

Google Docs:

The pros & cons of using 1 l-o-n-g Google Doc in breakout rooms

The idea I put forward at the most recent JAM session had been (like much of what I do!) an experiment with an online group. It had been part of a full day’s training, so I had been aiming for maximum but also varied interaction at different stages.

What I’ll do here is, firstly, give you the context, and outline what I did in this workshop, and then I’ll focus on the methodology – and discuss how it could be applied in more general ELT contexts. The workshop was very much EAP, but the idea can, I believe, be used much more widely.

THE IDEA AND HOW I USED IT FOR REAL

The workshop was about writing academic articles, and “getting published”. One area we looked at was the **abstract of a journal article**. Before participants started writing an abstract, I wanted them to see examples of published abstracts, and analyze them (genre-analysis). So, having brainstormed the ‘ingredients’ of an abstract, I demonstrated what I wanted participants to do on a Google doc. (shared screen), with an abstract from a recent *ELTJ (English Language Teaching Journal)* article, and – live – I highlighted different parts, ‘labelling’ them in the right-hand column. It started to look something like this:

Rachel's demo - completed	
<p>Abstracts: What do you need to include in the abstract?</p> <p><i>Task:</i> Look at the abstract below.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify the topic and the research question. 2. <i>THEN:</i> Identify the key ‘ingredients’ by adding comments on the right. <p>Consider also: <i>gap in the research; scope; details; personal interest, etc.</i></p> <p>English medium instruction: teachers’ challenges and coping strategies Jack K H Pun, Nathan Thomas <i>ELT Journal</i>, Volume 74, Issue 3, July 2020, Pages 247-257, https://doi.org/10.1093/eit/ccaa024</p>	
Abstract:	Comments:
<p>English medium instruction (EMI) is a growing phenomenon in many countries. Some researchers have investigated the difficulties and strategies students use to cope with EMI. However, the pedagogical challenges faced and strategies used by other key participants, teachers, have been surprisingly under-researched. This study utilizes questionnaire and interview data to identify the challenges and coping strategies used by secondary school EMI science teachers in Hong Kong. A number of challenges and strategies were reported. The authors argue that many of these challenges can be overcome with principles and strategies from ELT, as the ‘English’ in EMI is often the main issue. The most prevalent strategy reported is the use of L1. Two perspectives on L1 usage in EMI contexts are discussed. Two emergent realities are presented as possible solutions: the idealized reality and the immediate reality. Implications for teachers and suggestions for future research are provided.</p>	<p><i>Current situation / facts</i></p> <p><i>Significance</i></p> <p><i>Gap</i></p> <p><i>Question</i></p> <p><i>Meth. / scope</i></p> <p><i>Results</i></p> <p><i>implications</i></p>

The participants had, in advance, each emailed me a sample published journal article, so before the workshop, I had copy-pasted each person’s article abstract to a table like the one above – all on one continuous Google Doc., – and added their names.

During the workshop, once I had shared the link to the doc. (and the editing rights!) – they scrolled down to search for their abstract. Here, on the right, you can see the beginning of one:

You'll see that I also asked them to add in the title etc. of the journal.

ABSTRACTS	
Name: ... XYZ PLEASE ADD THE ARTICLE TITLE, AUTHOR AND JOURNAL!	
Task: This is your abstract. (1) With 1-2 partners, <u>identify its key features</u> . (2) Then ask your partners to <u>choose key words</u> for the box at the bottom (don't tell them!)	
Title: Author: Journal:	
Abstract:	Comments:
The paper assesses Black Sea politics through the lens of regionalism as the path to a security community, the effects of an outdated and dysfunctional pan-European security architecture, and the shared hegemonic potential of Russia and	

I then put participants into break-out rooms in 2s / 3s, and asked them to focus on just one of their abstracts (for now). Their task was to share their screen, and for one of them to mark up the abstract as I had done in the example. The group working on the one above chose a very nice colour-coded approach:

