

Specimen section

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Sample

Activities for Cooperative Learning

**Making groupwork and pairwork effective
in the ELT classroom**

by Jason Anderson

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0 Introduction to cooperative learning

Despite the fairly recent origins of cooperative learning in the 1970s, many of the activities associated with it are so widespread in language teaching classrooms in the UK, USA and other parts of the world that they can sometimes be taken for granted as either international norms or products of communicative or task-based approaches to language teaching. This includes activities such as information gap, jigsaw reading, 'Spot the Difference', and even personalisation tasks, all of which have been adapted for language learning, but ultimately trace their origins back to the same cooperative learning movement.

Yet underpinning these activities are important principles that are less well-known among today's teachers, leading many to presume the terms 'collaborative learning' and 'cooperative learning' are synonymous, which they are not. By understanding more about the history, principles and theory of cooperative learning we can both evaluate it critically and learn how to make use of its ideas and activities more effectively in our everyday teaching.

This chapter serves as a brief introduction to cooperative learning and is written with the needs of all teachers of English in mind, including both teachers of teens and younger learners working in state schools, where classes tend to be larger and learners less motivated, and teachers of adults and teens in private schools or higher education who often have smaller, more motivated classes. Of course, given the significant differences between these two very broad context types, no one approach is likely to fit all, so the reader is encouraged to evaluate this introduction critically and to adapt and appropriate from the ideas and suggestions within.

A brief history of cooperative learning

"It is not the similarity or dissimilarity of individuals that constitutes a group, but interdependence of fate."

Kurt Lewin, 1939

Cooperative learning has its roots in the research of two American psychologists, Kurt Lewin and Morton Deutsch. Influenced by Gestalt psychology, Lewin's early work into group dynamics in the 1930s and 1940s established that the essence of a group comes from interdependence established through shared goals. Based on this, Deutsch identified three types of interdependence that may exist between individuals: positive interdependence (when individuals share the same goal), negative interdependence (when one individual's success requires the failure of others) or no interdependence (when there is no link between the success of individuals). Not surprisingly, Deutsch noticed that cultivating positive interdependence leads to more productive relationships and recognised the importance of his research for group learning and productivity (Deutsch, 1949), although the application of his observations in mainstream education came later.

Perhaps the key catalyst that sparked off the cooperative learning movement in mainstream education in the USA was the desegregation of public schools during the 1960s. The initial challenges experienced during attempts to integrate classes of learners with diverse ethnicities and prior experiences of education prompted early innovators in cooperative learning to experiment with new strategies, activity types and principles. Many of these were based partly on Deutsch's research and were developed primarily to diffuse tension, increase self-esteem and promote peer-respect within these classrooms. This included Johnson & Johnson's *Learning together* theory (1975), Aronson's *Jigsaw classroom* (Aronson et al., 1978), Slavin's *Student team learning* (e.g., Slavin, 1980), and Kagan's Structures

"Cooperative learning, when it includes heterogeneous teams and team-building, is the single most powerful tool this nation has for improving race relations."

Williams, 2006

(Kagan, 1989). These authors became the central methodologists of the cooperative learning movement, and while there were differences in opinion, each developed similar theories around two key principles of cooperative learning described below. Johnson and Johnson went on to conduct important research into cooperative learning, and Kagan, through his own company, began to promote his version of cooperative learning in materials and workshops for teachers around the world (see: www.kaganonline.com).

Key principles in cooperative learning

Most teachers who are familiar with communicative language teaching and/or task-based language teaching will know something about collaborative learning, but this isn't necessarily the same as cooperative learning. In this book, I will use the term 'collaborative learning' to refer to the general use of pairwork and groupwork: any activities in which learners collaborate. But I will reserve the term 'cooperative learning' for a more specific type of collaboration, in which two key principles are emphasised in the activities that learners do: positive interdependence and individual accountability. While different writers on cooperative learning mention other factors, these two are often emphasised and agreed upon by some of its most influential figures (e.g., Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Kagan & Kagan, 2009; Slavin, 1995). They also seem to be important to making groupwork effective in ELT classrooms in a range of contexts worldwide (Ghaith & Kawtharani, 2006; Ning, 2010; Panhwar, 2016):

"...the crux of the differences between cooperation and competition lies in the nature of the way the goals of the participants in each of the situations are linked. In a cooperative situation the goals are so linked that everybody 'sinks or swims' together, while in the competitive situation if one swims, the other must sink."

Deutsch, 1973

Positive interdependence: For an activity to be truly cooperative, group members must work as a team towards a shared goal, not in competition with each other, so that they sink or swim together.

Individual accountability: Group success depends on contributions from all group members, making each learner accountable, both for their own learning and for contributing to the group as required. Success may be interpreted as completion of a task, solution of a problem, answering of a review question or success in a class quiz taken individually after the team has prepared together.

When combined, these two principles encourage the group to manage itself, taking responsibility for ensuring that each group member is involved in an activity. Usually it is the design of the task that promotes this combination of positive interdependence and individual accountability. A good example of this is a jigsaw reading activity, something that most communicative teachers are familiar with. Not all jigsaw tasks are truly cooperative – many just get learners to read and summarise what they have read. While this may be useful and may work in some classes, it isn't as cooperative as a jigsaw reading activity in which learners have to understand, compare, synthesise, or even evaluate the content of the different texts in order to complete a specific task. The example activities in this book are of this latter, more cooperative type, as in Unit 5a. In this unit, after reading one of three texts about the jobs of three different people, group members work together to answer questions that force them to compare and evaluate all three texts, such as 'Who works hardest?', 'Who makes the most money?' and 'Who do you think has the most difficult job? Why?'. If any group member fails to contribute, the whole group may get the answer wrong, so it becomes the shared responsibility of the group to ensure that they participate. Thus, two of the most commonly encountered problems with groupwork – that one or two students dominate or that some don't pull their weight – are less likely to happen when positive interdependence and individual accountability are required. This shared responsibility that cooperative learning cultivates also promotes the development of key social skills, discussed below.

Other theories and principles important to cooperative learning

Sociocultural theory

A number of recent writers on cooperative learning have drawn upon sociocultural theory to provide explanations as to why cooperative learning may be effective (e.g., Jacobs et al., 2006; Kagan & Kagan, 2009; King, 2008). Because of the need for learners to interact with classmates during cooperative learning, learning becomes dialogic (i.e., it involves conversation) as students are required to verbalise what they are learning. This forces them to express ideas using familiar words and concepts, which are also likely to be accessible to classmates. As such, they 'peer-scaffold' each other's understanding of the content. Not only does this help to make that content understandable for others, the need to describe it in their own words helps each learner to assimilate it personally, to 'own' the content. It is an often-repeated mantra in learner-centred education that explaining an idea or fact to someone else helps you to remember it. This is especially important in language learning, when dialogue involves the meaningful use of vocabulary, grammar, speaking and listening skills, and also includes negotiation of meaning, which may help to accelerate the language learning process (e.g., Long, 1991).

