

Self-Assessment Through Reflection

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Reference Data

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This study aims to observe the benefits of reflective practices for corrective feedback in the classroom through examining qualitative and quantitative data. It is a study that focuses on how students reflect on their performance in discussion tests, and if they can “notice” their errors in accordance with the test and course aims. Students were asked to reflect on their performance after watching the videos of their discussion tests and answer certain questions. The purpose was to have a “focused” reflection wherein students were asked to consider the aims of the test (e.g.: use of target discussion skills). In the final prompt, a question was added to elicit and understand students’ perceptions of this task. Most participants found reflection to be helpful in noticing their strengths and weaknesses. The final survey also demonstrated a mostly positive attitude toward the task.

本研究は、質的および量的な研究データの検証を通して、教室における訂正フィードバックのための省察的実践の効果を観察することを目的としている。学生がディスカッションテストでのパフォーマンスをどのように振り返り、テストやコースの目的に沿って自分の間違いに「気づく」ことができているかどうかに関心を持った質的研究である。学生は、ディスカッションテストのビデオを見た後、自分のパフォーマンスを振り返り、プロンプトの質問に答えるよう求められた。その目的は、テストの目的（例：目標とするディスカッションスキルの使用）を考慮した「集中的な」振り返りを行うことであった。最後のプロンプトでは、このタスクに対する生徒の認識を引き出すための質問を加えた。ほとんどの参加者は、自己省察が自分の長所と短所に気づくのに役立ったと答えた。また、最終的なアンケートでは、この課題に対してほぼ肯定的な態度が示された。

This paper focuses on the potential for self-assessment through the implementation of a reflection task as conducted in an English discussion class with students at a university in Japan. The authors of this paper investigated students’ ability to identify and notice their own mistakes when using the target language, while watching videos of their performance in their discussion tests throughout the semester. For this study, qualitative and quantitative data were collected in the form of students’ reflections. A survey was also conducted to analyze the effectiveness of the reflections in encouraging self-assessment among students, as well as to examine their perceptions of the task itself. This study found that students viewed the reflection activity favorably, and were able to assess their performance using a set of guidelines.

Literature Review

There are various definitions of self-assessment, with most of them including the elements of “noticing,” “paying attention to,” and reflecting on and regulating one’s own performance, and they are usually quite broad (Ellis, 2009; Schmidt, 1990, 2001, 2012). Oftentimes, “self-assessment” is closely associated with different forms of evaluation such as self-grading and self-rating (Brown & Harris, 2012). However, the definition of self-assessment suggested by Andrade and Valtcheva (2009) as “a process of formative assessment” is more suitable for our study objectives, as it emphasizes the reflective and formative nature of our task. Similarly, McMillan and Hearn (2008) observed that self-assessment has three main components which include students’ ability to identify their learning strategies, to provide themselves with feedback through reflection and then act on it accordingly to enhance their performance. The key element of both definitions is the opportunity for the students to reflect on their performance and then make certain adjustments to have better results in the following lessons.

Andrade and Valtcheva (2009) suggested three steps for self-assessment: “articulating expectations,” “self-assessing,” and “revising” (p.14). These can be complemented by

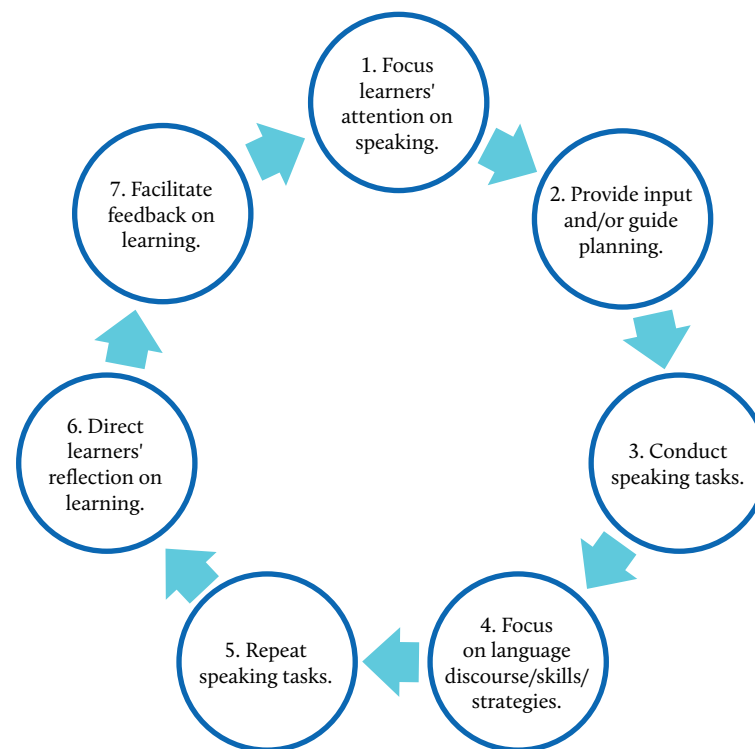
Barnawi's (2010) three task stages of "pre-noticing," "while-noticing," and "post-noticing" (pp. 213-15). In the first step, the instructor is to articulate their expectations of the students by presenting guidelines and models to prepare them for the self-assessment activity. In the second "self-assessing" step, students reflect on their progress, strengths, and weaknesses by accomplishing the self-reflection task using certain prompts. In the final "revising" step, learners look over their performance in the previous tasks and set their goals for how to improve in the following lessons. They also have opportunities to practice and correct their mistakes through smaller post-noticing activities. Barnawi (2010) recommended doing these stages collaboratively to provide support and additional guidance to students.

