



Teaching Concerns

Newsletter of the Teaching Resource Center for Faculty and Teaching Assistants

Hotel D, 24 East Range (434) 982-2815 trc-uva@virginia.edu <http://www.virginia.edu/~trc/>

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Teaching Idea: Cooperative Learning / Cooperative Grading

by Marji Lindner, Department of Psychology & TRC

Around the nation teachers are talking about cooperative learning—that is, students working together to teach each other. Research on cooperative learning is producing positive reports. For example, Lowman (1990) divided his students into two groups, asking one group to prepare and teach a body of material to the class, and the other to master the information for test performance alone. When tested, the former group demonstrated much greater mastery of the material than did the students who had learned the material by more traditional techniques.

Some of us (and some students) are reluctant to attempt cooperative learning strategies because, come grading time, it's difficult to determine how much each student contributed to a group project. In the Psychology Department, after two students complained that a group member had skipped meetings and failed to return phone calls, two instructors asked their students to evaluate group members' contributions anonymously and confidentially. We liked their opinion form and reproduce it on page 3.

This form asks each student to report how much each group member contributed to the project. Then an open-ended question offers students an opportunity to indicate whether all group members should receive the same grade even if all did not participate equally. For example, students may feel that they should all receive the same grade even though one generally hard-working student fell ill and was unable to contribute the day of the presentation; or students may feel that they all contributed equally, but only after one member was hunted down at the great expense of others' effort and time.

As the instructor, you maintain final authority on grades, but input from students will increase the likelihood that you will grade fairly. Moreover, if students know that they will be graded by their peers, themselves, and their instructor, they are likely to perform better right from the start.

So, the next time you ask students to learn together, why not ask them to give you a window on the process?

The purpose of this evaluation form is for you to provide information on the contribution of the members of your group to the presentation. These forms may be used to help us assign grades for the presentation. Although your answers cannot be totally anonymous, they are totally confidential. No one other than the instructor will ever see these forms. Please be as candid and honest as you can. You do not have to complete this form or any part of it if you do not wish to.

1. Do you feel that each member of your oral presentation group contributed equally to:

a) the preparation for the presentation? ___ Yes ___ No

b) the presentation to the class? ___ Yes ___ No

2. If you answered "No" to 1a and/or 1b, please assign the percentages of the total work done for the preparation and presentation by the different group members including yourself. Please write each member's name and the percentage you would assign them below. Do not indicate which person is you.

Preparation for presentation:

Classroom presentation:

<u>Name</u>	<u>% of total work</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>% of total work</u>
_____	____%	_____	____%
_____	____%	_____	____%
_____	____%	_____	____%
_____	____%	_____	____%
	= 100%		= 100%

3. Regardless of your answers for questions 1 or 2, do you feel that each member of your group should receive the same grade for the presentation? Why or why not?