**Facilitating Group Work**
A guide to good practice


---

**Why Group Work?**

Group work can generate collaboration among students, learning at a deeper level, better information retention, and the ability of higher grades. It can promote the life skills and graduate attributes including teamwork, project management, responsibility, negotiation, leadership, communication, self-awareness, and reflection.

---

**Managing Groups**

“...it is a rare student team that doesn’t eventually run into problems with one or more of its members. The most common problems involve a member who refuses to do their share of the work but try to get the same grades as those more responsible team members” (Oakley et al., 2004)

Several strategies are proposed to address this “free-riding” issue:

**Warnings:** Often this opportunity for all parties to air grievances can be enough to resolve issues. Non-performing students are issued a warning.

**Penalties:** If a warning is ineffective marks can be reduced for that individual.

**Resolution:** In situations where disruptive team members refuse to actively engage, the offending team member can be expelled.

---

**Group Selection**

A fundamental decision is whether groups should be self-select or whether the lecturer should assign students to groups, randomly or actively. Randomly assigned groups, all students are recognised equally and encouraged to contribute and strive to work smoothly and effectively. On the other hand, randomly assigned groups may lead to clash of culture in the groups.

Where the lecturer plays an active role in selection an inclusive balance can be achieved across academic ability, gender, and cultural diversity. Group size ranges from three to five students is suitable for most assignments.

---

**Group Preparation**

It is important to establish expectations within groups to enable their effective functioning. Mechanisms such as Team Policy Agreements and Team Expectations Agreements can be used to set clear expectations at the start of group work.

Team Policy Agreements provide guidelines on effective team functioning: team roles, responsibilities, procedures surrounding assignment submission, and approaches for addressing uncooperative group members.

Team Expectations Agreements seek to unite the group with a shared set of realistic expectations produced by the members. Students decide grade from pool of marks: Lecturer awards pool of marks and lets the group decide how to distribute them.

---

**Assessment**

Fair and effective assessment strategies and methods represent a major challenge for group work. Issues with assessment often focus on how assessment process deals with the unique contribution of group members in any given project.

Lecturers can choose assessment strategies that align with learning outcomes across three areas: Person, Process, Product - what we call the “3Ps”

Assessing the person focuses on individual knowledge or performance; assessing the process is concerned with interpersonal and teamwork skills and assessing the product is based on the outcome or artefact produced by the group as a whole.

Methods for assigning differential marks across individual students within groups, recognising the contributions of those involved, are equitable and encourage more responsible student learning behaviour (Gibbs, 2009). The approach adopted should be driven by the nature of the task and the specific skills and experience you want your students to develop.

Considering the assessment of group work, educators should ask themselves: Is product or process the main emphasis? Will a group or individual mark be awarded? Will the assessment be primarily tutor or student graded, or both?

Use the grid to the right to follow the three step process from assessment strategies to methods to selecting a combination of methods that suit any individual situation.

---

**First, consider an assessment strategy from the options below**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where individual contribution &amp; development is the primary concern. It is an issue with free-riders with this strategy as it does not promote collaboration.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person based methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Individual exam or assignment, subsequent to group process. Marks are allocated to individuals based on their performance in a subsequent individual assignment.

---

**Then, consider assessment methods.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process based methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Average Grade based on individual parts. Each member submits an individual report on their individual group task. Final grade is the average grade for all work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Finally, select and/or combine assessment method(s).**

---

**Example A:**

100% Individual Task grade

**Example B:**

10% Private Peer Assessment, 90% Single Group Grade

---