KOBE JALT
JOURNAL

Volume 4, Issue 2
December 2023

Kobe JALT Journal

Volume 4, Issue 2

Winter 2023

Editors

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From the Editors

The current issue of *Kobe JALT Journal* comes at a time of reform for the publishing division of Kobe JALT. A glance at the Contents section reveals that this issue of the journal is much lighter than it has been in the past. This change reflects a conscious editorial decision to publish *Kobe JALT Journal* more often so that authors who wish to see their writing published and seen by others will have the chance to do so without long wait times. Depending on the number of submissions, this journal will be published at a pace of approximately six to eight months, as opposed to the previous yearly publication schedule.

Another change we're excited to announce is the addition of several new, "full time" reviewers. These reviewers, drawn from volunteers with teaching experience both in and out of Japan, will help the editors realize our goal of frequent publication. Having a pool of reviewers will help with article turnaround time and allow authors to receive feedback from a diverse pool of educators. The editors are always eager to expand the publishing team, so any readers who wish to volunteer as reviewrs can reach out to kobejaltpublications@gmail.com.

As we welcome our new reviewers, the editors would like to thank the authors who have contributed to this volume of *Kobe JALT Journal*. **Denver Bernie** joins us again with an article about how to draw students to classroom participation using a point system. This article should be of interest to any teacher who has dealt with shy students in the past – and who hasn't? **Thomas Amundrud** explains how Xreading can be used to engage students in reading circle activities. Teachers who have struggled with teaching reading in an interactive way may find something worth implementing in their own classrooms. **Julia Kimura** contributes, after extensive classroom use, a book review of *101 EFL Activties for Teaching University Students*. Veteran teachers, who know the pitfalls of comfort and routine, and newcomers to teaching university students alike should find some inspiration in trying new activities.

The editors would like to thank all of the reviewers – the above-mentioned authors and **Joshua Jodoin** – who helped in the publication process. We would also like to extend deepfelt gratitude to you – the reader – for engaging with the works published here and keeping the conversation going. We look forward to bringing you more exciting and relevant articles in a timely manner.

Editors

Armando Duarte

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A Points System for Grading Classwork in University Language Courses

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University language courses often require instructors to grade student's classroom participation. However, there is often little specific guidance on how to achieve this objective. Consequently, many teachers find themselves creating ad-hoc, intuitive or highly idiosyncratic systems, implemented with varying degrees of success. Within this context, this paper sets out to document a method for allocating classwork grades more transparently and systematically, using class points. The process awards points for in-class activities as well as homework assignments and stores the accumulated points electronically. The points are awarded in each lesson according to pre-determined criteria and gradually accumulate to build each student's classwork grade for a semester. Thus, the system constructs learners' grades methodically while positively impacting student engagement through the use of awards.

大学の言語コースでは、学生のクラス参加度に成績をつけるために担当教員者を必要とすることがある。しかしながら、このような目標達成するための具体的なガイダンスはほとんどないと言える。結果的に、教員の多くが臨機応変な評価方法を作り出している。また、直観的な方法を使ったり、個人的な方法を使うこととしている。本論文ではクラスポイントを使用して授業の採点をより浸透かつ体系的に割り当てる方法を明示化することを目的としている。このプロセスでは、授業内の活動や宿題に対してのポイントを与え、蓄積されたポイントを電子的に保存する。ポイントは事前に決められた基準に従って各授業内で与えられ、徐々に蓄積され、生徒のその学期の授業成績を構築する。したがって、このシステムは学生の採点を体系的に構築し、同時に受賞を通じて学生にポジティブな影響を与える。

Like many teachers, I began assessing class participation by giving holistic judgments of students' performance at the end of a semester. Ultimately, this approach felt unsatisfactory and open to teacher bias. Therefore, I sought an approach which was a little more systematic and transparent. With regard to this challenge, Bean and Peterson (1998) outline some interesting ideas, such as the proposal to use rubrics, created in conjunction with the students, that score much-repeated tasks such as discussions. An alternative method, they suggest, is a "cold calling approach", where the teacher systematically selects students to answer questions or give opinions and then awards points based on the answers. Both of these approaches have benefits but seem ultimately incomplete, as they only target slivers of students' performance and could overlook the efforts of more introverted learners. For an assessment to be more comprehensive, it must cover a broader range of activities. One such method is a Participation Point System (PPS).

Numerous authors (Bess & Bess, 2002; Ihsan et al., 2018; Raine, 2014) have detailed various implementations of this approach. The common theme to all these adaptations is that points are awarded and collected over a given time period with the aim of encouraging positive behaviours.

There is a preponderance of evidence suggesting that points can encourage desirable outcomes in the classroom. Firstly, competition can increase student motivation, participation and emotional states (Antonaci et al., 2019; Mee et al., 2020; Yaccob et al., 2022). Game-play elements, such as points and leaderboards, can also increase motivation by allowing students to see how they are performing in relation to their classmates (de Byl, 2013). Furthermore, team activities with points can promote cooperation as well as competition, as the groups need to collaborate to accumulate points (de Byl, 2013; Hung, 2017; Matsumoto, 1998). An additional advantage of a points system is that it can smoothly facilitate late submission or re-submission of assignments (for a penalty) (Hung, 2017). Conversely, some students might become demotivated by failure in competitive endeavours, so this possibility must also be considered carefully. Yet, it has also been found that (occasional) classroom failure can be a motivational factor for some students (Dickinson, 1995; Matsumoto, 1998).

