the participants could not be a random group of poets. A *za* was a group of poets who shared a communality of spirit that was fostered by a respect for the literature of the past. This did not necessarily involve any loss of individuality on the part of the participants, though it is true that nobody deliberately tried to be unlike the others” (p. 934). Classic *renga* groups generally included several accomplished poets but usually also included writers from the aristocratic, military, religious, or merchant classes brought together by their interest in the genre. In the West, independence and individuality come naturally as the cultural values, and the need to cooperate is the contrary value. Yet the external rules for separation and the personal preferences for separation, which together do reinforce identity, do not cancel out the contrary value of cooperation. In the world of open-source

technology, McTighe cites the development of the Linux computer system as a long-term project bringing together “hundreds of programmers” harmoniously (p. 23). When members’ interests do coincide, the cooperative value can blend a variety of personalities into a working group.

In *renga* composition, Japanese writers use their individual contributions to advance the goal of the collaboration. The host composes an opening verse and passes it to another writer to add a completing verse. The next writer takes the second verse, adds his or her completing verse to that one, and so on.

The group accomplishment is achieved with rules requiring innovation with each added verse. In Western culture, the contradictory impulses also coexist, but aligning rules and preferences is not easy. Writers may want to collaborate, but often the rules from more familiar writing practice drive the writers toward individual effort. When collaboration is intended, and rules are there to encourage collaboration, just one writer can break the group by choosing his or her own preference over cooperation. To align rules and preferences, the contradictory values must coexist to advance the work in their own ways.

The final *renga* is not in fact a homogenous whole, but its parts are composed and reviewed to be complementary. Each writer is not only aware of the team members’ obligations to each other and to the final product, but each member writes in direct response to the writing of another to create an independent five-line verse, a module of the overall poem. The creativity of the act lies in the ability to work with given materials within given rules. The results may be judged by how successfully they meet criteria (a type of judgment common to Western performance evaluations), but they must also develop with a natural feel to them. Referring to a common value in *haikai* and the Way of Tea, Sen defines an attitude for engaging in artistic or commonplace activities: “Furyu points out only what is absolutely essential for balance and proportion. On the other hand, furyu refuses to be perfect; it includes the imperfect” (p. 67). Literally, he explains, “*fu* means wind and *ryu* means to flow. This suggests that our spirit should flow through life like the wind that flows through all of nature” (p. 66). A Zen precept like this, by nature an elusive concept, cannot serve as an objective criterion or a best practice in a manager’s handbook, but it does allow that variation can exist in “balance and proportion.”

One especially Japanese trait, however, does help to blend the separate contributions of collaborators into an effective whole. Yamada (1997), a Japanese linguist who lives and works in London, explains a difference between Japanese and Americans:

...the Japanese expectation of unspoken interdependence: Like a person is only... part of a larger group, a sentence in Japanese is only part of the larger interaction, and consequently often gets completed *across* communicators rather than by a single individual on her own.

The process of anticipatory guesswork required to fill out each other’s communication is called *sasshi*, a strategy where players try to understand as much as possible from the little that is said. A *sasshi no ii hito* (literally, a person with good *sasshi*) is someone who is quick to understand and empathize, and a *sasshi no tsuku hito* (literally, a person who can hit on *sasshi*) is one who is perceptive. Both are people who can “hear others out” with little need for explanation. (p. 37)

One communicator is not independent, and if both speaker and listener are good in their roles, then the completion of a thought from one to the other means, as Yamada notes, “the responsibility of communication rests with the audience, making listener interpretation not only key, but the main mode of communication” (p. 38). This complement of implication and inference is the cultural communication style that Hall (1983) characterizes as high context and is, unfortunately, partly behind the Western perception that Asians are guarded or even disingenuous. Moving beyond the relation of speaker and listener to a team of speakers or writers, *sasshi* allows one collaborator to contribute part of a document and another to add to the document in the same spirit as the first. Just as a listener is responsible for discerning the speaker’s meaning, each collaborator is responsible for discerning a common meaning with others. This common meaning should not lead to a stale uniformity or make every member of the group except one unnecessary; communication needs a community. However, the interdependence of collaborators “fill[ing] out each other’s communication” means no one will take the communication off in a contradictory direction.

