



# ESL Writing with Collaborative Tasks to Build Student Confidence

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## Benefits of Collaborative Student Writing

- **Planning strategies** may be particularly important to low-achieving writers for compensating and overcoming documented weak prior knowledge and vocabulary (Graham & Perin, 2007). In this way, through collaboration, students help fill gaps for other students in the group, and peer instruction and modeling occur.
- Learners working together through the entire process of writing—planning, drafting, revising, and editing—results in **higher quality products.**”
- It is important to increase the amount of writing that students do because this has a positive correlation to **not only improved writing skills**, but also improved **reading**, increased **writing fluency and comfort**, **deeper thinking**, and **construction of new knowledge**.
- Finally, grammar study alone does not improve students’ writing, but that teaching of grammar does hold value when learners are provided opportunities to use learned grammar structures that involve **active learning** (*Just Write! Guide*, U.S. Dept. of Education, OCTAE, 2012).

## Why have students do collaborative writing?

- ELP and CCR Standards alignment
- Workplace prep (writing with others AND soft skills)
- Students build on their own and others’ knowledge; Peer teaching about language conventions
- Fosters supportive learning community
- Writing is less isolating and intimidating
- Develops sense of reader-based writing / awareness of audience
- Student speaking interactions; explanations and defense of their choices
- Build better understanding of writing as a process
- Draws upon strengths of all members; builds student agency
- Integration of all skills

## Descriptive / Detailed writing

### Images:

1. Make a slideshow of different interesting pictures.
2. Model with one image and explicit instructions for expectations for participation in groups and for end product.
3. In groups, students write a description of the image. (You may ask them to mark adjectives and adverbs).
4. Provide ongoing feedback.

5. Team designees read each team's description.
6. Optionally vote on the best description.

[Make a copy of slides for your own use](#) (images from [New York Times What's Going On in this Picture](#))

[PicLits - piclits.com](#) – free registration with freewrite and drag-and-drop of provided words

### Random Emoji Generator

1. Go to Random Emoji Generator site at <https://perchance.org/emoji>
2. Select number of emojis to randomly generate
3. Take screenshot and print or copy/paste in a doc or slideshow, one “emoji story” for each team
4. Each team begins to write the story within a time limit for their “emoji story”
5. Rotate the emoji stories; the next team reads and adds details to make story more detailed
6. Repeat the rotation
7. Display and/or read how the story became more detailed from the first to the end version
8. Optionally, vote on the best story

Sample Team Emojis Stories after Two Rotations:

### Emoji Story



**Team 1:** I was going to cross the street when I saw the “no crossing” sign, and there was a chicken in my way. I was late for fishing with my friends because I was eating a plate of pasta and a delicious donut.

**Team 2:** I was going to cross the wide street when I saw the warning sign “no crossing” because a white chicken was in my way. I was late for fishing with my close friends because I was eating a plate of delicious pasta and a delicious round donut.

**Team 3:** I was going to cross the wide, wet street in Oceanside when I saw the big black warning sign “no crossing” because the white chicken was sleeping in my way. I was seriously late for fishing with my close old friend because I was eating a big white plate of stunning Alfredo pasta and a sweet, hot, round, rainbow donut.

### Narrative and Summary Writing:

#### Running dictation (lower levels)

1. Select a text appropriate to your students' level. Divide it up into sentence strips posted around the room and numbered in order.
2. In pairs or small groups, one student is the runner. This person goes to the first sentence strip, reads it, and memorizes it. Then the runner goes to the group and dictates the sentence, with each person in the group writing the sentence. The runner can spell words and repeat but cannot write. The runner checks the sentences for accuracy in content and conventions. The runner continues to the second sentence strip and so on until they have dictated the entire passage.
3. Once the group has finished, check to make sure their work is correct. If it's not, the runner can return to the sentence strip that was written incorrectly.
4. The first group to finish with all correct sentences is the winner!

## Dictogloss (higher levels)

Instead of teacher-led, each group has a student reader. Process:

1. Provide each group a level-appropriate, high-interest text that is not too long.
2. The reader tells the story one to three times, depending on the text complexity and students' level.
3. Once the story has been told, students retell / reconstruct the story in their groups to retell the story. Because this is not dictation, they may not be able to recreate the story exactly, but that's OK! They should use their own words and paraphrase.
4. Students then work together to write the story.
5. Finally, groups share their stories. You can use this to discuss the variety of ways the story was re-told, such as word choices. You may choose to then tell the original story again for comparison purposes.

Sample: [Running Dictation with video as source material](#)

## Structured Retell (higher levels)

1. Find a story that is appropriate for your students' level. Create a slide show of images and a few key words to accompany your telling of the story.
2. Provide a printout of the slides to students to have images to help them remember the story and for note-taking.
3. Tell the story with the accompanying slideshow.
4. Ask comprehension questions to gauge students' understanding.
5. In pairs, students use the printout to retell the story in their own words.
6. Students work together to write the story.

## Video Shorts

1. Prepare a list of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs for a video short story. All teams are given the same list of words and write about the same video.
2. Put the words on a doc or slide and assign groups to sections. You can also have the words on a sheet of paper if tech is not available to students.
3. Groups work together to write the story using all the words provided and adding details as they guess what the story may be about. You may ask students to use a particular verb tense (simple past and past continuous).
4. Then the whole class reads each group's story comparing it to the video (which is added to the slideshow after all teams have written and shared their stories). The team whose video is closest to the real story wins!

Example: Video Source – [Table 7](#) on Vimeo

Words to use: (NOUNS) boyfriend, girlfriend, restaurant, conversation, fortune cookie, notes, message, advice  
(VERBS) argue, spy, listen, write, disagree, break up, make up, taste

## [Sample of students' work](#)

- **Alternative 1:** Provide each team a different short video (without many words) in Google Slides. They write the story after watching the video. [Sample](#)
- **Alternative 2:** Students in groups get a different list of words based on different videos. They write the story, each group reads their story, the videos are shown afterwards. [Sample](#)
- **Alternative 3:** Students in groups get a list of words for different (or the same) **images** (rather than video).
- **Alternative 4:** Groups of students each get a different image or video. **THEY** write the nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs. The list of words is given to another group who works together to construct the story. The stories are compared to the actual images or videos.

## Opinion / Pro-Con and Informational / Expository

Idea generation with various tech tools and frames

1. In groups, students brainstorm answers to a question or pros/cons related to a topic that has been studied and discussed in class.
2. Tools to use: Padlet, Jamboard, Google Docs, graphic organizers appropriate to the task
3. Provide students with frames (it's not cheating!) for potential topic sentences and conclusion
4. All students need to do is fill in their team's brainstormed ideas written in cohesive and coherent sentences

Sample: Mental Health Toolkit

### Other samples

- [Pros and Cons of Social Networking \(Lesson materials\)](#)
- [Designer Babies \(Paragraph frame\)](#)
- [Environment \(Paragraph frame\)](#)
- Robots / Automation ([Paragraph frame](#))

### Resources:

#### Images

- [New York Times What's Going On in this Picture](#)
- [Random Picture Generator](#)
- [Wordseye](#) - enter text, site creates an image ([video](#))
- Share-alike sites for photos: [Pixabay](#), [Unsplash](#), [Gratisography](#), [Pexels](#)

#### Graphic Organizers

- [ReadWriteThink Student Interactives](#),
- [Read Naturally Retell Organizer](#)