Given the generally positive evidence for the benefits of points, I have used the practice for several years to motivate students. Therefore, it was logical to try and use points to manage class participation grades in a similar fashion to a participation points system. However, I aimed to assess as well as motivate, so I also wanted to expand this points system beyond activities that stimulate student engagement to cover a more representative range of classroom endeavours. Consequently, I incorporated structured tasks such as worksheets, surveys and homework in addition to motivational activities. As this process monitors a broader variety of activities, I began to use the term "classwork points". The paper will now describe how this system has been implemented in a variety of language-learning courses.

Classwork Points System in Language Learning Classes

The classwork points system described in this paper has been employed in university language classes of 15 – 30 members over the last eight years. It has been applied in several institutions across various courses such as Freshman English, Media English, TOEIC Skills, Academic Writing, and Oral Communication Skills to students of all levels, from beginners to advanced level (C2 to A1 CEFR). The system has varied somewhat depending on the course, institution and level of the students. However, the key elements were that students' points were tallied at the end of each lesson and added to a running total to build classwork grades incrementally for a semester. In managing the process, all learners had access to electronic devices and Wi-Fi, which they often used to maintain their own class points, as the following sections will explain.

Purpose of the Classwork Points System

The goal was to create a method that clearly and transparently tracked students' classroom effort and performance over a semester rather than relying on a holistic participation grade at the end of the course. I wanted this method to appraise several areas of performance

without needing to monitor students in microscopic detail. Time efficiency was imperative, so the process needed to be as automated as possible.

The points would perform two main functions: motivate students during activities and monitor their performance (once collected and tallied). At the highest level, the aim was to structure many of the activities in lessons to be both cooperative and competitive, allowing individuals, pairs and groups ample opportunities to gain points. It was also essential to cover a variety of skills when creating activities so students would be motivated and assessed on a wide range of tasks such as speaking, listening, reading, writing, presenting, spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and participation.

Types of Activities Managed with Classwork Points

The following will outline some examples of the types of activities that I have managed within the classwork points system. This section does not seek to evaluate the activities or assess the effectiveness of points in motivating students but to give instances of the kinds of tasks that can be managed with this system. There are broadly two categories of activities where I used class points to encourage and assess students: motivational activities/interventions and structured classwork tasks.

The motivational activities or interventions included warm-up tasks such as vocabulary/circumlocution practice like *Taboo*, descriptive practice like *Pictionary*, or conversation/grammar practice like *Find Someone Who,* to name just a few examples. These activities were inherently competitive and seamlessly allowed the awarding of points for winning teams or individuals. Another activity included in this category was competitive brainstorming; students were allocated to groups, and then each group was awarded points for the number or quality of suggestions generated on a given topic. In addition, I also practised a method similar to "cold calling" to motivate students; learners who were able to answer a question or who contributed to a class discussion were awarded a certain number of points. Listed in Table 1 are some examples of the points awarded for various activities.

Table 1

Examples of point values given in lessons

Action	Value of Points
1st place group in a competitive activity	10 points
2nd place group in a competitive activity	7 points
3rd place group in a competitive activity	5 points
4th place group in a competitive activity	3 points

Action	Value of Points
Asked a question in class	5 points
Answered a question correctly in class	5 points
Shared an answer with the class	3 points
Volunteered an answer in the class	5 points
Volunteered an opinion in a class discussion	5 points
Spoke to 10 students in a survey/interview	10 points
Used only English in a survey/interview/discussion	5 points
Gave a presentation to the class	10–20 points

Finally, in this motivational section, I used points for peer feedback. In this procedure, students reviewed each other's work and voted (using a Google Form) for the best work (according to pre-defined criteria). Each team or individual was then awarded points based on their position in the vote. For example, in one poll, students with 15% of the vote received 10 points. Those with 10% received seven points. The other students received five or three points depending on the number of votes.

The second category of work for which I awarded points was the structured classwork tasks. These were primarily worksheets, surveys, and questionnaires. The awards were sometimes binary: 10 points if students completed the work or zero if they did not submit the task. Alternatively, I gave points based on effort or quality, with the maximum depending on the task's difficulty. Students were given a simple rubric to outline the levels of awards, shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Points rubric for structured classwork and homework

Assignment Scoring (not including projects)

Description	Detail	%	Points	Points
Excellent	- More effort than expected - Great vocab & grammar - Did exactly what the task asked and more	100%	10	20
Good	- A lot of effort - Good vocab & grammar - Did exactly what the task asked	80%	8	16
Average	- Just enough effort - Ok vocab & grammar - Did most of what the task asked with maybe one or two things missing or has areas for improvement	60%	6	12
Poor	- Low effort - Unchecked/unedited vocab & grammar. Difficult to understand - No care or attention. Short answers with no expansion	40%	4	8
Very Poor	- Minimum effort - Really difficult to read. Makes little or no sense - One or two word answers	20%	2	4
Late - same day	50% deduction			
Late or missing	Zeo points	0%	0	0

The rubric has three alternative grading systems: a 100-point scale for in-depth work, a 10-point scale for quick, simple tasks and a 20-point scale for everything else. The rubric descriptors are very generalised and non-specific so that they can be applied across a wide range of assignments. This simplicity gave the students and the teacher a quick assessment of the relative quality of the work submitted.

Administration of Classwork Points

I attempted to digitise and automate this system as much as possible; otherwise, it could have become prohibitively time-consuming. The management of the process has undergone three major iterations since it was introduced. In the first version of this process, I used a Google Sheets workbook to manage the class points. The workbook contained the scores from all the activities and was permanently viewable by the students. This arrangement effectively gave the learners a leaderboard to view their relative classroom performance. The students were given edit access to this sheet and generally added their own points tally at the end of each lesson. The students were remarkably honest in this practice, and there were no real issues with students attempting to cheat.

