
Making Group Work...Work!

New Faculty Orientation

Why Groups?

Research overwhelmingly confirms that we learn more, gain multiple perspectives, increase our problem solving abilities, and improve collaborative and conflict management skills when we work in groups.

The key is to set student groups up for success through defined goals, holding each member accountable, creating an interdependent assignment, and offering clear assessment guidelines.

#1: Purpose Unclear

Problem: Students do not understand why they are being asked to work in groups.

Solution: Show students how the activity and process connect with course goals. Demonstrate the value of collaboration during and after an activity.

- Ask the same question before and after small group activity
 - Point out insights that emerge from group discussion
 - Structure group activities for interdependence
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#2 - No Practice

Problem: Students are put in groups to work on a major project, yet students have never worked together before. No time for learning how to work as a team.

Solution: Use a low-stakes assignment or activity to help them practice working together.

- Short worksheet or paper
 - Group quiz
 - In-class activity
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#3 - Undefined Roles

Problem: Students are given a task but no roles. This leads to students who dominate, withdraw, or blindly follow. It can also lead to power inequities and exclusion.

Solution: Provide clearly defined roles that have specific responsibilities and goals.

Tip: Consider having students change roles if the project allows.

Let's Try It

Activity: Forming a Team

Manager: Assign roles to each team member.

Everyone: Go around the table and share your role and your responsibilities.

- Make sure everyone is clear on who is doing what.

Tip: Carefully select the “Manager”

Activity: Know Your Team

Goal: Understand your team dynamics while also practicing your roles.

Each person:

Name one strength you bring to the team

(I am a good listener)

Name one characteristic your team should be aware of

(I don't make decisions quickly, so please give me time to think)

Describe how you handle conflict

(I shut down)

Managers: 2 minutes per person

Recorders: Take notes

Reflectors: Put info together-
how would you characterize
your team?

Presenters: Share your analysis
with the group

#4 - One Group Grade

Problem: Group project has one grade which is shared by everyone in the group

Solution: Split project grade into 3 sections

- Individual Contribution = 70%
- Group Final Product = 20%
- Teamwork = 10%

Tip: Don't wait for the final grade to give feedback.

#5 - No Student Input

Problem: Students are not given an opportunity to comment on each other's performance (or their own).

Solution: Include peer assessment as part of the group project

- Have students assess each other (roles helps with this)
- Have students self-assess as well

Tip: Provide guidelines for effective feedback.

#6- No Guidance on Conflict

Problem: Students are not equipped to handle conflict in a professional or appropriate manner. Leads to fighting, shutting members out, and unfinished work.

Solution: Give students some guidance on handling conflict

- Handout phrases and strategies to navigate conflict
- Assign a group mediator and provide resources

Tip: Share [videos](#) and have students discuss.

Summary

Align group work with your learning goals

Allow students to practice teamwork before major assessment

Assign roles to help balance team work

Assess group work in multiple ways (e.g. peer and self-assessments)

Provide support with conflict management
