

Overview of Collaborative Learning Techniques: Writing CoLTs

*Source: Collaborative Learning Techniques by Barkley, Major and Cross (Jossey-Bass, 2014)
With additional adaptations from George Washington University Teaching & Learning Center*

24 Dialogue Journals

Students record their thoughts in a journal that they exchange with peers for comments and questions. This technique is useful for connecting course work to the personal lives of the students and promoting student interaction in content-related and thoughtful ways.

Students write in a journal about their course related readings, lectures, tasks and experience. The students exchange journals and the new student comments on the material in the originating student's journal. This can be effective when the journal writer knows that someone who is also interested in the topic will read and respond to the entries. The activity can be varied in many ways. For example, dialogue journals can be paired with group work or a common journal for all of the students in a course can be used. Building trust with the other student is important.

Group size

Pairs

Time on task

Variable

Preparation

Determine the structure and procedure for the journal. Determine the tasks, how and when the exchange will occur, and what the assessment will be. There should be clarity about whether the journal is primarily for content analysis and criticism or personal insight and concerns. Additional information about frequency of entry and exchange, instructor prompts, changing partners and other matters should be made clear at the beginning of the activity. The instructor will need to determine whether the journal will be kept on loose paper, a notebook or a computer file. The instructor should determine when and how the journals will be given to the instructor for review. It is good to develop written instructions that express expectations, provide examples, and establish rules or directions.

Procedure

1. Present the directions.
2. Form pairs.
3. For each journal entry (or fresh page) have the student vertically divide the entry so that writer adds material on the left and the responder on the right.
4. The writer enters comments or questions after reading course material, performing a task, or engaging in an activity. The writer signs and dates the entry.
5. The writer gives the journal to the responder.
6. The responder reads the comments or questions and responds to them with additional comments, suggestions or possible answers. The responder signs and dates the entry.
7. The instructor may review and assess the journals during the course.

25 Round Table

Students take turns responding in writing to a prompt before passing the paper along to others who do the same. The technique provides for practice in writing informally and creating a written record of ideas. This activity is similar to CoLT 2 which is a discussion technique. Having written responses to the prompt provides a quiet time for students to

reflect and focus. The activity also assures that all members participate in the activity. The process can be varied to fit the course. For example, students may perform the activity to generate questions during a lecture or the activity can be used to spark creativity for additional writing. Prompts can be selected to encourage brainstorming, gathering truth-claims, identifying key points, identifying evidence, or building a storyboard. Since some students will need to wait until other students finish, the prompts should be geared to quick responses. Setting a time limit can be useful.

Group size

3 or 4

Time on task

10 to 20 minutes

Preparation

Create prompts that allow the students to respond quickly. Consider constructing a formatted prompt and response sheet that the students use for the activity. Consider time limits for responses.

Procedure

1. Present the instructions about the exercise.
2. Form groups of four. Identify the starting member of the group.
3. Distribute the response sheet or announce the prompt.
4. Begin the response writing. It may be useful for the student to read his or her responses to the group.
5. If there is an individual time limit, indicate when time is over.
6. Pass the paper to the next student and repeat.
7. Indicate when the exercise is over.

26 Dyadic Essays

Students write essay questions and model answers, exchange questions, and after responding compare their answers to the model answer. The activity provides the opportunity for the students to identify important feature of a learning activity and formulate and answer questions about that activity. The students not only get practice in responding to essay questions, but in formulating the question. The activity can be done as homework and the instructor might provide additional suggestions and evaluations. This can be important since the activity involves peer learning.

Group size

Pairs

Time on task

30 to 45 minutes

Preparation

Writing good essay questions is difficult. Develop and distribute materials on how to do this. Use of question stems or prompts (“Why is ___ important?”, “What is the solution to the problem of ___?”) as a starting point. Provide sample questions and answers. Develop a rubric for grading and show how different examples are evaluated through the rubric.

Procedure

1. Present directions and additional materials including a schedule for submission and exchange.
2. Form pairs.
3. Students formulate the questions.

4. Students formulate model responses to their questions.
5. Students exchange their questions.
6. Students respond to the new question.
7. Students trade model responses and evaluate the partner's response.
8. Students discuss their responses.

27 Peer Editing

Students critically review and provide editorial feedback on a peer's essay, report, argument, research paper, or other writing assignment. The activity provides the opportunity for the students to develop critical editing skills and provides constructive criticism to improve papers before they submit them for grading. The activity helps students learn to identify good and poor writing and develop critical skills that can be applied to their own writing.

Group size

Pairs

Time on task

2 hours

Preparation

Decide on the essay topic. Construct and present materials about constructive commenting and editing. Develop and distribute a peer review form that lists the important elements of the essay that should be considered in critiquing each other's work. Determine a schedule. Determine how each part of the activity will be graded.

