

COMPOSITIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

STUDENT PERFORMANCES AND COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Aesop tells of a man who visited foreign lands and, when he returned to his home, could talk of little except his wonderful adventures during his travels and the great deeds he had done. One of his feats was an amazing leap he had made in a city called Rhodes. "My leap was so great," he said, "no other person could leap anywhere near that distance! Many people witnessed my leap and if you go to Rhodes they will tell you that what I say is true." "No need for witnesses," one of his listeners said, "Imagine this city is Rhodes. Now, show us how far you can jump!" The moral of this tale is, *actual performances count, not descriptions of what a person believes he or she can do.* ■

It is not enough to ask students to describe their skills, students have to demonstrate what they can do in actual performances that others can view and assess. **Student performance** refers to a set of actions students engage in to demonstrate their level of skill in enacting a procedure or creating a product. These performances can include performing a music recital, presenting a play, participating in a discussion, creating a newspaper, conducting a science experiment, presenting a mock trial, engaging in a debate, giving a speech, and writing a composition.

Gaining competence and expertise in such performances requires students to engage in four activities. First, students must engage in the performances frequently. The more frequently students write, for example, the better writers they can potentially become. The more presentations students make to an audience, the better the public speakers they may potentially become. Ideally, students should write and present every day.

Second, students need to receive immediate and detailed feedback on the quality of their performance. For every composition and presentation, students should receive detailed, helpful feedback on how to improve.

Third, students must observe and analyze the performances of others. In order to learn how to play baseball, for example, one must watch others play baseball and analyze how they field and bat. In order to learn how to write well, students must study other people's writing and analyze what is good about it and what could be improved. In order to learn how to present well, students must observe others present and analyze what is effective and ineffective.

Fourth, assessing others' performances teaches students how to improve their own performances. From assessing their classmates' performances, students increase their understanding of (a) what constitutes a high-quality performance, (b) what actions are required to engage in a high-quality performance, and (c) the criteria to be used in assessing their own performances.

These four activities (a) are labor intensive and time-consuming and (b) cannot take place in competitive or individualistic situations. Performances must be observed and discussed if they are to be improved. If students write every day, someone has to read their compositions and give critical but helpful feedback. The clear fact is, teachers do not have the time to assess numerous performances daily. The labor intensive nature of performance assessment means that teachers have to engineer assessment systems that involve others. They do not have to assess each student's performances, they create a system that ensures that each student's performance is assessed. If a teacher has 30 students in a class, for example, that is 30 compositions to assess each day. If a teacher divides the class into writing pairs, however, each student has one paper to assess each day. The former is unworkable, the latter is doable.

Students can most effectively assess the quality of each other's performances within a cooperative context. In a competitive context students will be tempted to be over critical of classmates' work in order to increase their own chances for getting an A. In an individualistic context students will be unmotivated to conduct quality assessments of classmates' work because it takes away from the time they can spend on their own work. It is only within a cooperative context in which students benefit from the quality of each other's work, that the conditions facilitate high-quality assessments of classmates' performances. Teachers, for example, may assign students to writing pairs, inform students their goal is to ensure that both members of the pair write a composition that meets certain criteria, and then add that if a student's partner's composition exceeds the preset criteria for excellence, the student will receive five bonus points. This clearly communicates that each student benefits from the hard work of his or her partner and has a stake in ensuring his or her partner writes well. Cooperative learning groups provide an arena in which performances can be developed, practiced, and perfected.

In other words, if students are to learn to write and present, they must write and present frequently, receive immediate and detailed feedback on the quality of their performances, and observe, analyze, and assess the performances of others. More time is needed to assess each student's work and to provide the feedback needed than any one teacher has. Therefore, teachers may wish to involve students in observing, analyzing, and assessing each other's work. It is only within a cooperative context, however, that such peer assessments are beneficial. This chapter covers the use of cooperative learning groups in assessing two common types of student performances: compositions and presentations.

COOPERATIVE WRITING AND EDITING PAIRS

When your lesson includes students writing an essay, report, poem, story, or review of what they have read, you should use cooperative writing and editing pairs (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1998a). Using cooperative writing and editing pairs involves four aspects of student learning; accomplishing an assigned task, evaluating criteria for success, establishing a group goal, and exercising individual accountability.

