

Peer Presentations of Historical Backgrounds: Setting the Context in Advanced Language Courses

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Abstract

In-class presentations exercise a useful skill for students to practice in advanced-level second-language classes. Furthermore, as literary texts and other cultural artifacts are introduced in upper-level courses, a student-centered assignment to introduce the requisite historical background can be very productive. However, student presentations can be difficult to implement, as some enthusiastic students use too much specialized vocabulary and narrate too much information, resulting in their peers being able to comprehend and use little of the presentation. On the flip side, less enthusiastic students can create presentations that are difficult to understand or offer incomplete information that is not at all pertinent to classroom discussion. My presentation will detail three aspects of my solution to the above-mentioned problematic. 1) I will offer my extremely detailed assignment guidelines, which are given to the students to prepare their presentation, along with the rubric by which they will be graded. 2) I will detail the peer grading process by which I create a grade for this assignment. 3) I will present the follow-up writing assignment I assign to capitalize on the work the students do on their own presentations, and their attention to their classmates' presentations. This particular approach to in-class presentations includes instructions that describe the assignment as peer interaction. Moreover, the peer grading process makes one-half of the students' grade based on their peers' feedback, as provided on an anonymous form. As regularly assigning extra reading or the instructor lecturing the class on historical background is less desirable, this assignment constellation allows for the introduction of pertinent contextual information through peer interaction.