Many authors support self-assessment as a tool to improve the learning process. Some suggest that students can gain certain insights when participating in the assessment (Ishii & Baba, 2003). According to Klenowski (1995), self-assessment leads to improved academic performance because of increased self-regulating skills, motivation, and engagement. Andrade and Valtcheva (2009) stressed that self-assessment leads to higher academic achievements due to the fact that students set their own course objectives and make plans to achieve them. Several benefits of self-reflection were observed by Krystalli and Arvanitis (2018). When students have an opportunity to reflect on their own performance, it increases their autonomy, makes them think about their own learning, and also helps them to assess their own progress and eventually become more responsible learners. Such practices also alleviate the teachers' burden when it comes to giving feedback by providing more examples and the opportunity to give more focused comments to students.

However, self-assessment is not without its limitations. The most common concern about this practice is associated with the lack of accuracy in correlation between the student self-assessment and teacher assessment (Campbell et al., (2001). Barnawi (2010) proposed another significant challenge of focusing learners' attention on the mistakes we want them to notice instead of what is most obvious. Students might avoid putting in additional effort to look at their work more deeply and critically. In a study conducted by Mackey (2006) on interactional feedback among English language learners, it was found that many students focused on mistakes that were different from the target items. They noticed problems with language structures that were already familiar to them or problems with vocabulary, but often missed feedback associated with the target language or new forms introduced by their teacher or peers. The additional stress of time management on teachers to conduct these additional self-assessment activities in the classroom was also noted.

Figure 1

"The Teaching-Speaking Cycle" (adapted from Goh & Burns, 2012, p. 153)



As emphasized by Goh and Burns (2012) in their "teaching-speaking cycle" (Figure 1), it is important to encourage students to reflect on what they have learned in the classroom and then provide appropriate feedback. They recommend that teachers conduct self-reflection activities individually, or in pairs or small groups (to save time and reduce the pressure on students) to allow learners to think more deeply about their language use and to identify their strengths and weaknesses regarding their understanding and application of the target language. Guidelines are provided for these reflection activities, including asking students to think about what they learned, how it helped them, their

successful uses of the target language, where they need to improve and how they plan to improve their language skills. Also, having students record their responses verbally or in writing can be helpful for the final stage of the cycle of giving personalized feedback to students about their performance and suggestions for improvement.

Research Questions

The aim of the study was to show the benefits of reflection in promoting self-assessment and noticing among second language learners. The students' perceptions of the reflection process were also considered. To investigate these issues, the following research questions were formulated:

- RQ1. Does reflection encourage noticing of the positives and negatives of students' performance in the test according to the lesson objectives?
- RQ2. What are students' perceptions of the benefits of reflection?

Methodology and Participants

The participants in this study were 198 first-year students of various majors at a private university in Tokyo, Japan. All participants gave their informed consent for data to be collected, and this study was reviewed and approved by the university's research committee. All the students participating in this study were enrolled in a mandatory English discussion course which aims to develop students' fluency and discussion skills. The researchers of the study also taught this EFL course.