Tasks. Students write a composition and edit other students' compositions.

Criteria for success. Each student produces a well-written composition. Depending on the instructional objectives, compositions may be evaluated for grammar, punctuation, organization, content, or other criteria set by the teacher.

Cooperative goal. All group members must verify that each member's composition is perfect according to the criteria set by the teacher. Students receive an individual score on the quality of their compositions. You can also give a group

score based on the total number of errors made by the pair (the number of errors in their composition plus the number of errors in their partner's composition).

Individual accountability. Each student writes his or her own composition.

The procedure for organizing student learning in cooperative writing and editing pairs follows.

1. The teacher assigns students to pairs with at least one good reader in each pair.
2. Student A describes to Student B what he or she is planning to write. Student B listens carefully, probes with a set of questions, and outlines Student A's composition. The written outline is given to Student A.
3. This procedure is reversed with Student B describing what he or she is going to write and Student A listening and completing an outline of Student B's composition, which is then given to Student B.
4. The students research individually the material they need to write their compositions, keeping an eye out for material useful to their partner.
5. The two students work together to write the first paragraph of each composition to ensure that they both have a clear start on their compositions.
6. The students write their compositions individually.
7. When completed, the students proofread each other's compositions, making corrections in capitalization, punctuation, spelling, language usage, topic sentence usage, and other aspects of writing specified by the teacher. Students also give each other suggestions for revision.
8. The students revise their compositions, making all the suggested revisions.
9. The two students then reread each other's compositions and sign their names (indicating that they guarantee no errors exist in the composition).

While the students work, the teacher monitors the pairs, intervening where appropriate to help students master the needed writing and cooperative skills. When students complete their compositions, they discuss how effectively they worked together (listing the specific actions they engaged in to help each other); they plan what behaviors they are going to emphasize in the next writing pair; and they thank each other for the help and assistance received.

WRITING TOGETHER

HOW MY PARTNER AND I ARE GOING TO WRITE TWO OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMPOSITIONS

Step 1. Creating a partnership. Have students identify their partner, say hello, and make sure they have all the materials (pen, paper, topic) they need to complete the assignment of writing a composition. They are to work cooperatively with their partner to ensure that both write a high-quality composition. Each student will receive two scores for the composition. The first is based on the quality of his or her composition. The second is based on the total number of errors each student and his or her partner made (the number of errors in the composition plus the number of errors in the partner's composition).

Step 2. Outlining the compositions. Have students flip a coin to determine who will be Student A and who will be Student B. Student A describes to Student B what he or she is planning to write. Student B listens carefully, probes with a set of questions, and outlines Student A's composition. The written outline is given to Student A.

This procedure is then reversed, with Student B describing what he or she is going to write and Student A listening and completing an outline of Student B's composition, which is then given to Student B. Students should be instructed to teach partners how to construct an outline if their partner does not know how to do so.

Step 3. Researching the topic and collecting helpful materials. This can be done cooperatively or individually. In either case, students should search for information on their topic and keep an eye out for material useful to their partner. Students should be responsible for teaching their partner what they know about using reference materials and the library, and learn what their partner knows.

Step 4. Writing the first paragraph (or sentence). Students should work cooperatively with their partner to write the first paragraph of each composition. They should first write the starting paragraph of Partner A's composition and then of Partner B's composition. They should make sure there is a clear and coherent beginning to both compositions.

Step 5. Writing the composition individually. Working individually, each student should write the best draft of the assignment that he or she can. Each student should try to meet the criteria for the assignment set by the teacher. Any draft, however, is better than no draft. Students should write something.

Step 6. Editing a partner's composition. Students should trade compositions with their partner, carefully reading what their partner has written. Each student should make suggestions to his or her partner as to how the partner may improve his or her composition and better meet the criteria set by the teacher. Suggestions should include corrections in capitalization, punctuation, spelling, language usage, topic sentence usage, and other aspects of writing specified by the teacher. When both a student and his or her partner have finished, students need to explain suggestions to their partner and listen carefully to his or her explanations of the suggested revisions for the composition.

