**Scoring Essays To Help Learning**

**Objectives**

1. To score essay questions in a reliable way.
2. To allow students to learn content information using peer scoring.

**Material List**

1. Class sets of student essays.

**Procedure**

**On Scoring**

At first I felt guilty about allowing students to grade papers, but then I realized math teachers to do this all of the time and they do not even use a system of checks and balances.

I had each student grade 2 different papers. When students took the test they used a number instead of a name at the top of the page. I used numbers instead of names so students were not sure whose paper they were scoring and I would change the numbers from time to time so student's would not know who's paper they were scoring. When I had more than one class with the same subject this was not an issue. As they did not know which class they were scoring.

1. **Define what is to be scored.** I defined what information had to be in the paper and shared this with the class. My essay tests were loaded with content as I taught science. I did give the students the various bullet points that had to be present in the essay as a guide. (Sometimes I would allow the students to develop the points that had to be included, they were usually more picky than I was.) The scores they gave on these were very reliable, with the exception of the low kids. If they did not score well on the test they did not generally do well on scoring either. The good thing is they did improve when retested.

2. **Give them the rules** They could NOT write the score on the paper. (They put their name, the paper number, and the score on a note (Today, I would use sticky notes). Student scorers could write appropriate comments on the papers, "this is not clear" "sentences end with periods" "Paramecia live in fresh water, not salt water," etc.

3. **Give each student a paper to score.**

4. After they graded the first paper paper, they return the scored paper. **Have the student take another paper** from a stack of student papers and score that one. Logistics, have a stack of papers, have not been scored yet, have been scored once, have been scored twice to be sure that all papers are scored at least once.

5. **Record the score and the scorer.** I recorded each score and the scorers name (so I knew who scored what). I also randomly sampled some papers to score in class while they were scoring. So, in some cases, a paper received three scores. At the time. I did this by hand as I was not familiar enough with spreadsheets. Today, I would set it up in a spreadsheet.

6. When every paper had two scores or at the end of a class period I would **compare the scores,** if the scores for one paper were the same, that is the score they received. If they were off a bit I sometimes just gave them the higher score. I would determine how far off I would allow by the total number of possible points, usually 10 to 15%. Papers with vastly different scores, I scored myself. I usually found that one of the scores was very close to what I gave. An aside, I was not in assessment at the time, but this is almost exactly how essay tests are scored in professional scoring centers. The major difference is they provide anchor sets. That is another story.

I sometimes used scores A,B,C's, or 1-5 in a holistic score. However, my favorite was giving a point (or more) for each bit of information I wanted included in the answer - This was, in someways, easier for students to score and the scoring was much more reliable between the two students than using a holistic rubric. I would also allow a bit more leeway in the difference between the two scorers depending on how many points the question was worth. When the essays required opinions I usually had to use the more general holistic scoring.

Sometimes the students would be scoring two or three short essays on each paper, something I never could have done when I had 150 kids a day or more.

Added advantage, when kids had to take the test again - we were not allowed to give lower than a 50 on any work, the kids who had been there on scoring day always did much better. The kids who had missed scoring day did not do nearly as well. I think just reading other kids work helped them understand different ways to approach the work.

One year that I taught ,we had a school wide final exam. I taught all of the regular and low students. My kids out performed the "gifted students" I attribute lots of this to peer scoring.