At the end of the semester, I calculated a percentage score in the Google Sheets workbook, which was then used for students' classwork grades. Depending on the course, this classwork component comprised 10 – 25 % of the overall grade. Figure 2 shows an example of this type of workbook.

Figure 2

Class points participation grade calculated in Google Sheets

	%	Total		Student Names	Quizlet Average	Semester 1 Review	Media Journal 3	extended interaction 3	Photostory Bonus	Photostory Comments	Photostory Practice	Quizlet 15 July	Caption Comments
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
2													10
3	92	1012			97	10	93	50	7	10	20	12	10
4	77	845			93	10	85	50		10	20		10
5	76	832			93	10	30	50		10	20		
6	71	785			95		68	50	7		20	10	10
7	84	923			100	10	74	50		10	20		10
8	79	871			97		76	50		10	20		10
9	74	815			100	10	87	50			20		
10	85	931			100	10	85	50	7	10	20		10
11	82	904			98	10	82	50	7	10	20	10	
12	76	838			93	10	65	50			20	5	
13	84	920			97	10	75	50		10	20	14	10
14	81	888			65	10	68	50		10	20		10
15	78	856			95	10	77	50	7	10	20		
16	65	710			97	10	52	50			20		
17	82	897			100	10	83	50			20		
18	85	935			97	10	95	50	10	10	20		10

The percentage grade for each class member was calculated relative to the highest-scoring student's points total. In Figure 2, the highest-scoring student has 1012 points. Some extra points were added to the divisor (for all students in the class) so that no student received 100 percent. Consequently, the highest-scoring students scored somewhere in the 90% range, an A+ or S in most grading systems. Hence, in this instance, the divisor was set as 1100 to calculate 1012/1100 x 100 = 92. Thus, the highest-scoring student received a grade of 92% for their classwork grade.

This system using Google Sheets was effective in various ways. The visibility of the points and cumulative scores facilitated a simple catch-up system, as students could easily pinpoint unsubmitted assignments. Accordingly, students were permitted to submit missing assignments until the end of the semester, for a penalty. This feature proved popular with learners. Many students also appreciated having the ability to monitor their relative performance over the semester. However, some students disliked the visibility of the points. The negative response of those learners meant that there was an important dilemma to ponder; in any competitive scenario, some people will do less well than others, which can be motivating or demotivating, depending on the individual. After considering the problem, I applied the following solution: Students would still be awarded points in each lesson, but the cumulative semester scores would not be made available to learners. This approach meant that the competitive element within lessons would be preserved while the semester-long competitive pressure would be reduced.

Thus, in the second version of this process, the running semester totals had to be made inaccessible to the students. Therefore, I created a Google Sheets workbook with two worksheets. The first worksheet contained an area for each student to enter the points earned in that day's lesson. The second worksheet was a hidden "Totals" sheet, the same as the one depicted in Figure 3, but this was only accessible to me. Shortly after the lesson, I cut and pasted the points into the hidden "Totals" worksheet, where they accumulated over the semester. In addition, I added the points from the more structured worksheets and homework tasks directly to

the hidden "Totals" sheet. Figure 3 illustrates how this "Totals" sheet was hidden from the students.

Figure 3

How to make a worksheet hidden in Google Sheets
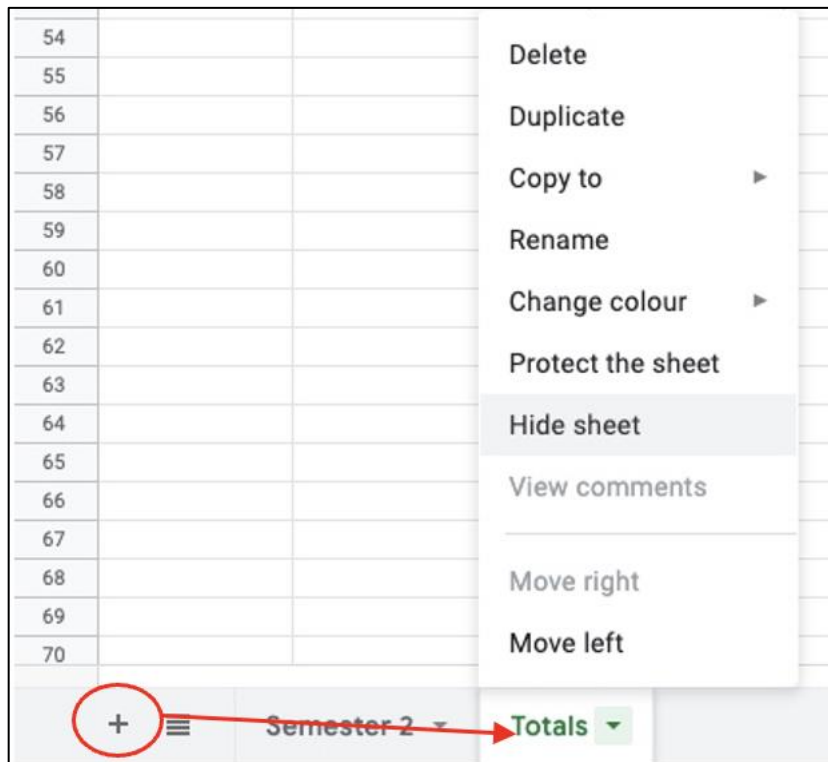
Finally, in the third version of the process, I used Google Classroom to manage all the students' grading, including the class points. This version had the advantage of automating the calculations, but it did create some additional steps and considerations. First, I needed to create grading categories for each class in Google Classroom. Figure 4 shows an example class, which has two instructor-created categories: "Classwork S2" (for classwork points) and "Projects S2" (for formally graded assignments). The ratio was set as 25% for "Classwork S2" and 75% for "Projects S2". The application then automatically totalled the points for all assignments marked as "Classwork S2" and did the same for the "Projects S2" assignments, then calculated the overall grade according to the ratios I set. Naturally, when creating assignments in Google Classroom, it was essential to select the correct "Mark category" each time to report students' grades accurately.