Step 7. Rewriting a composition (the second draft!). Things get better the second time around. Working individually, students should carefully consider the suggestions made by their partner to improve their composition, deciding which ones to use. Students should then revise their compositions to make them better and to better meet the criteria set up by the teacher.

Step 8. Reediting a partner's composition. Students should trade compositions with their partner again, carefully reading what their partner has written. Each student should consider how his or her partner may improve his or her composition, making constructive suggestions as to how his or her partner may do so. The criteria set by the teacher should be kept in mind. When the pair of students have finished editing, they should explain their suggestions to their partner and listen carefully to explanations for improving the composition. The composition should keep being revised until both partners agree that it meets all the criteria set by the teacher and is ready to be turned in.

Step 9. Signing off. When partners agree that their compositions are the best they can be under the circumstances, they sign their name as the author of the composition and their partner signs as the editor, personally guaranteeing that no errors exist in the composition and that the composition is ready to be read by the teacher.

Step 10. Discussing the quality of the partnership (How well did the students work together?). With their partner, students should discuss the effectiveness of their partnership. They can list specific actions each did that helped the other to write a good composition. They can think of how they could work together even better

next time. Students thank each other for the help and assistance received, and celebrate the success of their partnership.

Many benefits can be derived from peer editing relationships. Complete Activity 5.1 to help you reflect on what aspects of the relationship benefit the editor and what aspects benefit the editee.

ACTIVITY 5.1 ■ **REFLECTION ON PEER EDITING AND ASSESSMENT**

Benefits to Editee	Benefits to Editor
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.

PRESENTING TOGETHER

HOW MY PARTNER AND I ARE GOING TO GIVE TWO OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST PRESENTATIONS

Step 1. Creating a partnership. Have students identify their partner, say hello, and make sure they have all the materials (pen, paper, topic) they need to complete the assignment. The learning tasks include students (a) preparing a presentation, (b) making a presentation, and (c) assessing its effectiveness. The presentation has to include visuals and/or active participation by the audience. The cooperative goal is to ensure that all group members learn the material they study, and develop and deliver a high-quality presentation on it.

Step 2. Selecting a topic. Each person, working individually, selects a topic to present (or considers the one assigned by the teacher) and collects his or her initial thoughts about what he or she may say.

Step 3. Outlining the presentations. Have students flip a coin to see who will be Student A and who will be Student B. Student A describes to Student B what he or she is planning to present. Student B listens carefully, probes with a set of questions, and outlines Student A's presentation. The written outline is given to Student A. This procedure is then reversed, with Student B describing what he or she is going to present and Student A listening, completing an outline of Student B's presentation, and giving it to Student B. Partners should teach each other what they know about how to construct an outline and learn what each other knows.

Step 4. Researching a topic and collecting helpful materials. This can be done cooperatively or individually. In either case, the student should search for information on his or her topic and keep an eye out for material useful to his or her partner. If their partner does not know how to use reference materials and the library effectively, the partner should be taught how to do so.

Step 5. Writing the introduction. Students should work cooperatively with their partner to write the introduction for each presentation. They should first write the introduction for Partner A's presentation and then for Partner B's presentation. They should make sure there is a clear and coherent beginning to both presentations.

Step 6. Planning a presentation individually. Working individually each student should plan the first version of his or her presentation. Each student should try to meet the criteria for the assignment set by the teacher. Any version, however, is better than no version. Students should plan something.

Step 7. Presenting the initial version. Combine one pair of students with another pair into a group of four. Have each person give his or her presentation. The other three members carefully analyze the presentation (using the assessment rubric) and make suggestions as to how it may be improved. The teacher rotates throughout the class and samples as many presentations as he or she can. When all four members have finished, the group discusses how each may revise his or her presentation to make it better.

Step 8. Replanning the presentation (the second version!). Things get better the second time around. Working individually, students should carefully consider the suggestions made by their groupmates to improve their presentation, deciding which ones they want to use. Students then revise their presentation to make it better and to better meet the criteria set up by the teacher.

Step 9. Giving the presentation. Combine one pair of students with a different pair to form a new group of four. Each member gives his or her presentation. The other three

members critically analyze the presentation (using the assessment rubric) and consider how the presentation may be improved. The teacher rotates throughout the class and samples as many presentations as he or she can. Students should listen carefully to the feedback they receive from the other three members on how to improve their presentation. The teacher may wish to collect the assessment forms completed by the group members to help him or her assess the quality of each student's presentations.