A possible solution: As discussed under ownership, a style guide will help. In mapping out the collaborative writing process, Alred, Brusaw, and Oliu (2003) include a step in the initial planning phase to establish “writing style standards that the team is expected to follow” (p. 81) and a step in the final revising phase when “all drafts can be consolidated into a final master copy” (p. 82). Comparably, Repko (2008) declares finding, understanding, and resolving the conflicts in perspectives of group members from different disciplines to be an important early step, and in fact, he sees the initial conflict itself as fundamental in providing the justification for collaborating—why have varied contributors if they already think the same (p. 248)?

While Repko refers to the possibility of *finding* common ground among disciplines, he emphasizes the process of having to create it (pp. 271-294). Just as a *renga* is modular but balanced and proportioned, Weiss (1991) argues that carefully planning modular documentation (in fact, spending more time planning the process than actually writing) and “breaking the long, complicated process of writing into a set of small, independent tasks” means that “the little pieces will ultimately fit together well” and that “Planning, writing, editing, and producing by module enhances the control of the person in charge” rather than fragmenting the result (p. 51). Hart (2006) also notes that planning early reduces last-minute revision or redirection (p. 21). Repko lists the necessary skills for bringing together different viewpoints: analysis, comparison, discovery of common elements, evaluation and selection, critical thinking, and a realistic acceptance of limitations (p. 297). With such clearly defined, group-approved standards, the potential conflict of different styles from different collaborators’ different disciplines should be ameliorated. Such standards would be directed toward the audience’s needs rather than derived from collaborators’ habits.

Even when one style must rule in a collaborative document, agreement is key. Technical writers should advance this position even if it moves away from the style of their own field. Speaking of tech-writing teachers, Dobrin (1982) puts it that “We should be teaching students to write so that we don’t understand it” (p. 137). Communication requires adaptation to the situation.

Recommendations and Conclusion

In the high-context culture of Japan, systems like collaborative projects are more natural to potential collaborators, more acceptable when presented as rules to follow, and more tolerable when complex. Asian communication and interaction emphasize communal values and habits, while practice in the United States defaults to individualism so that some or all collaborators may spoil the group work by turning it into a mass of individual works. Habits of individual writing simply take over as natural because writing is not assimilated as a group activity. However, the potential for collaboration is not inconceivably alien to workers in the United States; they readily use systems to perform unfamiliar tasks and traditional team tasks.

Solving the collaboration problem is not simple, easy, or instinctive because collaboration depends on a complex relation among group members. Problems can be managed, however, and a systematic approach will deal

with problems more smoothly than a haphazard set of reactions to isolated problems. Interdisciplinary research is not quite poetry, not literally, and poetry is not all interdisciplinary. Nevertheless, both interdisciplinary teaching and research can benefit from simple strategies for encouraging collaborative writing that have proven useful over the centuries in Japanese poetry. While educators and managers probably should not study the Way of *Haikai no Renga* and lead students and workers in poetry exchanges, they can all recognize their work situations as communities dependent upon their own sets of social skills. Planning at the outset to keep everyone conscious of the social skills and interaction will lead to stronger collaborative habits. One of the first theorists of *renga*, Yoshimoto Nijō, believed some of the skill was artist’s instinct but that the skill became usable and that beginners from any background could become leaders through practice and observation (Keene, 1993, pp. 927-928). Poetic or not, as collaborative writing becomes more familiar and driven by routine, the writers will be able to distinguish it from the practice of individual writing, just as an American athlete named Chad Rowan could switch from basketball to become a sumō wrestler named Akebono.