Figure 4

Grading percentages (including classwork) for a class managed on Google Classroom

The points I awarded for the motivational activities in class still had to be managed with a Google Sheet and then added to Google Classroom later; it was more time-efficient for students to add their points to the Google Sheet rather than create new Google Classroom assignments for each activity. Consequently, I created a Google Classroom assignment to incorporate these in-class points into the grading. Prior to input, I calculated the students' percentage scores relative to the highest-scoring student to give a maximum score in the 90% range, as previously demonstrated. Then, I added the student percentages to the Google Classroom assignment manually. Figure 5 shows an example of the settings for this class points assignment.

Figure 5

An assignment to input class members' in-class activity points (collecting in the Google Sheet)

This system worked well and preserved many desirable features from previous iterations. I could manage students' points on the individual assignment pages and in aggregate on the application's Marks "screen". Students could view their scores in each assignment, and there was a setting where I could make their overall grades available. Therefore, learners could still easily locate unsubmitted work, and they could monitor their progress throughout the semester. The disadvantage was that Google Classroom did not create sub-totals for each "Mark Category". This situation meant neither students nor I could see the total for their classwork grade, as the application just presented the overall grade. This breakdown could be calculated manually, but it added an additional step to the process. Overall, Google Classroom and Google Sheets have been invaluable tools for creating and managing this implementation of classwork points. However, there are numerous tools and methods to achieve similar results; this paper demonstrated just one possible way to implement a classwork grading system.

Conclusion

The goal of creating this system was to design a transparent, time-effective, and simple method to assess students' classroom performance. These main objectives were achieved as students could track their performance over the semester without requiring extensive teacher record-keeping or task-specific grading. One vital decision, with hindsight, was allowing students to add their own points. This procedure saved a significant amount of time and helped students become invested in the process, as they were often excited to add their points and watch their scores grow. Initially, this practice might have seemed risky as students could easily have falsified their scores, but in reality, that was never an issue. As the process matured, though, I did allocate a small amount of time to the end of lessons to check that students had added their points correctly.

The more structured individual tasks such as worksheets, surveys and homework assignments were integrated so that the system could monitor a greater range of students' output. As a result, this method could assess the full range of skills practised in those activities without

needing to track all these components specifically. Therefore, it can indeed be argued that this method was more systematic and comprehensive than a holistic grading system. In practice, many students did receive classwork grades consistent with what might have been expected from a holistic grade. Nevertheless, there was a sizeable minority of students whose assessments were at odds with expectations. In these situations, a re-examination of the points indicated that the usual classroom observations had overlooked elements of some students' performance. Consequently, there is a case to be made that a classwork points system could reduce individual teacher biases.

The points system also helped keep students focused on completing tasks; the rate and quality of homework submissions noticeably improved after the system was introduced. This result was enhanced by permitting students to submit assignments after the deadlines for a reduction in points. Late submission likely prevented some learners from failing particular courses and rewarded increased effort rather than merely relaxed standards. This concession does create additional work for the teacher, but the increased student participation made it worthwhile. Overall, the classwork points system described in this paper significantly improved how I managed classwork grades. Therefore, I hope some readers might be able to extract something of value from this description to apply in the grading and management of their classes.

Denver Beirne has lived and worked in Japan since 2009 and is currently a lecturer at Asia University, Tokyo. His research interests include metaphor, corpus linguistics and materials development focusing on CALL and CLIL. He can be reached at beirner@yahoo.com.

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Text-based Reading Circles with Xreading

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This narrative teaching reflection article shares how I have implemented reading circles using the Xreading platform in two mixed-level first-year English courses. It will show how, in a two-week cycle, this course implements a translanguaging and text-based section in the first week, in which the students complete collaborative summaries and other reading activities, speaking L1 Japanese but writing L2 English, so that all students understand the story content and can participate. This is then followed in the second week with role-based reading circles conducted primarily in L2 English. This article will demonstrate how this course has been developed and conducted, discuss strengths and problems with the current approach, and explore possible changes.

本稿では 1 年生の英語コースで Xreading を使用したリーディングサークルをどのように実施したかを紹介する。このコースでは、2 週間のサイクルで、第 1 週目にテキストベースのトランス・ランゲージングの部分を実施し、学生が第一言語（日本語）を話しながら第二言語（英語）を書き、物語の内容を理解したら参加できるように、共同で要約やその他の読書活動を書く方法を説明する。そして 2 週目には、主に第二言語（英語）で行われる役割を使用ながらのリーディングサークルが行われます。 本論では、このコースがどのように開発され実施されてきたかを示し、現在のアプローチの長所と問題点を議論し、変更の可能性を探る。

Keywords: reading circles, text-based language teaching, Xreading

Xreading (www.xreading.com) is a website and LMS (learning management system) that, at the time of writing in early 2023, has over 1000 graded readers at a range of levels. Xreading is primarily used as a way to administer class-based Extensive Reading (ER). Its accessibility on any internet-capable device, its relative affordability at ¥2400 for 12 month's access for students joining teacher-led courses on the platform, and the ability of teachers to monitor student reading as well as assign readers to multiple students without needing a physical library of books to loan solve some of the key problems previously noted with ER (Milliner & Cote, 2014). However, as I will show in this narrative teaching reflection article, you can do much more with Xreading as well. I will describe a course for first-year students that incorporates translanguaging (e.g., Garcia & Wei, 2014) and text-based (e.g., Feez, 1998) collaborative writing activities alongside communicative reading circle discussions so that all class members can read, understand, and actively participate. I will also discuss the materials used, how I give feedback to students and evaluate their work, and possible future directions in terms of both research and teaching.