Step 10. Discussing the quality of the partnership (How well did the students work together?). With their partner, students should discuss the effectiveness of their partnership. They can list specific actions each did that helped the other to make a high-quality presentation. They can think about how they could work together even better next time. Students thank each other for the help and assistance received, and celebrate the success of their partnership.

You can review how well you organize and prepare your classroom and your students by maintaining a checklist of the various components of cooperative learning that contribute to success in your class. Such a checklist is provided in Activity 5.2.

PREPARATION PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS

To prepare for each lesson, students write a short paper and present it to their cooperative base group. Even if the papers and presentations are not graded, the assignment compels students to do their homework, organize their thoughts, and take some responsibility for the lesson's success.

1. Students' tasks are to write a short paper (one to two pages) on an aspect of the assigned readings and to prepare a 2- to 3-minute presentation on the paper. Before each lesson (class session), students:
 - a. Choose a major theory, concept, idea, or person discussed in the assigned reading
 - b. Write a one- to two-page analysis of this theory, summarizing the relevant assigned readings and adding relevant material from another source (book, journal, magazine, newspaper) to enrich the analysis
 - c. Prepare a 2- to 3-minute presentation on the paper.
2. Students meet in their cooperative base groups of four members. The base groups stay the same for the entire semester or year. Teachers create the cooperative structure by giving the base groups the responsibility of ensuring that each member's writing and presenting continuously improves throughout the semester. Bonus points may be given if all members' compositions and presentations meet the basic requirements for excellence. Students are given (or ideally help develop) a set of criteria with appropriate rubrics to assess the quality of each other's compositions and presentations.

Students should bring a copy of their paper for each member of their base group and a copy for the teacher. The base group meets at the beginning of the class session. Each member hands out the copies of his or her paper and presents a 2- to 3-minute summary of the paper to the base group. The other group members assess the quality of the presentation and give suggestions for how it could be improved. Before the next class session, members of the cooperative group read, edit, and constructively criticize the paper. Members then sign each member's paper. The signature means that they have read the paper and have provided feedback to improve their groupmates' writing skills.

3. The cooperative groups summarize what they have learned from members' papers and how it applies to the topic of the lesson.

ACTIVITY 5.2 ■ TEACHER APPRAISAL SYSTEM

1. Provides opportunities for students to participate actively and successfully:

- _____ Varies activities appropriately
- _____ Structures cooperative groups appropriately
- _____ Monitors and interacts with cooperative groups appropriately
- _____ Intersperses pair discussions during lectures
- _____ Extends students' responses and participation
- _____ Provides time for thoughtful responses

2. Assesses and provides feedback on student progress during instruction:

- _____ Defines instructional task clearly
- _____ Defines criteria for success clearly
- _____ Systematically observes students at work in cooperative groups
- _____ Solicits responses, explanations, and demonstrations for assessment
- _____ Structures peer assessment and corrective feedback
- _____ Structures peer support for high-quality work
- _____ Reinforces correct responses and performances
- _____ Provides corrective feedback and clarifies
- _____ Reteaches when needed

3. Organizes students and materials:

- _____ Secures student attention
 - _____ Gives clear directions
 - _____ Maintains appropriate grouping and seating arrangements
 - _____ Moves students into groups and from group to group smoothly
 - _____ Has materials, aides, facilities ready
 - _____ Provides clear cooperative structure for learning groups
-

SUMMARY

Two of the most important performances to be assessed are writing and presenting. Through compositions and presentations students demonstrate what they can do in actual performances. If students are to learn to write and present, they must write and present frequently, receive immediate and detailed feedback on the quality of their performances, and observe, analyze, and assess the performances of others. More time is needed to assess each student's work and provide the necessary feedback than any one teacher has. Teachers, therefore, may wish to involve students in observing, analyzing, and assessing each other's work.

For writing assignments, students are assigned to cooperative pairs and are given a writing assignment. Students help each other plan their compositions, ensuring that each has adequate material and a good start on his or her composition. Students write the composition individually and have their partner edit it. The student then rewrites the composition and has it reedited by his or her partner to ensure that the final draft is ready for the teacher to read.