All students of this course are divided into four levels of ability based on their TOEIC listening and reading scores: Level I (TOEIC 680 or above), II (480-679), III (280-479) and IV (below 280) and are placed with students of a similar level. During the semester, students learn various discussion and communication skills, and practice them through discussions on given topics in regular and test lessons. Discussions usually take place in groups of three to five participants. Students are tested three times during the semester and receive feedback on group performance from their teacher. The course consists of 11 regular lessons and three discussion test sessions. However, because of the shift to online classes and some organizational adjustments due to the Covid19 pandemic, the semester was cut to 12 weeks instead of 14. The discussion tests took place during weeks four, nine and 11 (refer to the syllabus in Appendix A). It is worth mentioning that during face-to-face classes the feedback given after each test was mostly teacher-fronted. Thus, to make it more student-centered we assigned an individual reflection task after each

discussion test (see Appendix B for the task prompt). After the first test, we realized that many students struggled to remember the details of their performance. For this reason, we modified the format of the task by recording the tests and asking the students to watch the videos and then complete the task (Appendix B).

As recommended by Andrade and Valtcheva (2009), when implementing a self-assessment task, we followed a three-step procedure. Firstly, we clearly stated our objectives while assigning the task and explained to the students what was required from them. In the second step, the students were asked to assess their performance by answering the prompt questions. They were given the option to either answer the questions in writing (at least 150 words) or to audio-record their responses for 2-3 minutes. After reading or listening to their reflections, we gave feedback on the students' strengths and weaknesses in the test. This step was then followed by what Andrade (2019) defined as a "revision" wherein students were able to review their performance, allowing them the opportunity to adjust and self-correct their performance in the subsequent tests and classes. After the final discussion test, we asked them to answer an additional question in the reflection task and to also fill out a survey in which they could evaluate the effectiveness and usefulness of the activity (see Appendix C for the survey).

Results and Discussion

Reflection and Student Performance

Table 1
Quality of Reflections

Reflection	Focused	Partially Unfocused	Unfocused	Missing
Discussion Test 1	41.6%	48.2%	9.13%	1.01%
Discussion Test 2	38.07%	52.2%	5.58%	4.06%
Discussion Test 1	42.1%	48.7%	7.61%	1.59%

As discussed above, students submitted their reflections for each test based on three questions asking them to assess their own performance (see Appendix B). Once students submitted their reflections on the online learning management system, the data from all students were collated in a shared drive and reviewed by both authors. As we were

collecting data from different classes, to increase researcher reliability, we assessed each other's and our own submissions together. Since the results of the discussion tests were determined for the most part by the students' ability to use the discussion skills frequently and appropriately, we decided to focus our review of the submissions according to these objectives. When the task was explained to the students in class, they were asked to reflect only on their use of the skills required for the test, and not worry about their grammar or fluency as those aspects were not being graded. For the purpose of this study, the responses to the reflection task were separated into three categories based on our evaluation:

- a. Focused - students discussed their performance using only the test objectives.
- b. Partially unfocused – students mostly focused on the test objectives, but also prioritized more general aspects of their language abilities.
- c. Unfocused - students did not mention the test objectives or did not complete their reflection task after the test.

Looking at data in Table 1, we can see that over 89% of reflections (including focused and partially unfocused responses) centered on the skills being assessed in the tests. In fact, more students were able to submit focused reflections by the final discussion test. Less than 10% of the students submitted reflections that did not mention the test objectives, and the number of unfocused reflections reduced significantly during the second test. While it increased during the third test, the number was still lower than for the very first reflection submitted by the students. Some students were absent or did not submit their reflections – two for the first test, eight from the second, and three from the third test. Thus, overall, we can infer that most students were able to understand the reflection assessment and execute it fairly successfully.

In addition, around 42% of submissions for the first and last tests were focused. For instance, students wrote:

- *Giving opinions of discussion skills can be better next time. It's mainly because I said 'I agree with...' only once*
- *...it was difficult to find the right time to react, so I couldn't react well"; "Also, asking for example was most difficult for me*
- *I could show my opinion in each topic using phrases such as 'from the point of view of {X}' and 'one advantage is...'*

These examples demonstrate that students were able to notice their strengths and weaknesses with the help of reflection (Goh & Burns, 2012). However, the number of

exceptional reflections reduced to 38.07% for the second test. Additionally, over 48% of the students submitted reflections which partially focused on their general language skills such as vocabulary or grammar. Some students reflected:

- *...it was difficult to change my thought into English*
- *I want to speak English more fluently...so, I need to memorize more English words by System English Word right now.*

Students were provided with preparation material and the test questions in advance and were instructed that their fluency and grammar were not being assessed. While these are extremely important issues that were addressed in the classroom, since the objective of the discussion test was to use the target discussion skills in an appropriate manner to convey meaning to each of their group members, the reflections above were classified as unfocused.