How I started using reading circles

My experience with reading circles began when I encountered *Oxford Stories for Reading Circles Bronze and Silver* (Furr, 2007a & 2007b) while collecting data for my dissertation on multimodal teacher consultation genres (Amundrud, 2017). I was impressed by the level of student engagement I perceived in the stories in the books. The designed-in scaffolding, which is how classroom goals are built into the materials used by the teacher (Gibbons & Hammond, 2005), of the discussion roles that gave each student a specific and achievable job to accomplish, and which provided guidance students could refer to so that they could complete their roles successfully, was also appealing since this scaffolding can be key to successful student performance of tasks that may be otherwise beyond their abilities. I therefore adopted these two books for the spring and autumn terms, respectively, when I started teaching at my current university, a national university of education, the following year. Beyond the reading done for the reading circles, I also implemented an Extensive Reading program using the MReader ER course management site (www.mreader.org) and the collection of graded readers the university library had already started, which they extended through my further purchases over the years. To provide more focused speaking practice, I varied each week with topical discussion questions that students answered before class, which we used for listening and pair-based discussion.

The two classes of first-year students for which I use text-based reading circles are:

Class 1 (n=10-14), which consists primarily of English Education majors, with the occasional non-English major registering because they want a higher-level class. Since most students plan to become English teachers, Class 1 students are usually around CEFR B1 level.

Class 2 (n=34-36), which consists of students from the Science Education, Physical Education, and Home Economics Education faculties. Class 2 generally has a wider range of student abilities that Class 1, ranging from CEFR A2 or even A1 students, to CEFR B1 level students equivalent or better than those in Class 1.

I had used the *Bookworms Stories for Reading Circles* for five years with no incident and would have been happy to continue using them, but they were discontinued in 2017. With Oxford not planning to replace the then-11-year-old series with anything new, and with no other publishers offering comparable materials, I was stuck. What could I do to continue weekly reading circles from 2018?

Introducing Xreading

For years previously, I had seen Paul Goldberg, the founder of Xreading, talk about it at JALT events, and had heard good things about the site from satisfied teachers. I had resisted adopting it because the Oxford Bookworms series worked well enough, and my university had a small but growing collection of paper readers that was sufficient for the 50 or so students I had in my two combined classes that used them. But with the discontinuation of the Oxford Bookworms series, Xreading became more attractive. Paul was very helpful in answering my questions about using Xreading not only for a standard ER program, but also as a platform for whole-class readers. When I saw the range of books available, which has only increased for lower levels since I first implemented Xreading in my classes in April 2018, I decided to make the switch and haven't looked back. For 2018 and 2019, I switched to Xreading for the whole-

class readers, but maintained the pair-based discussion questions for weeks when we weren't reading.

What are reading circles?

Reading circles started in the late 1990s and early 2000s as a regular and scaffolded means through which students can discuss their interpretation of the same text that they have all read using prepared roles (Daniels, 2002; Shelton-Strong, 2011). For my reading circles, I keep students in a stable group for the entire semester. Like the *han* (班) system that most Japanese students experience in grade school, in which heterogenous groups of students work together to accomplish specific tasks (Tsuneyoshi, 2020), this gives students stability and accountability. It also enables me to pinpoint students in each group that need particular attention – a point that, in my experience, can be overlooked when changing student groups every class.

Following the reading circle roles outlined in Furr (2007 a & b), I use the following four roles in each group, and each student changes their role for each story:

Discussion Leader: The Discussion Leader guides discussion, ensuring all group members can speak. To do so, they prepare 10 information questions for discussion about the story and related topics. From the spring semester, I also teach students to add follow-up questions to polar interrogatives in the homework they submit.

Connection Leader: The Connection Leader finds connections between the story and life in the real world. To that end, they write three connections that link the story and their own experiences, or those of people they know. They also prepare one question for each connection to ask their group. In my classes, I require students to write at least three sentences per answer for this role.

Passage Leader: The Passage Leader finds important or difficult passages to ask questions about. They choose three passages before class, taking screenshots of each, and give reasons for choosing each passage, using three sentences or more. They also prepare one question for each passage to ask their group.

Culture Leader: The Culture Leader finds similarities and differences between the culture in the story and the culture of contemporary Japan. For this, they write about three similarities or differences, in three sentences or more each, and prepare one question each to ask their group.

Each role is given five to eight minutes to lead the group, reading their homework responses and in some cases, asking prepared questions about the story read for that day to other group members. Throughout each term, I also teach students to expand with spontaneous follow-up questions in order to generate more student L2 talk. Since we do seven stories each semester, this means that all students perform each role at least two or three times per term.

Problems implementing Reading Circles (pre-2020)

Through years of administering reading circles, I experienced the following three problems:

What if students didn't understand the story?

While the reading circle roles introduced by Furr (2007a and b) do use designed-in scaffolding for the designated roles, all of these roles presume that each student read the story

and understood it well enough to complete their role individually. Over the years, with both the Oxford Bookworms series and with Xreading, I sometimes found that students significantly misunderstood important points in their stories which resulted in erroneous questions or confused discussions. While I was sometimes able to correct this in class, either when checking student homework or when monitoring group discussions, no doubt I did not catch every time this happened. In addition, since mixed ability groups meant that some group members *did* read and understand the story, I wondered how I might be able to design into the lessons a way for these students to help their classmates understand the materials so that they could all discuss them, primarily in English, during the reading circle activity.