Procedure

1. Present the rules, schedule, and other materials for the activity.
2. Form pairs.
3. Students should take turns describing and commenting on the ideas for their papers.
4. Students conduct research separately but inform their partner if they find something relevant to the partner's essay.
5. Students write papers individually.
6. Students exchange papers for peer editing. Students proof and make comments on the essay and rate the essay on the Peer Review Form, which they sign and date.
7. Each student revises her or his essay.
8. The student author attaches the Peer Review form to the final draft and submits it to the instructor.

28 Collaborative Writing

Students write a formal paper together. The activity is directed at learning and performing the stages of writing more effectively. Students go through the stages of brainstorming, gathering and organizing information, drafting, revising, and editing together in order to produce one essay. This technique also provides the opportunity to develop skills that are desired in the work-place. The sequence of steps presented in other CoLTs can lead to this technique and also improve the trust among team members. Consider providing a check list for the items to be evaluated, as well as a rubric for how the students will be evaluated. Students working collaboratively discourages academic dishonesty. This can be enhanced by providing a set of procedures for each phase of the construction of the essay.

Group size

2 or 3

Time on task

Several hours

Preparation

Prepare as if for a normal writing project. Add into the preparation, the scheduling of the phases, what information will be provided by the group and when it will be provided, and prepare additional checklists and rubrics.

Procedure

1. Explain the rules for the activity and the schedule.
2. Distribute any additional information including the checklists and rubric.
3. Form pairs or triads as appropriate.
4. Allow time for the students to discuss the project and ask questions.
5. Students brainstorm and conduct preliminary research.
6. Students develop an outline.
7. Students determine writing tasks for group members and produce a first draft of their part.
8. Students discuss the draft and resolve issue.
9. Students combine the parts into a single document.
10. The team revises and edits the document for content, clarity, and style. The team can use the checklists and rubrics to guide this phase.
11. The final draft is submitted by the team to the instructor for assessment and evaluation.

29 Team Anthologies

Students compile course-related readings with student annotations. This activity helps students experience the research process without writing a formal research paper. The activity provides a structure for reading and reviewing course topic information. This CoLT can be combined with others in a longer term project. It can be useful to have team members identify their contributions. This is especially useful if both individual and team grades will be assigned.

Group size

4 then 2 then 4

Time on task

Several hours

Preparation

Establish the topic or topics to be investigated. If students are new to this sort of research, the instructor will need to provide guidance on how to do the research, as well as what the structure of a contribution should be. Examples are helpful. Create a time-line for the activity.

Procedure

1. Explain the activity and the procedures for constructing and submitting the anthology. Present the time-line.
2. Form base groups of four.
3. The individuals in the group identify five to ten resources about the topic.
4. The teams rejoin and compile all of the team members' contributions into a bibliography.
5. The students discuss the combined list and identify the items that the team considers important and those which can be eliminated. The result should be a bibliography of about ten items
6. The team subdivides into pairs and each pair is assigned half of the bibliography.
7. The pairs divide the bibliography so that each student has about half of the team's items.
8. The individuals write brief commentaries on their assigned resources.
9. The pairs reform and discuss their contributions and identify convergent and divergent ideas.

10. The pairs generate a composite annotated bibliography.
11. The pairs rejoin the original groups of four and prepare the composite annotated bibliography along with an introduction and conclusion. If the resources can be printed and distributed, they can become part of the anthology.
12. The teams submit their anthologies to the instructor.

30 Paper Seminar

Students write or present an original paper and receive formal feedback from peers or engage in a general discussion of the issues within their group. This activity is an opportunity for the students to engage in deep discussion about their research and provides individual students with focused attention and feedback on her or his work. Within the group one or two students act as formal respondents to a team member's paper and the whole group engages in a discussion of the content of the paper. The smaller groups avoid the complex logistics of having the entire class participate at once. The students can submit their contributions collectively to the instructor for assessment and evaluation.

Group size

4 to 6

Time on task

Several hours

Preparation

Determine the amount of time for the presentations. Provide a time line for the production of the paper and the formal response.

Procedure

1. Present the manner in which the activity will be conducted and the time line. Make sure that the students understand that each student will be a presenter, respondent, and discussant.
2. Form groups.
3. Determine the presenter-respondent pairs.
4. Students write papers
5. Students distribute their papers to the group and respondents build their formal response.
6. The presenter gives a brief presentation about the paper (5 to 10 minutes).
7. The respondent presents a formal response to the paper (5 to 10 minutes).
8. All students discuss the paper and the response.
9. Repeat for other groups.