Over 52% of the students' reflections were partially unfocused with references to their general language ability during the second test, showing that they might have struggled with the topic or content of that discussion more than the other tests. For example, some students commented on the increased difficulty level:

- *Today's question was not a question that could be answered with two choices, so it was difficult to speak the sentence following 'As you said...'*
- *This discussion test was a little difficult for me. I must use a lot of skills which I learned in class, so it was a little hard*
- *It was a little difficult because there were many things to do.*

Finally, while the number is very low, a small percentage of students (5.58% - 9.13%) were unable to meet the requirements of the reflection assignment. These submissions barely, if at all, mentioned the discussion skills they could or could not use during the test. These students chose to focus on unrelated skills or their general language ability. In some cases, these submissions were incomplete. While one student focused on their demeanor, *First, I laughed a lot. I think my face gave them to relax. It is one of the communication skills*, another gave the same answer to all three reflection questions: *I have no idea*. These unfocused reflections could have stemmed from a lack of understanding, insufficient language ability to express themselves clearly, or a lack of motivation among the students.

Overall, the quantitative data in Table 1 show us that the majority of the students were able to notice their strengths and weaknesses in accordance with the test objectives by submitting focused and partially unfocused reflections. There were also students who

acknowledged that the task helped them to improve in a new test. For instance, some students observed:

- *I think good during my discussion was communication skills. I tried to take a reaction with a voice*
- *Questions can be better next time. I couldn't ask some questions today*
- *...next time I would like to disagree with someone's idea or opinion*
- *I asked follow-up questions which I couldn't have done at the last discussion test*

This supports Andrade's (2019) thesis of self-assessment being a powerful formative tool for self-correction for the subsequent performances. Students were asked to review their previous reflections before their second and third tests, and were also provided with some preparation time in class before the test began, where it was suggested that they recheck their reflections to prioritize the skills they needed to improve. It is also important to remember that students were being tested on different skills each time, but communication skills and questions, as seen in the examples above, remained a constant in each test. Therefore, as a tool for self-assessment, this reflection task could be mostly considered a success.

Student Perceptions

Table 2
Findings from End-of-semester Survey

Construct	Usefulness	Attitude
Cronbach's α	.679	.758
Mean	4.28	4.25
Standard Deviation	0.6	0.76
Mode	4	4
Median	3	3
Inter-Item Correlations	0.15	0.20
No. of Items	5	6
Confidence Interval (95%)	4.28 \pm 0.0844	4.25 \pm 0.107

Note: N = 194

At the end of the semester students completed a survey requiring them to assess the reflection activity for how useful they found it in terms of their performance in class and how they felt about completing the activity after each test (see Appendix C). The survey consisted of 11 Likert scale questions, with 1 being "strongly disagree" and 5 being "strongly agree".

Before completing this survey, students reviewed their reflections. In the survey, five questions were aimed at students' perceptions of the usefulness of the reflection activity. The reliability of the statements as per Cronbach's α is .679 which indicates a slightly weak reliability of the survey items (Field, 2009; Pallant, 2013). The lower reliability is because this was a preliminary study with questions designed by the researchers themselves. Many struggled with communication skills that required active participation, since conversational elements such as showing reactions were unfamiliar to these students, who had been exposed primarily to teacher-fronted classrooms before entering university (Brown & Muller, 2014; Reidsema et al., 2017). Thus, the students had different views of which skills they were able to perceive as improved, and which ones they still struggled with at the end of the semester. Nonetheless, most students agreed that they found the activity to be quite useful.

The remaining six statements were set with the purpose of gauging students' attitudes towards how beneficial the reflection process was for them. The reliability of statements is much higher in this case with α = .758. This indicates a strong reliability of the items (Field, 2009; Pallant, 2013). A mean of 4.25 demonstrates that most students reported finding the task useful. Positive responses to statements such as "It was useful to think about my performance before receiving feedback from the teacher" or "I think this assignment was a good way to check how I improved in discussion class" show that students perceived this activity as a useful addition to their coursework. The statement "It was easy for me to talk about what was good and what could be better in my discussion test." received fewer positive responses and more neutral ones. This suggests that while students might have found the activity helpful, it was fairly challenging for them to execute this task. The ambiguity of this item might have also resulted in more neutral responses.