What if students can't write beyond individual sentences?

Because writing pedagogy is not significantly developed in many Japanese public school English courses to such an extent that I've sometimes called it the forgotten fourth skill, with some students limited at first to responses comprising a single word or phrase at least, and perhaps one or two sentences at most, I found that many first-year students did not come to class capable of writing a coherent paragraph, which most roles demand. Since writing is the embodiment of thought, this situation seemed woefully inadequate and so I wanted to try and remedy it.

How to help error correction for weekly activities stick?

Because students often repeat the same errors as their classmates, and corrections for common mistakes are frequently required more than once, I found prior to the intervention described later in this paper that I would often repeatedly mark the same errors on students' papers even if I had corrected them in class the previous story. Before my introduction of text-based reading circles in 2020, at the beginning of every reading circle class, I used to collect student papers and assign each a quick score, and often correct one or two errors. The most frequent or notable errors found I would write on the board for whole-class correction. This I have found to be a useful way to correct some clearly discernable errors of vocabulary and spelling. But I wondered how I could help students retain error correction better, and how I could help them be able to refer to previous exercises easily since most did not take notes, even when I suggested they do so.

A "good" COVID-19 coincidence

Due to these three problems, I had been considering a change when COVID-19 forced my classes to Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT: Hodges et al, 2020) in Spring 2020. Because I taught ERT-based lessons throughout 2020 and most of 2021, I needed a solution that was manageable with the cloud-based remote teaching tools available at my institution, which were Microsoft Teams and Office 365. Text-based reading circles proved suitable to remote teaching and, since we returned to in-person classes in November 2021, it has also been usable for face-to-face lessons as well.

What is "text-based," and what are text-based reading circles?

The fundamental belief motivating my current approach to reading circles is that "people learn language through working with whole texts" (Feez, 1998). A text, in this view, is "any stretch of language which is held together cohesively through meaning" (ibid.), regardless of length. It is thanks to this inspiration from the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) tradition

that I call this activity "text-based", although I do not provide nearly the degree of designed-in or interactive scaffolding of more detailed and orthodox types of SFL-based pedagogy (e.g., Derewianka & Jones, 2016; Martin & Rose, 2013). But for the story genres students read in this course, the focus on summary writing and collaborative understanding, described below, does provide a text basis since students must engage with the entire story to complete all activities for each cycle in the syllabus, and there is a focus on clause and discourse-level language forms throughout.

Since my reading circles activities, as well as book-based Extensive Reading overall, both require students to read coherent texts in the students' L2 at length, and since the Japanese English textbooks used in grade schools generally do not prepare students for this task, I surmised leading up to the start of my text-based reading circles course implementation that this gap between my course requirements and students lack of experience reading texts, and particularly stories, in class might have been the source of some of the problems I had experienced.

I therefore decided on the following two-week cycle for each book, which is selected from Xreading Level 2 and Level 3, containing 101 to 300 headwords (Xreading, 2019) and around 2000-3000 words total:

First week: For the first week of the cycle, the students read the book and then complete for homework a summary in English of the story with their group. They also find and define seven key vocabulary terms (Appendix A). All group work is submitted by 9 AM the previous class day. In the second class of the spring semester, I introduced summarizing and presented a plot pyramid that students could use with their groups to ensure that they retold the entire story. I regularly use the plot pyramid throughout each semester to remind students of the elements of the narrative genre. I also teach the use past tense to convey stories, as well as the importance of using compound sentences to combine facts when making an effective summary.

The goal of the summary activity is to support the understanding of the story for all students through collaborative work using the summary genre, which I generally find when entereing the course that students are familiar with in Japanese, and whose format I teach and review throughout the course. Along with these summaries, the group vocabulary lists support students' collaborative learning by providing a shared resource that they can use to help understand the story, and to work on their individual roles in the second week. For the vocabulary lists, students are required to write the word alongside definitions and reasons for choosing each word that they should compose themselves. Students are encouraged to correct each other's mistakes since this is a shared group score, although in my experience, few students seem to do so. Student participation is verified through the Office 365 "Browse Version History" feature, and students receive a single group score for their work.

For our class in the first week of each cycle, we work with the summaries made by each group. For instance, since groups frequently start by paraphrasing very closely to the original text, we first work on basic summarizing skills, and practice writing more concisely. During these classes, students also do other translanguaging activities where they support each other's understanding of the L2 English text in L1 Japanese by, for instance, writing alternate endings to the story, or providing backstories for each character so that their motivations for their actions are more apparent. Based on an understanding of meaning-making as a shared resource facilitated by cooperative use of students' L1 and L2 (Garcia & Wei, 2014), these activities

provide a designated space during class time for students to confirm and extend their understanding of the texts through their L1, while also using their understanding to create new texts in their L2 (for other examples, see Cook, 2010).

Second week: In the second week, they read the story again and then take turns completing worksheets for one of four reading circle roles (Discussion Leader, Connection Leader, Passage Leader, Culture Leader) described earlier (Appendix B). They then use this worksheet to discuss the books, mainly in English, in the second week.

Error correction every week: For both weeks, I collect between 8-15 sentences from the entire class featuring errors that I believe are common, either due to my own intuition or previous experience with prior classes, or that I find widespread among students that year. At the beginning of each class, students work individually and in groups to correct these errors, which are written in a shared Excel spreadsheet, and I then provide feedback to the entire class. Students are then given time to correct their homework papers so that they can use the recast version in their class activities. I also encourage students to check with the previously shared error correction feedback spreadsheets so that they can avoid making the same mistakes.

What works in text-based reading circles, and what could be better?

