
Small-group Discussions: **Testing Ideas with Peer-to-Peer Consultation**

Research Process Grades 7–12 (Processing Information)

Testing ideas with others is an important component of processing information. This analysis skill helps to clarify understanding and confirm the logic of ideas before students finalize their thinking. Peer-to-peer consultation involves collaboratively articulating ideas, discussing, questioning, reflecting, challenging, coaching and suggesting. The goal is to help students make meaning and develop personal understanding of the data they have assembled through their research.

Purpose

- Clarify understanding of complex issues and problems.
- Analyze data gathered in research.
- Test ideas with peers.
- Provide time to reflect on progress.

Payoff

Students will:

- confirm the logic of their thinking and conclusions.
- develop communication skills.
- learn how to question effectively.
- listen and respond constructively to alternative ideas and viewpoints.
- develop personal understanding.

Tips and Resources

- This strategy can also be applied at any stage in the research process; broadening a topic, deciding on research questions or thesis statements, evaluating resources, analyzing data collected, testing new ideas, preparing for presentations and goal setting.
- Consultation prompts in the Student/Teacher Resource, *Peer-to-Peer Consultation* are also useful for teacher to student conferences.
- Review communication and collaboration skills:
 - Listen without interrupting and be aware of other people's feelings
 - Give physical reinforcement (e.g., nods, smiles): respond to new ideas and encourage others
 - Accept responsibility for your task
- A prerequisite skill for this approach is active listening and paraphrasing. Provide reflection prompts to assist students when paraphrasing such as:
 - I think you are saying...
 - So, you are saying.....
 - Am I understanding you to say.....?
 - Are you thinking that.....
 - I heard you say that.....
 - You're suggesting that.....
- Questioning skills are also a pre-requisite skill. See *Developing Questions* in Stage 1.
- Writer's workshop is a similar strategy of peer coaching and consultation applied during the writing process to help students find their voice. See *A Community of Writers* by Steve Zemmelman and Harvey Daniels, Heinemann 1988.
- Info Tasks for Successful Learning pp. 41-43, organizer pp. 117.

Further Support

- Encourage students to apply visual analysis strategies such as webbing, charting, graphing and making notes during the consultation. See *Looking for Relationships* in Stage 3.
- Make use of electronic communication tools to set up virtual conferences (e.g., telephone, e-mail, video).



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What teachers do	What students do
<p>Before</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have students think about occasions when they want to check out their thinking or ideas (e.g., deciding which movie to go to or choosing a career path). • Discuss the benefits of making decisions, working through problems or difficult tasks with a peer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brainstorm personal decision scenarios. • Contribute to discussion of benefits of working collaboratively.
<p>During</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce the consultation process as a strategy for testing ideas and solving problems. Discuss the role of a consultant in the business world. What attributes and specialized skills does a consultant need to possess? Chart ideas. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Active listening and critical reading skills. – Communication skills - questioning, encouraging responding. • Discuss how a businessperson would prepare to use the services of a consultant. Chart ideas. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Organize all materials, research notes, visual supports. – Plan to share ideas, problems and theories. – Review and rehearse. • Provide students with reflective prompts so they can examine their peers' work in some depth. See Student/Teacher Resource, <i>Peer-to-Peer Consultation</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to the discussion of business consultation. Brainstorm attributes and skills. • Contribute to the discussion of preparing for consultation. Brainstorm preparation ideas. • Review Student/Teacher Resource, <i>Peer-to-Peer Consultation</i>.
<p>After</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have students meet with a peer to consult about their research progress to date. • Ask students to share their thesis, present their research findings and test out their theories. • The student partner responds, questions, challenges, encourages, suggests and coaches as necessary. • Students switch roles and analyze the other's research. • Both students take notes, reflect on the experience and adjust their research and ideas as necessary. See Student/Teacher Resource, <i>Thinking About Understanding</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in peer-to-peer consultation. • Share theses and research to date. • Use the prompts and appropriate additional questions to guide the consultation process. • Switch roles and continue the process. • Take notes and use visual strategies to clarify understanding. • Adjust research and ideas as necessary. • Reflect on the learning process. See Student/Teacher Resource, <i>Thinking About Understanding</i>.

Notes

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Peer-to-Peer Consultation

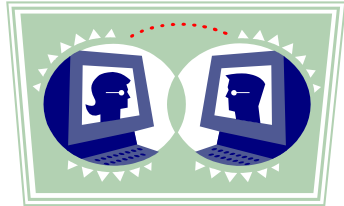
Talking about your research with a partner will help you to reflect on the information you have gathered. By talking about your work you are often able to clarify meaning for yourself. Your peers will help you by asking questions about your research. They may also be able to provide you with some tips regarding other sources you should consult or connections they see with their projects.

Some questions to help you get the consultation started:

- How did you settle on this topic for your research?
Tell me about your project?
What surprised you about your findings?
Have you discovered anything that concerns you?
Are you satisfied with the information you have gathered?
Have you investigated all possible perspectives?

Further ideas to keep the discussion going:

- What is the significance of ?
What are the possible positive/negative impacts of ?
Explain how you came to understand
How might you prove/confirm ?
Describe how
Justify/support/prove/verify
What is the big idea, key concept, moral in ?
Give an example of
What conclusions might be drawn from ?
What might happen if ?



Now switch places. Critique your partner's work and provide supportive suggestions if you can.

Reflections:

What new ideas do you have?
What changes do you plan to make?
How has the consultation process helped you?



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Thinking about Understanding

Today I consulted with.....

During the consultation I discovered.....

I had some difficulty understanding.....

I found it helpful to.....

I thought about.....

Now I understand.....

I would still like to know.....

Perhaps I can.....