



Tips for Structuring Group Work

If you plan to have students submit their work as a group, structure needs to be built into the task so that groups work effectively. Here are some tips to help you in this process:

1. Individuals need to be accountable in the group. Break down the task into smaller parts for which each group member bears a primary responsibility. One person may be responsible to lead the group discussion, and this rotates for each question. Or, one person may be responsible for recording responses, another is required to draft the summary statement, and another is responsible for the final copy and submission.

2. Strangers often work better together than friends. Groups are more on task when students don't know each other. In addition, this helps them meet new people and provides a greater diversity of ideas. You can ask students to stand up, move to a different part of the room, and work with at least two people they do not know. Or you can assemble students in the room by month of birth. Then divide those groups into smaller groups if needed.

3. Students report how well they worked together. Monitoring their own contributions teaches important social skills and can help students become aware of extent to which they dominate a group or are relying on others to do the work for them. At the end of the group task, have students fill out a small sheet where they list each group member and what each of them contributed to the task. As you quickly skim these sheets, look for concerns expressed about the work of particular group members and address this accordingly. With larger classes, students can fill out a Likert scale for each group member—roles are listed down one side and students fill in the group members' names next to the appropriate role. Next to the names is a 1-5 scale where students provide a score on the contributions of their classmates. These can be quickly skimmed to determine where problems are occurring.

4. Grades do not have to be shared equally. If ample evidence exists that a student did not carry his or her weight, that student should receive a lower grade for the assignment.

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