Heterogenous grouping

Most writers on cooperative learning emphasise the importance of heterogenous 'base groups' or '**home groups**'. The word *heterogenous* indicates that each group should include the widest possible mix of characteristics such as sex, ability level, ethnicity, age and first language (e.g., Johnson & Johnson, 2002; Kagan & Kagan, 2009). These groups should remain stable for an extended period of time to allow learners to build bonds and peer understanding. This creates an environment that increases peer support and tutoring, both of which are known to increase learning (Hattie, 2009), especially through peer-explanation, but also through praise and peer-correction. Guidelines for grouping learners according to the principles of cooperative learning are provided below.

Learner autonomy

Cooperative learning encourages learners to take responsibility for their own learning and to work independently of the teacher. As such, it promotes and provides the conditions for increased learner autonomy (Jacobs & McCafferty, 2006), something that is known to have a positive effect on learning (Hattie, 2009; see 'self-regulated learning'). Learners develop the organisational, analytical and study skills necessary to work independently of the teacher. What is more, they develop these skills communally, sharing ideas and strategies for autonomous learning.

Peer-needs analysis (see Unit 3d) helps learners to share these skills and become aware of each other's needs, thereby improving rapport, understanding and empathy within both groups and classes (Anderson, 2017).

"Peer needs analysis can be defined as the act of raising the students' awareness of the needs of their co-learners in a class. It aims to turn needs analysis into a social event."

Anderson, 2017

Task-mediated differentiation

Differentiation, also called 'differentiated learning/instruction', is an important principle in classrooms where learners have varying abilities, strengths and preferences – i.e., most classrooms! Differentiation involves "ensuring that what a student learns, how she/he learns it, and how the student demonstrates what she/he has learnt is a match for that student's readiness level, interests, and preferred mode of learning" (Tomlinson, 2004). Recommendations for differentiation often focus on providing different tasks to different individuals or groups, but this is rarely recommended in cooperative learning, where the emphasis is on


bringing learners together rather than segregating them. Instead, opportunities for differentiated learning occur naturally in the cooperative classroom, especially through what we might call ‘task-mediated differentiation’, in which differentiation occurs simply in how learners complete a task or activity. Task-mediated differentiation happens in the language classroom whenever we provide enough freedom and flexibility for learners to use the skills and language they have to complete the same task in ways that suit each learner’s personal preferences and level of ambition. For example, Unit 5e in this book requires learners to think up their own questions, thus learners with stronger grammar awareness may use more complex question forms, challenging themselves and providing useful exposure to new structures for their classmates. Unit 4e requires learners to take as many notes as possible while listening to a story, thus learners with stronger listening and writing skills can take more notes than classmates who are weaker at these skills. And Unit 2d offers freedom to learners to provide spoken summaries of a section of the text, once more allowing longer or shorter summaries according to ability level.

“Differentiated instruction is a way of living in the classroom so that the broader objectives of education are achieved. ... All learning is an individual matter, but teaching is essentially individual guidance in group situations. Properly planned instruction provides recognition of individual capacities, achievements, interests motives, and needs, as well as equal learning opportunities in the classroom.”

Betts, 1946

Differentiation also occurs naturally in the cooperative classroom through interaction between students of mixed ability. For example, peer-tuition and peer-correction both allow students with more knowledge about the language and its usage to provide useful input or feedback to classmates with less knowledge, enabling them to help their classmates and to challenge themselves to use the language effectively and sensitively as they do so. Most adult learners are able to use their current social skills to do this effectively, but younger learners (and even some adults) will need to be trained to do this well – training that will serve them for the rest of their lives. And all learners will be more willing to provide peer-tuition if they know that it improves learning for both parties involved (see **Research evidence supporting cooperative learning** below).

Organising groupwork in cooperative learning

The interaction patterns used in cooperative learning are similar to those in most collaborative classrooms. At different times they will include individual work, pairwork and groupwork, all of which are important in the learning process. Individual work is useful when learners need time to think for themselves, to check that they have personally understood something, or to work on a skill that can be practised individually, such as writing or reading. At such times, the teacher can monitor and provide individual support. Pairwork is useful for maximising speaking practice and for getting students to explore or test out new ideas, as in the **Think-Pair-Share**  micro-strategy. As individual and pairwork activities are comparatively straightforward to organise and manage, this section looks more carefully at how to organise groupwork; an area of classroom management where many teachers experience more difficulty, and where the literature on cooperative learning is consequently often more prescriptive.

Much of the writing on cooperative learning includes quite specific guidelines on how groups should be created and used to ensure that learning is as effective as possible. Firstly, groups should be kept small. Four is the perfect group size, partly because it neatly divides into two pairs, and partly because it’s the right size to allow for interaction and relationships to develop without the danger of cliques or exclusion (Jacobs, 2006; Kagan & Kagan, 2009). Of course, the number of students in most classes doesn’t divide exactly by four, so there may need to be some groups of five or even three (see below for how to manage this). Groups of six or more are rarely recommended for cooperative learning, except perhaps when there are clear roles in the group, for example, in longer, project-based activities.

So, bearing this in mind, let’s look at two types of groups:

Home groups

Most writers on cooperative learning recommend organising home groups (also called 'base groups') at the start of a term and keeping students in these groups for a number of weeks. Exactly how many weeks home groups stay together will depend on how often they work together, but there should be opportunities for bonds to form, and for individuals within the group to overcome any initial challenges they meet when working together. It's also important to regroup students several times during a year to ensure that groups don't get too attached, and to provide variety and new friendships for all. Home groups should be heterogenous (i.e., as mixed as possible), with a combination of both sexes, different ability levels and – where appropriate – different ethnicities, races and first languages. For this reason, it's usually best that you select the groups yourself, but only when you know the class well enough to do so. Use home groups for most cooperative learning activities and use them for the first and last stages of a jigsaw activity. Some classes enjoy thinking up names for their home groups, and they can be encouraged to create name cards that can be put on their home group tables whenever they are working together (see Figure 1).

"Base groups are long-term, heterogeneous cooperative learning groups with stable membership. The primary responsibility of members is to provide each other with the support, encouragement and assistance they need to make academic progress."

Johnson & Johnson, 2002



Figure 1: Group name card

Expert groups

Expert groups provide an alternative to home groups and don't have to be fixed or consistent between lessons. While they can be used for a variety of activities, they are most common in jigsaw activities (Aronson et al., 1978). For example, if you want learners to read different texts and then to share what they have read, you can use expert groups for the 'reading stage', after which they can return to their home groups to share what they learnt. If your jigsaw activity involves just two texts, you can simply combine two students from Home group A with two students from Home group B to make an expert group. This keeps the expert groups small and reorganisation simple. Alternatively, you may want to create four expert groups for four different texts (e.g., Unit 6a, **Expert Writers**). Thus, you can send one member of each home group to each expert group. In large classes, you may need to divide expert groups into two or three subgroups to prevent them from getting too large. Expert groups can also be mixed-ability, but especially in classes where the ability range is large, expert groups can provide an opportunity for students of similar ability to work together and challenge each other. Often, this can happen simply through the interaction and language choice of the group. However, you can also challenge higher-level expert groups by giving them either a more challenging text or additional questions and tasks (e.g., 'Write a summary of the key points of the text'; 'Do you all agree with the writer? Why/why not?').