To close this profile of my class intervention, I will briefly share what I think is effective in this approach, what I think the remaining problems are, and last, what changes I might make in future courses.

What works

 Homework completion. By 9 AM one class day before our discussion day, students are required to submit their completed summary and vocabulary homework for the first week, or role sheets for the second week, in their group's Office 365 folder. This gives me ample time to check that all students have completed their work, and provide feedback on errors both on student papers and on the classwork feedback exercise we do at the start of each class. It also enables me to contact any groups or individuals who did not complete their work, who were unable to submit it due to technical errors since sometimes Office 365 does not consistently synchronize files, or whose work shows significant problems, especially plagiarizing from other classmates.

Thanks to constant reminding, diligent checking, and the merciful but not infinite acceptance of late work, I have largely solved the problem I found in previous iterations of reading circles activities where students would not complete their homework and so leave their group without a participant for every role. In addition, because all reading circle homework is submitted in advance and in the cloud, students that are absent from class can still submit their homework and receive points, and their group members can still use absent students' answers for group discussions.

 Summary writing. I believe that student groups generally improve their summary writing of stories that follow simple narrative paths from the middle of the first semester, though interactive fiction and stories with codas and cliffhangers sometimes prove more challenging. Detailed research is needed to confirm this, however.

Story comprehension across student levels. As mentioned previously, one problem I have experienced in previous iterations of reading circle activities is that lower-level students in mixed-level classes sometimes did not understand the story they were assigned to read, and they did not have the explicit chance in class to get help from their more capable peers, or from me, until the day of their reading circle discussion. By giving students the opportunity to create and correct summaries and vocabulary lists together and do shared summary and reading response activities that review and deepen their understanding of the story content and related issues, the translanguaging portion of the reading circles has enhanced student understanding and made discussions more accessible to all students. I have also seen students use their summaries during discussion activities to facilitate their talk about events and people in the stories.

What could be improved

Error correction? As numerous studies in second language acquisition (SLA) have shown, while our students expect us to correct errors, and individual students may benefit from some correction, correcting repeated errors in class cannot guarantee that all students will avoid making the same errors again (Ur, 2012). For example, in both sections I repeatedly correct the omission of the modal auxiliary "would" to discuss hypothetical situations, period splitting of compound sentences with "and", "or", or "because," the mistaken use of the present instead of the past tense to talk about stories, and conditional sentences. Although all of these grammatical forms were covered in junior and/or senior high school English classes, they are regularly corrected yet mistaken by students in both sections of the course. I therefore believe this may be worth researching in more detail through, for instance, assembling the most frequent corrections from each semester and section and then coding the frequency of the occurrence of these errors in order to determine whether this corrective feedback may have any effect.

Encouraging discussion in L2. Because the text-based activities described above result in more reading and writing oriented work that permits the use of L1 Japanese, I have not given as much time to L2 fluency activities as I perhaps could. Although this may be an admission to reality that allows students who come to the course with lower oral proficiency to at least participate in the class in a more reflective and written mode, it also demonstrates the truth of the time on task principle– if students don't speak the L2 in class much, they probably won't speak the L2 very well when they do. For this reason, I have found that it remains challenging to provide translanguaging-based activities in the first week in such a way that these activities, which are explicitly designed to permit students to use their L1 in L2 focused tasks, facilitate more L2 in the reading circle discussions in the second. However, it is also unclear if L1 use in designated L2 tasks exceeds pre-intervention.

Next Steps

Since I am now finishing my third year following this syllabus, I have tried some small changes based upon these reflections discussed above. For instance, to provide more focused listening practice and summary review in the first week of each story cycle, I have added dictogloss (Wajnryb, 1990), whereby students listen to excerpts from one chapter of the book and work in groups to write a glossed summary of the excerpted text. In addition, I have also added focused fluency practice for discussion through 2-3-4 expansion practice. This is the reverse of the 4-3-2 activity, popularized by Nation (1989), in which students are pushed to expand their answers and questions in greater elaboration through each progressively longer iteration. Although I cannot yet say whether either of these changes has had a significant effect, I

do nevertheless believe that this syllabus is effective in spurring students across ability levels to read, listen, write, and speak more English than they have before in most cases, and to discuss topics of interest to them in a manner that also develops their command of summary and story genres.

Conclusion

In closing, as I continue to develop this intervention in response to and in collaboration with my students, I hope to refine research questions that may be worth later study. I hope that this brief discussion encourages other language teachers who already do Extensive Reading in general English classes like this to consider similar uses of reading circles, and I hope to see future publications that develop and extend beyond the work in progress presented here.

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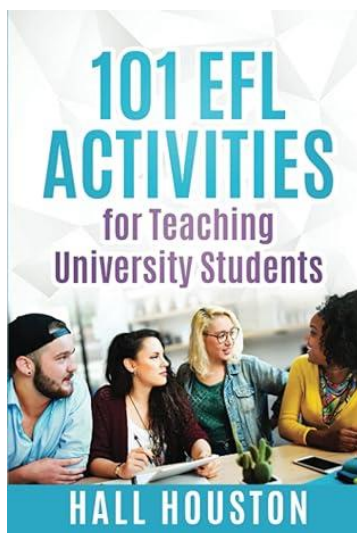
Appendix A
Access Appendix A (Week one: Summary and vocabulary homework) here:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/123bWQkCnU5CyzHBriR5yyiwC1E95NdI0/edit?usp=share_link&ouid=10530716597902743616&rtpof=true&sd=true

Appendix B
Access Appendix B (Week two: Reading circles role sheets) here:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vbsoOCdKeBz263XjCspFTVwQD7PlLlSU/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=10530716597902743616&rtpof=true&sd=true

Reviewed by: Julia Kimura

Instructors new to the university EFL teaching context sometimes face a steep learning curve. After teaching conversational English in Japan for seven years, I started teaching as an adjunct lecturer for the first time. I felt unsure about the specifics, such as planning lessons for a class of 40 students, most of whom were at the CEFR A1 level. I also felt uncertain about more nebulous problems, such as guessing and meeting students' and administrators' expectations. I wish Hal Houston had written *101 EFL activities for teaching university students* back then.

