

Improve students' academic writing, critical thinking and autonomy

Cornell University

 Peer Review

Class format
On-site

Class duration
15 weeks

Class size
5 - 13 students

CONTEXT

This class in the Korean language program, taught by Meejeong Song, Senior Lecturer of Asian Studies at Cornell University, focussed mainly on developing intermediate reading and writing skills for Korean heritage students. With a survey on student needs at the beginning, and feedback opportunities throughout, learner autonomy was promoted, giving space for self-regulation and the development of critical thinking through the evaluation of each other's work.

Prior to using FeedbackFruits, each student received feedback on each assignment with a red pen from the instructor, however *"it was exhausting grading every day without seeing much improvement"*. The instructor decided to let students *"focus on their own errors to let them improve their own writing"*, using the Peer Review tool to bring student-to-student feedback processes into effect. The result: decreased instructor workload, positive student responses and improved written work.

CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT

Learning objectives

- Students improve on their receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing) Korean language skills.
- Students acquire concrete knowledge of grammar to use in everyday situations.

Learning activities

Developing language skills relies heavily on communication, both between instructors and students, and between students themselves. In this full-time class, students met 3 times a week and completed diverse homework assignments to refine their knowledge of Korean language and culture, with feedback activities providing a chance for students to review each other's work. One sort of activity was a homework composition which was a short writing assignment with 8 instances across the course. After writing their assignments, students handed in their work individually into the Peer Review tool, accessed within the Canvas environment. Each student was assigned two other compositions to read *"in order to make the feedback more balanced"*, and used a 5-point scale to grade their peers' work, according to 4 criteria: structure and content development, vocabulary and grammar, text type, and spelling and spacing. Both the reviewer and submitter were anonymous in this setup. In some iterations of the course, it was also possible for students to leave comments detailing why they had given particular ratings, as well as writing a self-reflection as a last step at the end of the activity.

Comments between peers from this activity were also included by students in a final e-portfolio submission, as evidence of improvement based on critical reflection upon peers' observations.

Learning activities in terms of Bloom's Taxonomy were at the levels of:

Understanding

linguistic conventions of writing and reading comprehension in Korean

Applying

learned grammar rules and received feedback in written exercises

Analyzing

peer's work based on content covered in class and assignments

Evaluating

peers' work according to given criteria



Assessment of learning outcomes

Students' overall grade was based on a variety of components such as active in-class participation, various types of homework, quizzes, projects and an e-portfolio. Homework compositions were peer-graded with Peer Review, accounting for 6% of the students' total grade.

Meejeong Song, Senior Lecturer of Asian Studies at Cornell University

“ I really like the support - it's personal and a quick response. Whenever I have a question I have an instant useful response, so I really appreciate that.

Notable outcomes

- The interface and navigation were found to be simple and intuitive, and students appreciated being able to see their grade weighting broken down within the activity for more transparency in assessment.
- Both the instructor and students reported benefits from the anonymity feature. Reviewer and submitter anonymity was enabled, allowing for a safe space to process feedback.
- Personalization was achieved with progress monitoring and grade adjustments, which allowed discrepancies or outliers to be detected and followed up on, while grades could be manually adjusted where necessary, e.g., if a student missed out on feedback due to a late submission.
- The instructor found that Peer Review *"stimulates student autonomy and critical thinking when they rate each others work"*, and resulted in *"a great improvement in students writing in their portfolios compared to the first drafts."*
- Students made particular note of the benefit of hearing multiple perspectives on their writing. When surveyed in the class evaluation, all students indicated that they found the tool to be *"a good app for peer review"*.

The role of the instructor

- With references in the syllabus and an introductory workshop detailing the use of the tool for this assignment, the instructor made clear to students exactly what was expected of them and how to use Peer Review. Grade weighting and deadlines were communicated clearly, as well as attention called to the support feature, accessible for the instructor as well as students, directly from within the tool interface.
- Surveys at the beginning of the class and evaluations at the end helped the instructor judge the students' needs and experiences and respond accordingly. For example, remarks about the availability or features or frequency of steps like self-reflection resulted in changes in successive iterations of the course.
- The instructor downloaded an excel file from the FeedbackFruits activity, containing data such as student reflections which could be easily reviewed in one location.

Added value of technology

Individual feedback is a time-consuming process but one which is essential to improvement in language and writing skills. However, instead of the instructor being responsible for all of this feedback, students can benefit from taking this analysis and evaluation into their own hands, guided by a comprehensive rubric. Not only does this promote students' critical thinking and autonomy, it also reduces the workload for the instructor. More feedback can be generated in less time. Furthermore, instructors can overview this student feedback and identify points to discuss in synchronous sessions, maximizing the use of face-to-face time while providing guidance in asynchronous assignments.

Publishing grades from the activity straight to Canvas gradebook was reported to be another time-saver, compared to previously having to manually input grades. This synchronization also works where Canvas uses a different scoring system than that used in Peer Review; FeedbackFruits tools automatically convert percentages from the activity into whichever scoring system is set in the LMS gradebook.

Meejeong Song, Senior Lecturer of Asian Studies at Cornell University

“ My workload reduced thanks to FeedbackFruits.