How to cope with odd numbers?

Learning to teach cooperatively certainly improves your arithmetic, especially division! Sometimes we need to create an odd number of groups, and sometimes we may have uneven numbers in the home groups due to absenteeism or other factors. In such situations, organising groups can be quite challenging. Let's use an example to show an easy way of doing this:

Imagine that you have 26 students in your class organised in five groups of four and two groups of three, but only 25 are present today, and you have the following home groups (each group is a fruit name, each letter is a student and 'A' is the absent student):

Apples	Oranges	Peaches	Strawberries	Mangos	Grapes	Lemons
B C D	E F G H	I J K L	M N O P	Q R S T	U V W	X Y Z

Now let's imagine you need to put them into three expert groups for a jigsaw reading activity with three texts (e.g., Unit 5a). Remember that it's okay to put to learners from the same home group into the same expert group. The easiest way to do the division is to go around the class, numbering the learners 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, etc. as follows:

Apples	Oranges	Peaches	Strawberries	Mangos	Grapes	Lemons
B C D	E F G H	I J K L	M N O P	Q R S T	U V W	X Y Z
1 2 3	1 2 3 1	2 3 1 2	3 1 2 3	1 2 3 1	2 3 1	2 3 1

Double check that all have remembered their number by saying: '*Number ones raise your hand! Twos raise your hand!*' etc. Now tell the 'ones' to sit together, the 'twos' to sit together, etc. This creates the following expert groups, with at least one student from each home group:

Expert group 1	Expert group 2	Expert group 3
B, E, H, K, N, Q, T, W, Z	C, F, I, L, O, R, U, X	D, G, J, M, P, S, V, Y

These groups are too large, so you can now ask each one to split into two subgroups, and you can recommend that learners from the same home group (e.g., E and H from the Oranges group) join different subgroups, as follows:

Expert group 1		Expert group 2		Expert group 3	
1A	1B	2A	2B	3A	3B
B, H, N, T, Z	E, K, Q, W,	C, I, O, U,	F, L, R, X	D, J, P, V,	G, M, S, Y

This ensures that when they get back to their home groups, each will have the necessary knowledge to complete any task, and home groups with four members will benefit from knowledge shared in different expert subgroups, which can vary, even if two students have worked with the same text.

This method of simply counting round the class usually works well to create the right balances when regrouping students. Nonetheless, the first time you do it, you may want to plan groups a little in advance. And once classes are used to regrouping, you can even involve the students in organising the groups, which helps to embed practice of real mathematical problems in their English lessons!

Research evidence supporting cooperative learning

Cooperative learning is one of the most comprehensively researched approaches in mainstream education. Over 1,200 studies have been conducted on it (Johnson & Johnson, 2009), and there is strong evidence that it improves learning from a number of meta-analyses*, although it should be noted that the largest of these (Hattie, 2009) reports a lower effect size than studies conducted by advocates of cooperative learning (e.g., Kagan & Kagan, 2009). When compared with 'competitive' and 'individualistic' learning, Hattie reports effect sizes** of 0.54 and 0.59 respectively, and a lower, but still impressive, effect size of 0.41 from studies that compared it to 'heterogenous classes'. These studies have been conducted over several decades and include findings from all age groups, although the majority are from studies in secondary

"If you want to increase student academic achievement, give each student a friend."

Roseth, Fang, Johnson and Johnson, 2006

* A meta-analysis is a research study in which the findings from a large number of smaller studies on a topic are brought together.

** Effect size is a scientific measure of how big the difference is between two things being compared in a study. The effect sizes cited here use Cohen's D."

classrooms, and there is some evidence that the positive effect of cooperative learning increases with age continuing to undergraduate level (e.g., Bowen, 2000).

Does this mean that cooperative learning always works? Unfortunately, no. There are also a few studies that report little or no positive effect of cooperative learning (e.g., Hitchcock et al., 2011). And while there are reports of the positive impact of cooperative learning from a range of English language learning contexts around the world (e.g., Ning, 2010; Panhwar, 2016), the vast majority of studies have been conducted in a small number of countries, particularly the USA. Over 90% of the 156 studies that Johnson et al. (2000) included in their meta-analysis were conducted in North America.

Because the term 'cooperative learning' is often quite widely applied to teaching approaches that share several broad principles, the variation in findings of these many studies is to be expected. The success of any one study is likely to depend on factors such as appropriacy of strategies and activities chosen, how they are implemented, teacher experience and training in cooperative learning, teacher's and learners' attitudes towards the strategies, cultural and institutional factors, and also (importantly) exactly who or what is being compared in the study. We can be confident that cooperative learning *can* work. However, given the important cultural and contextual differences between where we work as English language teachers around the world (Holliday, 1994), it is important for you to take a critical approach to any new strategies you try out in *your* classroom, and that includes cooperative learning. With this in mind, a number of guidelines for introducing cooperative learning are provided below.

Reciprocal teaching

Reciprocal teaching is an activity type in which learners take on specific peer-support roles within their own groups while reading, including predicting, questioning, clarifying and summarising sections of a text (see Unit 4d for an overview). While not historically related to cooperative learning, a number of strategies linked to Reciprocal teaching have been included in this collection, justified because Reciprocal teaching requires and cultivates both individual accountability and positive interdependence. It is no surprise, therefore, that studies of Reciprocal teaching also typically find strong, positive impacts on learning. Indeed, Hattie (2009) cites an effect size of 0.74 from two meta-analyses (38 separate studies), making it one of the most effective teaching strategies of all those that Hattie considers. However, as with cooperative learning, the majority of these studies were conducted in North America.

Implementing cooperative learning in your classroom

Like almost all approaches in education, cooperative learning developed primarily in one specific country and predominantly in one teaching context – in this case, secondary education (junior and high school) in the USA. If you teach in a context that has similar characteristics, it is reasonable to expect that cooperative learning is likely to work well in your classroom. However, if you feel that your context is different to this, you may (and perhaps should) be sceptical about whether it will work in your own classroom. Differences such as class size and learning resources, culture, attitudes to teacher and learner roles, curricular and assessment requirements may all impact on how feasible and effective cooperative learning is in your classroom. It is possible, if not likely, that you will need to adapt the strategies and recommendations provided in this book to your teaching context. So here are some simple tips to help you begin:

Start gradually: Perhaps the simplest and most important piece of advice to offer when trying out something new in your classroom is: begin gradually. Choose an activity that you like and try it out with a 'favourite' class of learners who you feel will cope with and enjoy the social interaction that cooperative learning requires. If it goes well, try another activity with this class and then gradually begin expanding and adapting if necessary to include other activities and other classes as appropriate.