In an effort to gather further personalized responses from students, an additional question was posed to them in the reflection task for the final discussion test:

"Was it helpful for you to reflect on your performance in each discussion test? Why / Why not? (e.g., discussion skills became better, communication skills improved)"

Table 3
Student Perceptions of the Benefits of Reflection

Themes	Occurrences
Notice strengths and weaknesses	67
Improve skills	60
Watch videos after class	9
Look back at the reflection	20
Reflect to remember skills better	10
More confidence	5
Not helpful	4

Most students submitted responses in favor of the reflection task. Upon closer analysis, there were multiple recurring themes, as outlined in Table 3. Sixty-seven students found that they were able to notice their strengths and weaknesses by reflecting on their performance. For instance, one student wrote:

- *...we can find our good or bad point...thanks to teacher's recording, we can do better reflection and practice until the next test!*

Sixty respondents said that analyzing their activity helped them improve their skills:

- *...I realized that I was only nodding and not responding aloud. Thus, I think reflecting on the test results makes me aware of my lack of skills.*
- *Because I do my best every time of the test, so without doing the reflection I would not analyze my activity and could not improve my discussion skills so much.*
- *I think it is helpful for me to reflect my discussion. It is because I can analyze my discussion objectively through reflecting the discussion.*
- *...the reflection which I have wrote about each discussion test was ...helpful. I could analyze my bad point and improve it.*
- *...there were a lot of things I didn't do on the first test that I could have improved on the next test.*
- *Reflection...was helpful for me. That's because I can look back on my discussion... objectively and my discussion skill became better.*

- *...I can improve the next discussion by reflecting on my performance.*

We can see from these responses that many learners felt that they could not only “notice” aspects of their performance, but they could also act on their mistakes before their next test (Schmidt, 2012).

Moreover, when sharing their perceptions, nine students mentioned that watching the videos was particularly beneficial for them:

- *...we can't feedback ourselves without recording video.*

Twenty participants said that they looked back at the reflections before each test to help them prepare. There were also ten replies which focused on the fact that reflections helped them remember skills better. As a result of this activity, five students gained confidence:

- *...this makes my problem clear, and I can try to correct the problems in the next discussion. It is better to do discussion having an objective.*

As can be seen from these comments, the task encouraged a certain degree of learner autonomy as students were involved in a more meaningful activity which helped them set measurable objectives (Krystalli & Arvanitis, 2018).

On the other hand, there were four students who gave a negative response to the question and provided the following reasons for validating not finding this task helpful:

- *I'm too much nervous so I can't reflect on my performance ... I was too incompetent to reflect on my performance...it was not helpful for me. I can find some bad points ..., but I can't understand how to solve their problems. For example, ... I don't know how to come up with my idea immediately.*

As mentioned earlier, one of the limitations of self-assessment is that students might struggle with language proficiency or motivation, hindering their ability to express themselves clearly. Perhaps, adding more peer support and collaborative reflection activities would help them generate more ideas and vocabulary to express themselves more clearly (Barnawi, 2010).

Overall, the survey and the additional question in the final test prompt elicited evidence to show that most students considered that they benefited from the reflection process by being able to observe their performance and review their target language use. While some might have struggled due to a lack of motivation or low English ability, most participants had a positive outlook.

Limitations

This study is not without its limitations. Firstly, it was only conducted in the context of a discussion class. There was a predefined curriculum covering specific discussion skills, which meant that we had to confine the reflections to the target skills (see Appendix C). Furthermore, the skills tested (or weighted more heavily) for each of these assignments were different. This meant that it was difficult to track students' feedback uptake across the semester through their reflections and discussion test scores. Additionally, the reflections, while written or spoken, had to be submitted in English which restricted some students' ability to voice their opinions and elaborate on their performance. Finally, all classes were moved online due to the coronavirus pandemic. As a result, the activity had to be modified to reduce the time for peer interaction, and instead students were asked to submit a delayed reflection based on the video recordings of their discussions, which burdened students with a higher workload due to multiple assignments from all their online classes, and this could have led to reduced motivation to work to the best of their abilities.

Conclusion

The outcomes of this study suggest that self-assessment is possible through reflection, as many learners reported that they found post-task reflection beneficial. Furthermore, as teachers, it can be particularly useful to observe how students perceive their own level and performance before providing more specific and individualized feedback.