ABSTRACTS	
Name: ... XYZ PLEASE ADD THE ARTICLE TITLE, AUTHOR AND JOURNAL!	
Task: This is your abstract. (1) With 1-2 partners, <u>identify its key features</u> . (2) Then ask your partners to <u>choose key words</u> for the box at the bottom (don't tell them!)	
Title: <i>In quest of governance: the failures of regionalism, a pan-European security architecture and 'bigemony' in Black Sea Politics</i>	
Author: Proedrou, F	
Journal: <i>Southeast European and Black Sea Studies</i>	
Abstract:	Comments:
The paper assesses Black Sea politics through the lens of regionalism as the path to a security community, the effects of an outdated and dysfunctional pan-European security architecture, and the shared hegemonic potential of Russia and	Topic Aim significance topic

So far so good. I won't elaborate on the details, but afterwards, we had everyone back in the main room, and briefly went through some of the abstracts – noticing 'ingredients' which had been missed out, or commenting on the ones which were clear and most effective. (The workshop itself did not allow time for participants to write a draft abstract; that will be Workshop part II!)

MY THINKING BEHIND THE METHODOLOGY, AND HOW IT COULD BE APPLIED MORE WIDELY

In anticipating how this was going to work, I decided to do the following:

- put all abstracts on 1 page, so that the participants were free to scroll up and down to a) see each other's abstracts & choose one easily, b) see others working on theirs in real time.
- copy-paste their abstracts, and add their names (to avoid wasting valuable workshop time)
- .. but not do all the leg-work: they had to add the article title, etc. (some didn't)
- add in a 'spare' page-break after each sample abstract, so that if in doing the task, they wrote more and went over the page, they wouldn't 'push down' the text of those working on a page further down. (This proved invaluable!)

Based on the above, **I / the teacher** was able to:

- check participants were on task at glance, and under just one link, rather than several
- watch 'live' as participants worked on their abstracts
- add my own comments (in this case, I didn't – it didn't seem appropriate)
- feedback on their work afterwards in the main room, - either commenting myself, or asking others to comment / add anything (this would also work on separate documents)

Based on the above, **participants** were also able to:

- delete anything – or all of it
- delete their own work at any stage (including after the workshop) (possible; disappointing)
- have access to over 12 mostly very good samples of abstracts, marked up: some mentioned this would be especially useful when they come to write their own

FEEDBACK & DISCUSSION

As this had been an experiment, I was curious to know what my breakout room-mates liked, or could suggest for improvements, or alternatives, and also – especially – how else this could work, i.e. students working in pairs or small groups on their 'own' text, but on one full page Google Doc.

I received some very useful **feedback and comments***, e.g.

- giving sts a choice (which text to work on, 'what' to highlight) promotes learner autonomy)
- being able to see each other's work might help cross-breed good ideas
- the colour coding is a great idea
- it's a good way to highlight (a wide range of) features of a text
- teens could be distracted with access to others' work; good with 'mature' adults
- YLs would need to know they need to be respectful, and not write inappropriate comments

** Thanks to ZoomRoomMates Rachel T & Chris MS 😊*

Other uses:

- other genres you could do this with, e.g. a letter of complaint; a short story; etc.
- students could highlight narrative tenses in a short story
- .. or prepositions, or collocations or ..
- Each group could highlight something different, but be working on the same text
- Many, more ideas, e.g. mark up / highlight phrases they 'like' in a tapescript, or TED video-script; 'spot the mistake' and correct them; rewrite sentences informal to formal, etc.

NB:

1. It takes a while to copy-paste individual texts, - but if you were having students working on the same text, it would be very quick.
2. The Google Doc link can be shared in advance, or in the chatbox before they go into breakout rooms. Make sure you highlight this, so they know to open the page before!
3. Remember to give them editing rights before you share the link!
4. It's good to get students to add comments on the part of the text they were working on, rather than – as the teacher – you going through each one (which is quicker, but far less effective and less personal). Make sure you give students time to read each other's, to speak and comment. (I didn't allow enough time for this!)
5. Using one long Google Doc. obviously wouldn't be suitable if you were running a test – students could too easily cheat by scrolling up or down to see each other's work.
6. ... and I'm sure there are other things to remember!

Thanks for the opportunity, and the feedback!