Choose and adapt materials as required: The example materials provided in each unit of this book are just that – *examples*. If you have access to a computer and printer, you will properly find that you can improve them by making changes to suit your classes and the needs of your learners. This may include changes to the language used (grammar or vocabulary), changes to activity structure or length, or even substituting the texts provided with texts more suitable to your learners. Remember that this book encourages you to develop your own materials for cooperative learning based on the overviews and examples. Although this will take longer, the materials created will be more appropriate to your learners' needs, so they should facilitate learning and enjoyment for many years.

Prepare the learners: When you begin using cooperative learning, it's a good idea to explain carefully to your learners what you're going to do, and what you expect from them. This can of course be done in English, but you could also use the learners' first language (if it is shared, and you speak it). You can explain not only what's going to happen, but also why you're going to do it, and why you feel and hope that they will enjoy it. Noise levels will rise the first time you get students to work collaboratively in any classroom (they tend to get excited both by the activity and the opportunity to work together) so remind them to stay calm and keep their voices quiet.

Keep groups simple to start with: Once you've established that cooperative learning can work in your classroom, you can begin to plan home groups, organise resources and adapt materials. But for your first experiments with cooperative learning, you may want to try a pairwork activity (easier than arranging learners into groups), or convenience grouping (simply putting learners who sit close together in the class into the same group). If desks are fixed or difficult to move in your classroom, it may be possible to get some students to turn around to face the students behind them for groupwork.

Manage noise and language choice patiently: As mentioned above, the first time you try cooperative learning, especially in larger classes of over 30, noise levels will increase. And if learners really enjoy the activity, they are more likely to use other languages that they know better than English. Both of these are natural phenomena in cooperative classrooms, and the best way to control them is to manage each group separately. Notice which group gets loudest first, approach them and ask them to speak more quietly. Likewise, with language choice, if you expect them to use only English, remind any groups that switch to L1 to speak English. Don't get upset if things get a little bit noisy or chaotic. At the end of the activity, praise the groups and the learners who did what you wanted, and, if necessary, at the end of the lesson have a word with any individuals who were particularly prone to shout or use other languages. Once you have got through this initial period and begun to manage noise levels and language choice effectively, follow the guidelines below for developing and valuing learners' cooperative skills.

"Noise escalation can have a domino effect in the classroom: If your team is loud, my team will speak louder so we can hear each other. That will cause other teams in the class to speak louder, too. Noise escalation can be prevented if students know and use their appropriate voice levels during interaction time."

Kagan & Kagan, 2009

Developing and valuing learners' cooperative skills

Our ability to work cooperatively is learnt, just like any other social skill. It is learnt partly at home, partly at school and partly in society at large, so it's part of our responsibility as teachers to develop these skills. Because of differences between learners' social experiences, it is likely that the learners in your classes will have different strengths and weaknesses with regard to cooperative skills, especially if you teach younger learners who are still developing core social skills. Effective cooperative teachers recognise this and also recognise the importance of developing and valuing these skills. The following tips will be especially useful for teachers of primary and secondary age learners:

1. Model effective cooperative learning yourself

Remember that when you are setting up a new type of cooperative activity, you can demonstrate it yourself with one of the groups or with a volunteer partner for pairwork. As well as providing a useful model to help them understand how to do the activity, your demonstration will also model the necessary interaction skills and language that you expect from your learners.

2. Praise effective cooperative learning

After activities, remember to provide feedback to your learners not only on correct answers or effective use of English, but also on their cooperative skills. This may include praising a specific learner for a specific skill (*'Huang, you listened to your classmates very well.'*), praising a group (*'The tiger group worked together very well and kept their voices down.'*), or the whole class (*'You all got the answers right – that's great teamwork!'*).

3. Provide constructive feedback to learners who find it difficult to work cooperatively

When cooperative learning doesn't go well, avoid telling off the whole class or criticising students in front of their classmates. Instead, praise students who did work effectively, and after the lesson, have a short chat with any learners who didn't do so well, first asking them to assess their own performance. Then give your opinion on their strengths and weaknesses and give them a clear target for the next lesson. The **Cooperative learning assessment form** on page 17 may be useful for this - you may choose to use it with the whole class, or just a small number of students.

4. Provide continuous assessment of cooperative learning skills

One of the reasons that some learners fail to develop the necessary cooperative skills is because they do not see them as important, especially with regard to assessment. Although many teachers are not able to include marks for cooperative learning in official assessment documents, we can provide continuous assessment of cooperative learning skills, especially when starting to use new cooperative strategies with a class. This will help them to recognise both their strengths and weaknesses and give them something concrete to work on as the term progresses. This is also an opportunity to get learners used to self-assessment, a key skill in itself. The photocopiable **Cooperative learning assessment form** on page 17 can help with this, based on a form developed by Jones and Taylor (2006), which you may want to translate into the learners' L1, depending on their proficiency in English. Near the start of the term or year, get each learner to complete the first column (Stage 1) with a rating from 1 to 5. You then complete the next column with your rating, if appropriate, providing brief feedback to each learner in a tutorial or quick chat. This process is repeated twice during the period (e.g., mid-term, end of term), and then, in the last column, learners can compare starting and finishing ratings to see how much they've improved. A small prize can even be given for the most improved learner!

Cooperative learning assessment form

Name:

Rating:

1. I'm not good at this, yet.
2. I'm quite good at this.
3. I'm good at this.
4. I'm very good at this.
5. I'm excellent at this.

		Stage 1		Stage 2		Stage 3		Improvement
		You	Teacher	You	Teacher	You	Teacher	
A	Polite and friendly Are you polite and friendly to your classmates and the teacher?							
B	Groupwork Do you work together with your classmates well when you are doing groupwork?							
C	Speaking quietly When you talk to your partner or group, do you talk quietly?							
D	Concentrating on activities Can you concentrate on activities carefully without needing the teacher to help you?							
E	Sharing with classmates Do you share materials, pens, paper and other resources with classmates well?							
F	Listening to classmates Do you listen to your classmates' ideas and let them finish before you speak?							
G	Giving feedback to classmates Do you say: 'Well done!' to classmates, and help them when they have difficulty?							
H	Getting feedback from classmates Do you listen carefully to feedback from classmates?							
I	Successes and challenges Do you stay calm either when you meet a challenge or have a success?							

Teacher suggestions:

1 Micro-strategies and tools

Micro-Strategies

Random nomination

Example units: 2a, 2e, 4b, 4e, 5a, 5e

Random nomination is a strategy we can use when asking questions. It helps to develop **individual accountability** 💡.