There are many possible avenues for further adaptations based on this study that could be used as class activities. For instance, in a face-to-face environment the procedure for the above reflection task could be conducted orally in pairs or groups in class after students complete their test. It could also be done individually in writing by answering the questions we provided in our online reflection task. Considering differences in L2 ability, lower-level students could be allowed to complete this task in their L1 in order to gather more informative qualitative data. A further step could be to provide an opportunity for immediate practice, correction, and uptake after the reflection for students to understand how to improve on their mistakes. All such activities could be employed to collect data for further research purposes. Although the possibilities in this field are vast, it is hoped that the activities and analysis presented in this paper can offer indications for educators looking to incorporate more reflection and learner autonomy into their classrooms.

Bio Data

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Appendix A

Discussion Class Syllabus

Course Schedule:

Week	Content	Discussion/Communication Skills	Lesson
1	Course Introduction	Communication Skills Follow-up Questions	Lesson 1
2	The Importance of Communication	Opinions	Lesson 2
3	Entering University	Supporting Opinions	Lesson 3
4	Becoming Independent	Review; Comprehension; Discussion Test 1	Lesson 5
5	Studying Abroad	Connecting Ideas	Lesson 6
6	The Globalization of Japanese Culture	Joining a Discussion	Lesson 7
7	Japanese and Foreign Customs	Changing Topic	Lesson 8
8	Learning a Foreign Language	Review; Paraphrasing; Discussion Test 2	Lesson 9
9	Entering the Workforce	Different Viewpoints	Lesson 10
10	Social Media	Balancing Opinions	Lesson 11
11	Social Issues	Review; Clarification; Discussion Test 3	Lesson 13
12	Review of all topics	Review of all skills	Lesson 14

Appendix B

Reflection Task (Discussion Tests 1 and 2)

Please answer the following questions:

1. How was your discussion test - good / so-so / not good? What was easy / difficult?
2. What was good during your discussion? (e.g., discussion skills, communication skills, questions, ideas, disagreeing, balance)
3. What can be better next time? (e.g., discussion skills, communication skills, questions, ideas, disagreeing, balance)

Speak for at least 2-3 minutes. Try to use **examples from your discussion test** if you can. You can **record** your answers in any format on the phone, tablet or computer.

OR

You can **write** answers to these questions. Your assignment should be **at least 150 words**. You can use **Microsoft Word, Pages or Google Docs** to do this assignment. You can also use **Write Submission** and type your answers directly.

Reflection Task – Discussion Test 3

Please answer the following questions:

1. How was your discussion test - good / so-so / not good? What was easy / difficult?
2. What was good during your discussion? (e.g., discussion skills, communication skills, questions, ideas, disagreeing, balance)
3. What can be better next time? (e.g., discussion skills, communication skills, questions, ideas, disagreeing, balance)
4. Was it helpful for you to reflect on your performance in each discussion test? Why / Why not? (e.g., discussion skills became better, communication skills improved)

Speak for at least 2-3 minutes. Try to use **examples from your discussion test** if you can. You can **record** your answers in any format on the phone, tablet or computer.

OR

You can **write** answers to these questions. Your assignment should be **at least 150 words**. You can use **Microsoft Word, Pages or Google Docs** to do this assignment. You can also use **Write Submission** and type your answers directly.

Appendix C

Survey about Reflection Task (Google Form)

Please answer the following questions based on the Post-Lesson Task for your Discussion Tests.

After every test you answered three questions:

1. How was your discussion test - good / so-so / not good? What was easy / difficult?
2. What was good during your discussion? (e.g., discussion skills, communication skills, questions, ideas, disagreeing, balance)
3. What can be better next time? (e.g., discussion skills, communication skills, questions, ideas, disagreeing, balance) What can you do to improve the next discussion?

Survey Statements

1. This assignment was helpful.
2. I could improve my discussion skills for the next class / test by doing this assignment. (e.g., balancing opinions, different viewpoints, connecting ideas)
3. This assignment helped me improve my communication skills for the next class / test (e.g., reactions / checking understanding)
4. This assignment helped me see my strengths and weaknesses in the discussion test.
5. I was able to think about what was good and what skills I missed in my discussion test.
6. We could improve the balance of our discussion in the next class/test.
7. I think it was useful to reflect on my discussion test.
8. It was good to get feedback from the teacher after I thought about my own performance.
9. It is helpful to think about our performance on our own before we get feedback / comments from the teacher.
10. It was easy to talk about what was good and what could be better in my discussion test.
11. I think this assignment was a good way to check how I improved in the discussion class.