

3 Peer assessment

3a Two stars and a wish

About the activity

Main skills	▶ Speaking	▶ Listening	▶ Writing	▶ Reading	▶ Vocabulary	▶ Grammar
Function	▶ Preparing students for peer assessment					

Summary

One of the perceived benefits of peer assessment is that it saves you time. This benefit, however, may not be immediately apparent. In the early stages of the implementation of peer assessment, considerable time has to be devoted to clarifying the process of assessment and the criteria used, not to mention the value of the practice, which some students might throw into question. So it's not so much the case of saving teachers' time, but rather reallocating resources as the time and effort seemingly saved on the assessment of students would have to be expended in peer assessment training.

The time investment into peer assessor training eventually pays off and yields a number of benefits. As learners gain more proficiency and confidence in assessing their peers, they gain an insight into the assessor's point of view, making the assessment process more explicit and turning assessment into a meaningful learning activity. See the Introduction for detailed discussion.

In order to become successful evaluators of their peers' work, students have to learn to give both positive and negative feedback and, not less importantly, maintain a balance between the two. Without training, peer assessors might end up launching a scathing attack on their fellow learners. I have found a template to be helpful, which explicitly encourages assessors to look out for positive features of their peer's performance ("star") as well as the areas that need improvement ("wish").

Another important component of peer assessor training is demonstrating levels of quality of performance and making sure students can distinguish high quality from low. This can usually be achieved by means of assessing examples representative of different levels. The advantage of using the examples of student's work is that they are concrete. In fact, some educators, for example Dylan Wiliam and Siobhan Leahy, the authors of *Embedding Formative Assessment*, have argued that looking at concrete work samples – ideally two – may be better at communicating the expected standard to students than using assessment rubrics, descriptors in which may not always make sense due to their abstract nature.

Assessment opportunity

Training students to be peer assessors is the vital step in the successful implementation of a peer assessment program. Correct modelling of peer assessment strategies as well as discussing and judging sample work ensures that learners are prepared for the task. It also helps them become critical evaluators of their peers' – and potentially of their own – work.

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How to run the activity

Levels	B1+	Language / Skills focus	no specific area
Ages	any	Materials	See Samples A & B The worksheet
Length	10 minutes		

Preparation	Choose two 'neutral' / anonymous pieces of writing for students to assess (this can be a piece of writing done by students in the previous year or in another class) – in the lead up to the upcoming writing task. The two samples should be representative of different quality of work with one sample approaching the required standard and the other one not meeting the standard or needing improvement.
Procedure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Divide the class into small groups. Provide each group with two examples of students' writing – one good; the other one not so good (needing improvement). Ask students to review each response and rate it holistically by commenting on the strengths and weaknesses. 2. Elicit students' comments and highlight positive and negative features of each writing sample. 3. Distribute the worksheet. Ask students to write two positive comments and one negative comment in the appropriate sections of the chart – two Stars and a Wish respectively. 4. In subsequent lessons, you can divide the class into pairs and have them assess each other's work.
Variation	If you would like students to practice applying more specific assessment criteria (e.g. assessment rubrics), anonymous piece(s) of work can be reviewed and rated against such. Make sure to discuss with the class and agree on the scores awarded to each response.

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ACTIVITIES FOR ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT
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© DELTA Publishing, 2021 | www.deltapublishing.co.uk
ISBN 978-3-12-501736-8



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