There are times in the lesson when we want to check that every student has understood or learnt something, such as after a grammar presentation, a listening comprehension exercise or a jigsaw activity. We typically ask questions and either allow students to raise their hand to respond or to shout out their answer. However, we've all experienced the problem of certain students dominating at such times. Even if we select students by name, we may unconsciously choose certain individuals more often than others. So, to ensure that this doesn't happen, and to ensure that all learners know that our selection methods are fair, we can use random nomination. Each student knows that she or he may be nominated and so is more likely to make sure that she or he remembers the answers in preparation for this stage (William, 2010).

There are several ways to ensure nomination is random. The simplest and most effective is to use **nomination sticks** 💡 (see below), pieces of wood, each with the name of a student in the class on one end, kept in a cup. An alternative is to get students in groups to randomly choose numbers (e.g., from 1 to 4, for groups of four) without the teacher listening. The teacher can then select a group and a number randomly: 'OK, so I'm going to choose Group C, Number 2.' This technique is called **Numbered Heads Together** 💡 (Kagan & Kagan, 2009).

While random nomination is useful, there are also times when it isn't a good idea to use it. We should only use it when we expect each student to know the answer to a question. So, if you are asking a challenging question that some students may not know the answer to, you may want to use **Think-Pair-Share** 💡 first (see below) or ask the whole class and allow learners to volunteer answers. This ensures that those who are ready to offer an answer get that opportunity, and those who are less confident also have the opportunity to listen and learn from their classmates. Another time when random nomination is not necessarily a good idea is when a question is open and exploratory, and there isn't necessarily any 'right' answer. At such times, you may prefer to elicit a range of different answers from the class.

Note also that the use of random nomination is a long-term strategy. By using it regularly and at the right times, we help students to understand what is required of them, both from us and their classmates. It's a good idea to forewarn students before we use it, so that in the previous stage, each group takes responsibility to ensure that every member of the group knows the answer.

Think-Pair-Share / Write-Pair-Share / Think-Pair-Nominate

Example units: 2d, 5d, 5e, 8b

Think-Pair-Share is a questioning strategy. It's especially useful after important or challenging questions when we want to give every student in the class time to think and discuss the question. First, present the question, either by asking it or showing it written down. Stop anyone from shouting out the answer and tell them to think about the answer for a few seconds (no talking). Then tell them to discuss the answer quietly with their partner. Finally, get one pair to share their answer with the class and find out if others agree or disagree and why. At this point you can choose a pair randomly (see below), or, if you have heard a less confident student telling their partner the correct answer during the pairwork stage, you could call

upon that student and provide encouragement: *'Elena, I know you have a very interesting answer. Can you share it with the class?'* You can ask questions in English or in their L1. The latter is especially useful when checking difficult grammar concepts or the meaning of idiomatic language.

Write-Pair-Share (Wee & Jacobs, 2006) is an alternative to Think-Pair-Share and is useful if you expect students to answer in English but their level of English, or confidence, is low. During the first stage, they think and then note down an answer, either in English or in their L1. Then they discuss with their partner and share with the class as in Think-Pair-Share.


Finally, Think-Pair-Nominate is a personal favourite that involves combining Think-Pair-Share with random nomination. In this variation, you use the nomination sticks (see below) to decide who will share information with the class. This ensures choice is randomised and not influenced by hands up or unconscious personal preference. Because all the learners have had a chance to think and consult their partner, there is a higher chance that even the lower-achieving learners can succeed when nominated randomly.

The exact amount of time you give students for each stage will depend on how challenging the question is.

Peer prompt / Peer test

Example units: 2d, 4d, 5b

Peer prompt and Peer test are useful ways to get students to work together to help each other to learn. Peer prompt is used after students have read a text of some kind. It is especially good with stories but can also be used with factual texts or a text on grammar rules or other aspects of language. It can be done in pairs or small groups. After reading, only one student in each group or pair looks at the text. The others must hide their copy of the text and try to recall as much of the content of the text as they can. If they forget something important or make an obvious mistake, the student who is looking at the text should prompt them, either by indicating that they have got something wrong, or by giving a clue as to the nature of their mistake or omission.

Peer test is similar to this, but takes student responsibility to a new level, using a strategy from **reciprocal teaching**  (see Unit 4d). The student who is allowed to look at the text should ask a number of questions to test her/his classmates' understanding or memory of the text, providing feedback on accuracy of answers as appropriate. It can also be useful at the start of a lesson if you want students to recall a text from a previous lesson.

Partner switch

Example units: 2a, 2b, 2c

Partner switch is a strategy for increasing speaking practice by getting more out of discussion activities. Often, we ask students to discuss a question or series of questions in pairs. Sometimes, we are disappointed by how quickly they finish. The solution: get each student to switch partners and tell their new partner what their previous partner told them. It works especially well for personalisation questions – they can tell their new partner everything they remember about their previous partner. But it also works well for opinion questions and questions for which students may have different ideas or solutions. You can get everybody to do this at the same time. Alternatively, if a few pairs finish faster than the others, it may be possible to get them to stand, find another partner who has also finished early and tell them about their previous partner.

A key advantage of Partner switch is that it encourages students to listen to each other. So, if you plan to do it, let the students know before the first stage of the speaking activity.

I, she, you (see Unit 2c) is an adapted version of the partner switch idea.

Team challenge

Example units: 5b, 5d, 5e

Team challenge is a useful strategy and a fun game to ensure students listen to each other when answers are being checked. It is particularly useful when there are right or wrong answers, and it is possible to use when checking homework. First (if students haven't already agreed answers in groups), students should compare their answers to an exercise or comprehension questions in home groups. Then, one team (the 'answering team') is chosen at random to read out *all* the answers. Students in this team take turns to read out. The teacher should say nothing until they have finished – she should only keep a note of which answers need correction or further clarification. The other teams should listen to the answering team and challenge *only* if they hear an answer that they think is wrong. If a correct answer is not challenged, *all* teams get a point. If a team challenges, they should say what they think the correct answer is (the teacher stays silent). If the answering team gives a wrong answer, any team that challenges them scores a point, but the answering team does not. Alternatively, if a team challenges a correct answer given by the answering team, the challenging team loses a point. At the end, the teacher confirms the correct answers and the points for each team and clarifies any answers if required. If appropriate, the teacher can select an individual from a team that correctly answered a difficult question to explain their answer to the class.

Once students are used to this technique, you can forewarn them before they check answers within their groups that you are going to use Team challenge. This encourages them to engage with the activity and discuss the answers carefully, promoting **positive interdependence** 💡.

Gallery walk

Example units: 3a, 3c, 6a

A gallery walk activity is one in which students walk around the classroom to look at work displayed on the walls. They may do this individually, in pairs or in groups. Typically, they will have a task to complete, such as evaluating the work, looking for specific elements, etc. Perhaps the simplest and the most common type of gallery walk happens after students have written texts (e.g., stories, reports, etc.). Reading each other's work gives them an opportunity to provide peer feedback, which is useful both for the student giving and the student receiving the feedback. Encourage students to focus their feedback on positives and constructive criticism, rather than negatives or individual competition.

