

Cooperative Learning SOS

If you experience difficulties with cooperative learning, don't give up! Ask yourself the questions below and try the suggested solutions. Click the embedded links to help you find the corresponding resources on www.lauracandler.com.

- Do my students **care** about each other as individuals? (If not, try using more quick & easy teambuilder and classbuilder activities to promote class spirit.)
- Do my students have the **social skills** needed to participate in cooperative learning activities? (If not, teach a new social skill each week and keep your activities simple and structured. Visit the Social Skills page for lesson ideas.)
- Do my students **want** to participate in cooperative learning activities? (If not, share with students the rationale for using cooperative learning activities. . . academics, skills for employment, etc. If necessary, switch to structured independent activities with lots of paperwork . . . then try again later!)
- Are my students responding to the **Quiet Signal** in 3 to 5 seconds? (If not, reteach the Quiet Signal and use a reward system to reinforce.)
- Do my students have trouble **following directions** during cooperative activities? (If so, be sure to give directions in bite-sized pieces and model with a team. Write the activity directions on the overhead or a chart.)
- Are a **few individuals** causing problems within their teams? (If so, remove the individuals and give them plenty of seatwork activities while the others are doing cooperative learning activities. Give them a chance to earn their way back into the group in a day or two.)
- Are my students on task but far **too noisy**? (If so, use the Erase a Letter technique or Team Stop Signs found on the Classroom Management page.)
- Are some students **not participating** in team activities while others are **dominating** the group? (Analyze the structure of the activity and make sure your directions require equal participation. You can use roles or have students take turns to encourage them to do their fair share. If possible, switch from a team activity to a partner activity to actively involve more students.)

Note: Remember that most cooperative learning activities are intended for practice and should not be graded. At the end of a team or partner activity, use a quick quiz to check for individual understanding. If you do grade an activity, make sure you are grading each person's contribution rather than giving a team grade.