The impetus for the book was the author's desire to share tips and activities suitable for the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. There are 38 activities in the first section, "Getting off to a good start," 37 in the middle, "Maintaining motivation and interest," and 24 in the last section, "Ending the semester gracefully." In addition, each section ends with a brief list of teacher development tips for each of the above phases of the semester, including familiarising oneself with the classroom before the first meeting, personalizing self-care, and seeking improvement.

For this review, I piloted some activities in the middle of the semester, but I plan on trying out some additional activities toward the end of this academic year. Because I hope to foster a positive learning environment, I also hope to try out some activities at the beginning of the next academic year as well—in particular, in the one class of first-year students I teach. In addition, there are three themes running throughout Houston's book: the context of the university environment, group dynamics, and active learning. At my institution, as well as many others across Japan, active learning is gaining traction, and MEXT regards the teaching methodology as an alternative to traditional passive learning based on rote memorization and the teacher-centred classroom (Wanieck & Nae, 2017). Though many of the activities were already familiar to me, I found several that I had not yet tried out but was interested in piloting in two groups of third-year students I teach. Thus, the book offers something that can be adapted for use at many points.

Section 1, "Getting off to a good start," includes the popular activity of "Saying names in a circle". Everyone stands in a circle, and the first person says their name, the next person says their own name and the name of the first person, and the third person says their own name, the name of the second person, and the name of the first person, and so on. Houston's variations include adding "I'm crazy about…." Surely, this activity is familiar to most EFL instructors.

Still, it is not usually practical in my context because I typically teach one first-year class of fifty students. The remainder of my classes are slightly smaller intact groups who have already taken most of the same subjects with the same classmates and, therefore, already know each other. That said, this activity could be valuable for educators of different kinds of courses.

One activity in the first section that is appropriate for my context is "Talking about our topics". In five of the nine classes I teach this academic year, we study English for the pharmaceutical sciences with an ESP approach. We cover many topics related to the pharmaceutical sciences, such as life as a pharmacist in the United States, or about drug recalls. Houston suggests students nominate topics they would like to discuss and then vote on which ones they will discuss in groups. Talking about topics that they themselves nominate would provide students with a break from learning about English for the pharmaceutical sciences week after week.

Because I piloted the book at the midpoint of the semester, I tried an activity called "Sharing solutions and life hacks". Students write down two areas they would like advice about and two clever tips that they would like to share with their classmates. On the back of their piece of paper, students list three names of classmates that they know quite well and three names of students they would like to get to know better. Students then circulate and talk to these six people. When I tried this activity, predictably, there was one student who did not participate in the activity at all. However, when I surveyed students using a Google Form after class had ended, eight students responded that they enjoyed the activity, three students responded that they did not enjoy the activity very much, and one student responded that they did not like the activity. Reasons for these responses included the fact that students were able to talk to various people, that students felt nervous talking to people they do not usually talk with, and that students felt that they did not have much advice to give. I sent out the Google Form after the class had ended not only to save valuable classroom time for learning, but also to reassure students that they were not obligated or coerced to provide feedback on these activities.

In another activity, Houston suggested students discuss three things that they like about the class and one suggestion. I tried this with another group of students, and in their online after-class survey responses, 12 said that they enjoyed the activity, three said that they enjoyed the activity a little, and two said that they did not enjoy it. Reasons for the above included the fact that they were able to talk to both their friends as well as people that they do not usually get to talk to.

Perhaps the most humorous activity I piloted from the book was "Talk show time". The teacher creates a slide with the name of an imaginary talk show and the host's name (i.e., the teacher's). I copied the name of a popular talk show in Japan, *Eigo de shaberanaito* (英語で喋らナイト, a play on words: *Speak English night*, or, *We have to speak English*). I randomly selected a few students and called them up one by one to the front of the classroom, the "stage", and pretended to interview them as if they were international celebrities. Depending on each student's English proficiency, I asked questions varying from what they eat for breakfast every morning, what they are wearing, and why they want to be pharmacists. Though some students admitted to feeling nervous about being called up onto the stage and about speaking in English in front of their classmates, the activity provided them with the opportunity to learn about their classmates. In addition, I took the opportunity to teach phrases for the answers in Japanese that "guests" stage whispered to me, such as, in answer to why one student wanted to become a pharmacist in spite of the significant investment of time and money, she admitted that she had heard that, "Pharmacists make good money".

Overall, the three activities that I was able to pilot with students were enjoyable and worthwhile. One benefit of the book is that in addition to photocopiable worksheets at the back of the book, the publisher has provided a link so that the instructor can download copies from the publisher's website. As much as I look forward to referring to Houston's book for teaching ideas and inspiration in the future, I have two very minor complaints. First is the lack of an index. Including an index would make it easier for teachers to look up activities by keywords. Second, I wish the author had provided some pedagogical rationale or justification for including each activity. Nation (2013) recommends EFL teachers provide a balance between meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, focus on form, and fluency development. At least explaining which aspect of language learning will benefit from each activity will make lesson planning easier. However, in spite of these two minor complaints, I would heartily recommend this book to teachers looking for ideas and inspiration.

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Cover image provided by Armando Duarte

Layout finished by Kobe JALT Journal editors