A further advantage of gallery walk activities is that they provide a change in interaction and get students moving around the classroom, although it is only possible in classes where there is space and the possibility to display work on the walls. In some classrooms, the work may need to be displayed on the board, or even distributed on desks around the classroom.

Pass the Pen

Example units: 3b, 3e, 4e, 4f, 6a

Pass the Pen is a simple way of ensuring that all students in a group participate equally in writing activities. Students take turns to write sentences, passing the pen around the group as they do. While it is the responsibility of the student with the pen to do the writing, all group members can help her/him by suggesting what she/he should write. They can also help with spelling but should not take the pen to correct mistakes. It can be used with any writing activity in which a group (or pair) are required to produce a text or write sentences together. It works well even with primary-age learners, for whom it can provide useful practice of working cooperatively. Kagan and Kagan (2009) call this activity 'Round Robin', as the pen and paper pass around the group as it happens. Pass the Pen also works well with any activity where **mini-whiteboards** 💡 are being used (see below).

Test-Learn-Test

Example units: 4b, 5b

Many English language teachers will have heard of Test-Teach-Test. Test-Learn-Test is a more cooperative equivalent. It is a planning structure either for a whole lesson or an activity. In the initial 'Test' stage, students do an activity that requires them to use a specific area of knowledge (e.g., a verb tense for grammar, or a set of personality adjectives for vocabulary). It could be a controlled practice activity such as a gap-fill, or a communicative activity that requires them to use the language in question. After doing the activity, the learners find out about what mistakes were made. This can be anonymous (e.g., teacher writes them on the board), or it can be through self-evaluation with each group marking their own work. This is followed by the 'Learn' stage, the aim of which is for students to understand the causes of their mistakes. This can be through the use of a grammar reference book, a dictionary, Internet research, or asking questions to the teacher (who monitors the groupwork during this stage). The aim of the final 'Test' stage of the lesson is for students to try again to use the language successfully. They may do a similar activity to the one they did previously, or even repeat the same activity. During this stage the teacher notes how well they performed, particularly areas of improvement for praise at the end.

While the 'Learn' stage is always done in home groups, the two 'Test' stages may be done individually, in pairs or in groups, depending on the activity type and its aims.

Note that students don't need to receive scores during the 'Test' stages. The word 'test' is simply referring to a test of knowledge or ability that enables learners to notice their strengths and weaknesses in the area that is being tested - the emphasis, therefore, is on formative self-assessment.

Intergroup competition

Example units: 4b, 4c, 5e

While writers on cooperative learning do not recommend competition between individual students, some allow for competition between groups (e.g., Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Ning, 2010). Providing it is conducted in a spirit of enjoyment and for its own sake, intergroup competition can help motivate groups to work harder and also provide an opportunity for them to feel the joy of winning and the disappointment of losing in a (hopefully) supportive environment! It should be noted, however, that not all writers on cooperative learning agree on this point, with Kagan and Kagan (2009) recommending that competition of any type is best avoided. Your choice to use it should be informed by factors such as age, stage of the course and what life skills you are currently aiming to develop. While adults typically find intergroup competition enjoyable and unproblematic, with primary-age learners, the choice to use it should be made sensitively and with awareness of individual personalities in the class.

Intergroup competition is most commonly used in activities where different groups are doing the same task (e.g., a quiz or a reading comprehension check). Scores for groups can be kept, and the winning group declared at the end. While giving material rewards (e.g., sweets or pens) is not recommended, winning groups may enjoy being able to choose privileges, either for their team or the whole class (e.g., first choice of pen colours for the next group writing activity, or the opportunity to choose one of two homework tasks for the whole class).

Tools

Here are three useful tools for the cooperative classroom. The first will need to be prepared for each class but can be kept for the whole year, the second can be purchased or created yourself and the final one is free and useful in classes where students have Internet access:



Figure 2: Nomination sticks

Nomination sticks

Example units: 2a, 2e, 4b, 4e, 5a, 5e


Nomination sticks are thin pieces of wood (e.g., coffee stirrers), one for each learner, with the student's name on one end (see Figure 2). They are usually kept in a container at the front of the class for random nomination (see above) whenever required. If necessary they can be made from small twigs, lengths of stiff card, or plastic tags. Putting students' names on pieces of paper and keeping them in a bag also works, although it takes a little more time to use them, and they may not last as long!


When using nomination sticks for random nomination, many teachers are tempted to put the nomination sticks of students who have already been nominated on one side – to prevent that student from being selected again. However, putting each stick back in the original container after a nomination ensures that every student is aware that they could be called upon in future and should continue to pay attention. While one student may be selected more than once in a lesson, this will even out over a term or academic year.

Mini-whiteboards

Example units: 3e, 4c, 5a, 8c

Mini-whiteboards are a simple way for groups to display written answers or ideas dynamically so that when they are held up, everybody can see quickly and easily what has been written by each group. They are small pieces of 'whiteboard', enough for each group to have one, and need to be given out with whiteboard pens and some kind of eraser or tissue. If you don't have any mini-whiteboards, a simple alternative is to put sheets of thick card into plastic wallets and get students to write on the *outside* of the plastic wallet with whiteboard pens, which will also be cleanable, like a whiteboard. If you use chalk in your school, an alternative solution is to use small pieces of thin hardboard with chalkboard paint painted on them.

One simple example of a mini-whiteboard activity is a class review quiz at the end of the week. Questions are asked orally by the teacher. Each group then has 30 seconds to agree upon and write their answer to each review question on their mini-whiteboard. Then all groups hold up their mini-whiteboards simultaneously, after which the answer is revealed. If **intergroup competition**  is used, team scores can be kept.

Mini-whiteboards make any activity in which groups have to provide responses to questions or prompts dynamic and fun. They usually encourage good interaction between learners, however, keep an eye out for one or two students dominating. It's a good idea to combine mini-whiteboards with **Pass the Pen**  (see above) to ensure equal participation and interdependence.

Padlet

Example units: 3d, 4a, 4c, 5c, 6a

Padlet is a useful online tool for hi-tech classrooms to help you to display instant, multiple feedback from groups simultaneously. It works particularly well in classrooms where there is a large interactive whiteboard or data projector, so that learners can see all contributions. You will need to create an account on the website (padlet.com) in advance of the lesson and get a blank Padlet page ready for feedback. If you use it regularly, tell your learners to save the Padlet URL onto relevant devices as a favourite webpage. Don't forget also to log in to Padlet on the main class computer, so that you can display the answers for all to see.