For presentations, students are assigned to cooperative group of four and are given an assignment to prepare a presentation. Students help each other outline the presentations, ensuring that each has the information needed and a good start on his or her presentation. Each student prepares a presentation individually and gives the initial presentation to the group. The group gives feedback on how the presentation could be improved. Each student revises his or her presentation and then gives the presentation to another group of students.

Writing and presenting can be combined through preparation papers. Each day students write a short paper on some aspect of their homework and give a 3-minute presentation on their paper to their cooperative group. The group members assess the quality of the presentation and the paper and give feedback on how each could be improved.

PARTNERSHIP PROCESSING FORM

Student's Name: _____ Grade: _____ Date: _____

1. My actions that helped my partner learn:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

2. Actions I could add or improve on to be an even better partner next time:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

WRITING A PERSUASIVE ARGUMENT

Student's Name: _____ Grade: _____ Date: _____

THESIS STATEMENT (A statement that you want others to agree with and accept, but expect others to challenge)

RATIONALE (The facts, information, and theories gathered that validate the thesis statement, arranged in a logical order that leads to a conclusion)

CONCLUSION (A statement that is logically derived from rationale and is the same as the thesis statement)

Author: _____ Editor: _____

PERSUASIVE ARGUMENT COMPOSITION RUBRIC

Name: _____ Grade: _____ Date: _____

Title of Composition: _____

SCORING SCALE: LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH

For each criterion, rate the composition between 1 (very poor) and 5 (very good).

Criteria	Score	Weight	Total
Organization Thesis statement and introduction Rationale presented to support thesis Conclusion logically drawn from rationale Effective transitions		6	(30)
Content Topic addressed Reasoning clear with valid logic Evidence presented to support key points Creativity evident		8	(40)
Usage Topic sentence beginning every paragraph Correct subject-verb agreement Correct verb tense Complete sentences (no run-ons, fragments) Mix of simple and complex sentences		4	(20)
Mechanics Correct use of punctuation Correct use of capitalization Few or no misspellings		2	(10)
Scale 93–100 = A 85–92 = B 77–84 = C		20	(100)

COMMENTS:

PARTNERSHIP PROCESSING FORM

Student's Name: _____ Grade: _____ Date: _____

1. My actions that helped my partner learn:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

2. Actions I could add or improve on to be an even better partner next time:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

ORAL PRESENTATIONS RUBRIC

Name: _____ Grade: _____ Date: _____

Title of Presentation: _____

SCORING SCALE: LOW 1 2 3 4 5 HIGH

For each criterion, rate the presentation between 1 (very poor) and 5 (very good).

Criterion	Rating	Comments
Addresses subject, scholarly, informative		
Organized (introduction, body, conclusion)		
Creative reasoning and persuasiveness		
Intriguing (audience wants to find out more)		
Interesting, transitions, easy to follow, concise		
Volume, enunciation, eye contact, gestures		
Engaging (audience active, not passive)		
Visual aids, props, music		
Other:		
Total		

PREPARATION PAPER ASSESSMENT FORM

Name: _____ Date: _____

Course: _____ Preparation Paper Number: _____

Rated By: ☐ Self ☐ Peer ☐ Instructor ☐ Other _____

Points Possible	Criteria	Points Earned
10	Has a clear, accurate, descriptive title	
10	Begins with a focus statement	
10	Major terms are defined	
10	Explains why the topic is of interest	
10	Includes analysis and critical thinking	
10	Ends with conclusions	
10	Includes information from two or more sources	
10	Each paragraph begins with a topic sentence	
10	Capitalization, appearance, punctuation, spelling	
10	Other:	
100	Total	

Comments or specific suggestions on how to improve paper:

REFLECTION ON MY STRENGTHS AND GROWTH GOALS

Student's Name: _____ Grade: _____ Date: _____

- 1. The best aspects of my skills in writing are...**
- 2. An interesting part of my rationale is...**
- 3. Things I learned from editing my partner's writing are...**
- 4. My next step(s) in improving my writing are...**
- 5. Aspects of writing on which I could be more skilled are...**