Western educators, interdisciplinary team leaders, and managers for technical writing teams can move to collaborative writing more smoothly with preparation. Cultural aptitudes like *sasshi* (perception of another’s intent) and *furyu* (adapting to change with balance and proportion) will not develop during a professional development training session, of course. On the other hand, new work goals are attainable when the collaborative techniques are defined clearly. While spontaneity, creativity, enthusiasm, and volunteerism can suffer under an unfamiliar system of rules, many school or work projects are not primarily characterized as spontaneous and creative, and enthusiastic volunteers are just that much more likely to agree to go along with a system. Educators and managers can begin with the recognition that assigning a writing project to several people raises many concerns that do not arise when assigning a similar project to one person: scheduling, fairness, personal interaction, allocating responsibility and rights, and competing styles. Then, considering these concerns as problems to avoid *and* opportunities to meet, the manager can plan, schedule, and assign tasks. Just as the manager must recognize that group writing is not individual writing with more people, he or she should introduce the project to the team members as different from writing in the usual sense. For Western writers, the explanation should include notice that the team members will have their own tasks, that the tasks will be different elements

of writing like research and editing or that the tasks will be shared, and in any case that the system distributes the tasks fairly or at least the manager intends it that way.

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Notes

¹ The 32 problems I found in early library and Internet research include six areas with common problems and many other difficulties of varying severity and rarity. Sadly, this list is probably not a complete catalog of every possible difficulty people have when collaborating.

1. Conflicts with schedules, for many reasons
2. Unfair distribution (section 2, slackers)
3. Shyness (section 2, slackers)
4. Members drifting away (section 2, slackers)
5. Members excluded (section 2, slackers)
6. Domination (section 3, bosses)
7. Friction between members (section 4, liking)
8. Established relations overwhelming the group's roles (section 4, liking)
9. Socializing that goes too well or not well enough (section 4, liking)
10. Expectations based on solitary writing (section 5, ownership, and section 3)
11. Protective attitude toward writing (section 5, ownership)
12. Conflicts in style (section 6, variety)
13. Disagreements on revision (section 6, variety)
14. Expectations for perfection
15. Conflicts between spontaneous and organized writing
16. Difficulty coordinating large groups
17. Loss of a member, especially in a small group
18. Bad attitudes based on experiences with previous collaboration
19. Inexperience with group writing
20. Expectations of privacy
21. Members losing materials
22. Miscommunication among members
23. Costs
24. Use of talents
25. No lasting solutions that apply to new collaborative problems

26. Doubt that work needs collaboration
27. Predetermined methods preventing true collaboration
28. Dependence on e-mail
29. Technical capacity to support collaboration
30. Conflicts between members and technology
31. Conflicts between members' different technologies
32. Security for writing in transit

² The authors of *Grass and Plum* did not complete the *haikai no renga* in one session or even with the same group of writers. Sixteen authors worked in three groups to complete the 36-verse poem. The relationships of the authors, groups, and verses appear in Table 1.

Group	Author	Order of the verses written by each author				
1st	Bashō	1	6	9		
1st	Otokuni	2	5	10	13	16
1st	Chinseki	3	8	11		
1st	Sodan	4	7	12		
1st	Chigetsu	14				
1st	Boncho	15	18			
1st	Kyorai	17	20			
1st	Masahide	19				
2nd	Hanzan	21	23	25	28	
2nd	Doho	22	24	31		
2nd	Empu	26	29	32		
2nd	Ensui	27	30			
3rd	Ranran	33				
3rd	Fumikuni	34				
3rd	Yasui	35				
3rd	Uko	36				

Table 1: Authorship of *Grass and Plum*

A Note on Japanese Names: I have tried to follow Japanese tradition in writing family names before given names even for authors commonly published in English under the Western order for names. The classic writers Murasaki and Bashō complicate academic conventions. Murasaki is primarily known by the name of her character Murasaki. Shikibu is a name based on her father's secretarial office. Her family's name is actually Fujiwara or Tō. Similarly, Bashō is the pen name used in general references rather than his family name Matsuo. For all other Japanese writers, I have written family names before given names in first citations and in the References and have written family names alone in subsequent citations. Sen Soshitsu refers to his predecessor in the Sen family by the given name Rikyu.

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