



Weekly Status Reports: Individual Reflections Based on a Group Activity

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Context: Out of class; Systems Design

Keywords: educator feedback, group activity, design projects

Student Activity Time: 10-30 minutes per week

Each week students reflected on their experience working on a group design activity.

Introducing the Reflection Activity

In a junior level systems design course, students worked in teams on a design project to convert their business model into a final functioning prototype. Each week students individually reflected on their experience in the design team. The purpose of these weekly reflections was for students to take a step back and examine what they had done and learn from it.

At the beginning of the course, the educator explained to the students the purpose of the weekly status reports. Each week students individually reflected on their experience working on a group design activity by responding to the following questions:

1. What did you learn from X (a particular assignment)?
2. What obstacles did your team encounter this week, and how did you individually contribute to their resolution?
3. What are your individual plans for next week (work plan and continuity for a long design project)?
4. What additional resources do you need to be more productive?

These individual reflection assignments were graded by a class grader who then provided a summary of major misunderstandings and teaming issues to the educator. Based on this summary, the educator adjusted the course and checked in with individual teams. These reflections made up about 12% of the students' final grade and were graded based on substance.

In terms of outcomes, students may realize that they were actually learning something throughout the course. Additionally, they may now have a language to communicate what they've done and what they have done individually for a team.

Recreating the Reflection Activity

	Description
1	Engage students in small group design activities.
2	Explain in the first class session the purpose of the weekly status reports.
3	Have class graders assign credit for completion of the weekly status reports.
4	Read the grade summary from the graders and decide if you need to talk to the class or individual groups or students.
5	Engage in any necessary follow-up.

In the words of the Educator: Tips and Inspiration

Be aware of what you name the reflection activity. I decided to call them weekly status reports. I used to call them reflections, but anecdotally found that students devalued the activity. I thought that using a name used in industry may make them more valuable to students.

Do not make the writing requirement too long. Engineering students are often resistant to writing, but this activity pushes on them to write something. Some answers are only a few sentences, which is fine as long as there is something deep within those sentences.

Engage students in reflection on a regular basis. Reflection should be a weekly or regular event instead of just something they do at specific time points or at the end of a project. There should always be something on which your students can reflect. Good journaling practice is valuable for students to develop.

Be aware that students are not the best writers. I was surprised with how poor the writing skills of some of our students are, particularly when it comes to punctuation and grammar. Since I have limited grading time by my teaching assistants, I ask them to grade content rather than writing.

What was the inspiration for the reflection activity? This activity was always intended as a reflection activity even though it has not always been called a reflection activity. In graduate school, I read Schön's Reflective Practitioner book and decided to use this method to evoke reflection in his students. I have tweaked the wording on some of the questions based on literature, conversations with other educators, and the learning objectives of my course.