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Teaching and assessing student writing in two-stage team assignments

A core learning goal of my applied math courses is improving teamwork and written communication skills. One way that I teach and assess these skills are writing-focussed team assignments. I have used such assignments over the last three years in both online and in-person classes that range from 50 to 900 students. More recently, I expanded these assignments into a two-stage process where students first receive feedback on a draft that allows them to reflect on their writing before making their final submission.

In my talk I will explain what priorities and learning goals influence the design of these assessments, how I ensure that all students in each team contribute to the assignment, what kind of rubric I use so that students can get a high writing score even if they have mathematical mistakes, and how TAs provide individual feedback to students.

Of course, no design is without fault and I will also elaborate on the challenges I am facing in the facilitation of these assignments. Two examples are dealing with tricky team dynamics, as well as effectively communicating to students that good writing is not necessarily about being mathematically correct, but instead much more about understandably verbalizing your thought process.