Padlet can be used in similar ways to mini-whiteboards, with groups using devices to respond to questions, to brainstorm lists, or even to ask questions to each other and you. Their responses instantly appear on the Padlet. As well as being useful for quizzes, because the text that students write appears instantly on the board, it is also possible to provide or elicit correction (e.g., of grammar errors in their writing), or to display a more extensive piece of writing, or an agreed solution to a problem (see Unit 4a) for peer review and feedback.

Students can also use the Padlet page at home, submitting homework answers which can be displayed (and compared if appropriate) at the start of the lesson. If required, student submissions can be anonymous, so nobody need know whose contribution is being evaluated.

Example activities

3b Six questions


Main skills	Speaking	Listening	Writing	Reading
Functions	asking and answering questions; comparing answers; providing reasons			

Summary of the activity

Six questions is a simple guessing game that students play in pairs with a dice. Working in pairs, students write their answers to six questions on a specific mystery item, such as: a species of animal, a famous film, a well-known dish or a famous person (see the example below), making sure to keep it secret from other students. Then each pair gets together with a separate pair and they are given a dice. Pairs take turns to roll the dice, ask a corresponding question (e.g., Question 3 if they roll 3), and listen to the answer. After each answer, they can try to guess the mystery item. The first pair to guess their opponents' item wins the game. Any group that finishes quickly can swap opponents with another group that finishes quickly.

Although the example activity below includes photocopiable resources, you can write your chosen six questions on the board if preferred and get them to write the answers in their notebooks. Make sure that each question is not likely to reveal the answer on its own. Put them in order so that Question 1 reveals the least information and Question 6 the most.

Key advantages

- Six questions helps to scaffold writing skills by providing structure to their text – useful for younger learners. As such, it can be a useful lead-in to a homework or composition writing activity.
- Six questions encourages learners to listen carefully to their classmates.
- Six questions is a great way to get students used to the **Pass the Pen**  micro-strategy. Make sure that after writing an answer, the student gives the pen to her/his partner.

Important notes and variations

- Once they are used to the game, you can introduce a topic and get the whole class to discuss and agree on what the six questions should be.
- If your students have access to the Internet, you can make the questions more challenging to encourage them to research the answers. In this variation you can even choose which item each pair has to write about, thereby making the learning more relevant.
- You can use Six questions for exam revision. For example, if your students have an English Literature exam, you could get them to answer questions on a specific novel, poem or play, and allow them to use their own notes or textbooks to prepare for the activity.
- An alternative activity that does not require questions or dice is for them to write a short descriptive text about their chosen mystery item. When it comes to the guessing game, pairs simply take turns to read out one sentence at a time, trying to guess their opponents' mystery item after each sentence.

Six questions: A wild animal / A famous film

Levels	A2–B2	Grammar	present and past simple tenses; descriptive adjectives
Ages	10+	Lexis	animals; movies and cinema
Length	20–35 minutes		

Preparation

1. Select which of the two example activities below you want to use. **A wild animal** is designed for A1–A2 classes, and **A famous film** for B1–B2.
2. Copy the materials (one copy of the question table per pair).
3. Get some dice (one per group of four students) or get students to use a dice app on their phones.

Procedure

1. Put students into pairs. Hand out one copy of the question table to each pair.
2. Read through the instructions above the question table and check they understand. Make sure they keep the name of their chosen animal/film a secret from other pairs, and do not mention it when writing their answers to the questions. Get them to use the **Pass the Pen** micro-strategy after each answer.
3. Sit two pairs together to create groups of four. Give one dice to each group. Read the instructions below the table, and once again check for understanding. Note that if they roll the same number twice, they can ask any question they like, except for the six questions on the sheet, and (obviously) the question: *'What's the name of your animal/film?'*
4. They can guess after each round if they like. They do not lose any points for wrong guesses. The first pair to guess their opponents' animal/film wins the game, although they can continue until the other pair have also guessed.

Extension ideas

1. Students can play again against a different pair. Alternatively, they can swap question tables with a different pair and play again with their partner.
2. Students can do something similar for homework, this time working individually. They can expand their six answers into a longer, connected composition.

Six questions: A wild animal

Work in pairs. Choose a wild animal. Keep it a secret!

Write your answers to the six questions for your animal in the boxes provided.

Don't let other students hear your choice:



1. Where does it live?	
2. What colour is it?	
3. How does it move?	
4. What noise does it make?	
5. What does it eat?	
6. What does it look like?	



Now sit with another pair. Take turns to roll the dice and ask the question that corresponds to the number on the dice roll (e.g., if you roll a 3, they must answer Question 3). The first team to guess the other team's animal wins the game. If you roll the same number twice, you can ask any question except these ones!



Six questions: A famous film

Work in pairs. Choose a famous film. Keep it a secret!

Write your answers to the six questions for your film in the boxes provided.

Don't let other students hear your choice:



1. When was it released?	
2. What type of film is it?	
3. Where and when is the film set?	
4. Which famous actors are in it?	
5. Can you describe an important scene from the film?	
6. What is the plot of the film?	






Now sit with another pair. Take turns to roll the dice and ask the question that corresponds to the number on the dice roll (e.g., if you roll a 3, they must answer Question 3). The first team to guess the other team's film wins the game. If you roll the same number twice, you can ask any question except these ones!

5b Grammar jigsaw

Main skills	Speaking	Listening	Writing	Reading
Functions	retelling key information; applying rules to situations; providing reasons for an opinion			

Summary of the activity

Grammar jigsaw typically involves a **Test-Learn-Test**  structure (rather than Test-Teach-Test), in which learners first work in their **home groups**  to assess their current knowledge of an area of grammar (e.g., use of articles). They then split up into **expert groups** , with each expert group finding out more about one part of this grammar area (e.g., in the example below, some students learn about the definite article: *the*, others learn about the indefinite article: *a/an* and the third group learn about the zero article). Depending on the area of grammar, there may be two, three or four topics for expert groups. Students then take this knowledge back to their home groups, where they work together to do the same, or a similar activity to the one used at the start of the lesson. Depending on the area of grammar and how it has been tested, students may also do a language practice activity after this (see example below, in which they retell the story).

Key advantages

- Test-Learn-Test is likely to be much more student-led than a typical Test-Teach-Test lesson.
- It encourages **positive interdependence**  and **individual accountability** .

Important notes and variations

- It is useful for a wide variety of grammar areas, especially when two aspects of language are being contrasted. Coursebook material can be adapted simply by copying and cutting up the grammar explanations and the corresponding exercises.
- It can also be used for areas of lexis where rules govern usage (e.g., different uses of *get*, normal vs. extreme adjectives, *make* and *do*, phrasal verb types, etc.)



Blind violinist

Levels	A2–B1	Grammar	articles: <i>a, the</i> , zero article; past simple
Ages	12+	Lexis	time expressions; travel and transport
Length	30–40 minutes		

Preparation

Copy the materials below (one copy of the **Blind violinist activity sheet**, one set of **Information sheets: A, B, C**, and one set of the three **Information sheet keys** per group of 3–5 students). Cut up as indicated.

Procedure

1. Put students into groups of 3–5 (**home groups** if you use them). Introduce the activity and hand out a copy of the activity sheet to each group. Get them to read the story and discuss what is missing.
2. Get each group to add articles where necessary, using pen and pencil as recommended. Monitor to notice difficulties – this will help in the next stage. Don't check the answers yet!
3. Put students into three **expert groups** (A, B, C). If you have over 17 students break each expert group into two smaller ones so that you never have more than six students in a group (3–4 is usually best).
4. Explain briefly that each group will learn about one of the three areas of article grammar (*a/an, the, zero article*). Remind them that they should work hard as a team because when they finish they will take this knowledge back to their home groups, who will rely on them for the next activity. Give each expert group their corresponding Information sheet.
5. Explain what they have to do and let them begin. Monitor carefully, providing support, especially with difficult rules. As each group finishes, hand out the corresponding **Information sheet key** and remind them that they must remember the six rules, as they won't have these materials during the next lesson stage.
6. When all groups have checked their answers, send students back to their home groups. Tell them to look again at their story; they should check carefully whether the rules that they read about in their expert groups apply to any of the article uses (including zero article) here. Once more, monitor and provide support as necessary.
7. Check the answers. The **team challenge**  method will work well here. One group starts reading and other groups challenge if they hear a mistake. The group reading at the end are the winners!
8. Within each home group, one student should now take the story, and the remaining members should try to retell it as accurately as possible. The student with the story can prompt them if they make any mistakes, using the **peer prompt**  method.

Extension ideas

For further practice, students may be able to translate anecdotes from their first language into English. Because anecdotes introduce and then repeat the same characters, they provide a good context for helping students to practise the most common uses of articles.

Correct article:

THE BLIND VIOLINIST

My friend Esra told me the funniest story about when she was travelling to the Cairngorm mountains in Scotland in July last year. She sat down opposite an old man who had a white stick, a violin and wore dark glasses. There was a dog sitting next to him, so she thought he was blind.

They got chatting and she found out he played the violin in the Scottish Symphony Orchestra. He was on his way home from work.

Anyway, the train had just left Edinburgh when the old man went to the restaurant car to get lunch and came back with some sandwiches and a newspaper. He sat down and opened the newspaper. His dog was now sit-

ting next to him, and every time the dog barked, the man turned the pages. Just then, the train conductor came to check our tickets. He saw the man reading and explained: "Sorry, sir. Dogs are not allowed on trains unless their owners are blind." "Oh, but I am blind," said the man, "but my dog isn't, and he likes to read the Times on long journeys."

1. There is a problem with the grammar in this story. Read it, then discuss: What is missing?

BLIND VIOLINIST

My friend Esra told me funniest story about when she was travelling to Cairngorm mountains in Scotland in July last year. She sat down opposite old man who had white stick, violin and wore dark glasses. There was dog sitting next to him, so she thought he was blind. They got chatting and she found out he played violin in Scottish Symphony Orchestra. He was on his way home from work.

Anyway, train had just left Edinburgh when old man went to restaurant car to get lunch and came back with some sandwiches and newspaper. He sat down and

opened newspaper. His dog was now sitting next to him, and every time dog barked, man turned pages. Just then, train conductor came to check our tickets. He saw man reading and explained: "Sorry, sir. Dogs are not allowed on trains unless their owners are blind."

"Oh, but I am blind," said man, "but my dog isn't, and he likes to read Times on long journeys."



2. You probably noticed that there were no articles (*a, the*) in the story. In your groups, insert articles wherever you think they are necessary. Use a pen if you are certain, and a pencil if not.
3. Now get into expert groups. Each group will learn about one of the three article situations:
 - A. Situations where we use *a* or *an*
 - B. Situations where we use *the*
 - C. Situations where we don't use *a/an* or *the* (called 'zero article')
4. Once you have worked in your expert groups, come back to your home group. Using the information you learnt in your expert groups, check your story again and make changes where necessary.
5. Your teacher will check the answers with you.
6. Working together, try to retell the story. One group member can look at the correct story and prompt the others if they forget anything.



Group A information sheet: a / an

Match the rules with the example sentences:

1. Use *a/an* the first time you mention something or someone.

2. Use *a/an* with singular countable nouns when it isn't important which one you're talking about.

3. Use *a/an* when you state someone's job.

4. Use *a* (not *an*) before words that don't start with a vowel sound.

5. Use *an* (not *a*) before words that start with a vowel sound.

6. Use *some* instead of *a/an* with plural nouns.

a. My brother Mark is a secondary teacher.

b. The plane was delayed for an hour.

c. I bought some new books yesterday.

d. I saw a really good film last night.

e. Could you pass me a pen, please?

f. I have just had a coffee.

Now cover the rules, read out the example sentences and try to remember the rule.

Group B information sheet: the

Match the rules with the example sentences:

1. Use *the* to talk about something you have mentioned before.

2. Use *the* when something is unique or there's only one of them in the situation.

3. Use *the* with superlative adjectives.

4. Use *the* with certain geographical features, especially seas and oceans, rivers, mountain ranges and island groups.

5. Use *the* to talk about musical instruments someone plays.

6. Pronounce *the* as /ði:/ before a word that starts with a vowel.

7. Use *the* with the names of most newspapers.

a. This is the best holiday I've ever been on.

b. She plays the guitar very well.

c. My uncle lives in the Caribbean.

d. Could you pass the salt, please?

e. We have a dog and a cat. The dog is called Cindy and the cat is called Jess.

f. I like to read The Daily Post on the train to work each morning.

g. I sometimes go running in the afternoon at the old stadium.

Now cover the rules, read out the example sentences and try to remember the rule.



Group C information sheet: zero article

Match the rules with the example sentences:

1. Use no article before the names of people, cities, continents and most countries.

2. Use no articles before plural nouns to talk about a group of things in general.

3. Use no article when referring to an uncountable or plural noun for the first time.

4. Use no article before times, days of the week, months or years.

5. Use no article when you are talking about being at or going to certain places, especially home, work, school, hospital, university, prison, church.

6. Use no article before meals.

a. The meeting is at 4 o'clock on Friday.

b. My sister, Emily, has lived her whole life in Leeds, in England.

c. I sometimes skip breakfast and have a bigger lunch.

d. Doctors are paid much more than nurses.

e. I'm not a fan of hot drinks. I don't like tea or coffee, but I love juice and lemonade.

f. He wasn't at school last week because he went into hospital for an operation.

Now cover the rules, read out the example sentences and try to remember the rule.



Information sheet key:

Group A: 1d, 2e, 3a, 4f, 5b, 6c.



Information sheet key:

Group B: 1e, 2d, 3a, 4c, 5b, 6g, 7f.



Information sheet key:

Group C: 1b, 2d, 3e, 4a, 5f, 6c.

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