



Group Work & Activities

Overview:

Great for Practice

- ✓ In an online or remote environment, you and your students engage with one another, and with your course content, in different ways.
- ✓ Group work helps build a community of engaged learners while giving students the opportunity to practice and develop different skills.

Great for Community

- ✓ In a class where you have less seat time, the number of informal interactions decreases.
- ✓ Building in opportunities for students to speak with one another will provide more opportunities for them to get to know and trust one another, which is essential in any learning community.

Designing Group Projects:

- ✓ For group projects, it's important to ensure that students understand what, how, and why they are being asked to do things for the project.
- ✓ Whether your group project is a small activity or a semester-long assignment, it is important to consider your structure.

Goals and outcomes

Consider what your goals and outcomes are for your group project, and how the group project connects to your overarching course goals.

Consider what skills students will develop during the course of the group project.

Content

Consider what you want students to work on and eventually turn in to you. This can be one thing or multiple things such as a paper and an oral presentation or an online exhibit.

Methods and time

Consider how you want students to work together and how long you want this project to last. Make sure your goals, the content you expect them to produce, the methods you want them to use, and the time you've allotted them all make sense together.



Structure (chunk your content!)

For online classes, having more frequent check-ins with students can help ensure that everyone is staying on track in situations where you might have less seat-time or synchronous interactions. For larger group projects, consider breaking down the work and having more frequent due dates and check-ins for various pieces of the overall project. Check-ins or smaller assignments might include some of the following:

- A group contract
- A project proposal
- An annotated bibliography or literature review
- A rough draft for a paper or website
- A final paper and an oral presentation
- A reflection on the project and an assessment
- Setting clear expectations

Guidelines

Provide students with clear explanations and resources regarding the different aspects of their group projects, from roles to participation guidelines to due dates to content they will produce and turn in to you.

Setting Expectations

Group Roles

- ✓ Structure is key!
- ✓ Setting clear expectations and guidelines can help students feel empowered and confident in how they will participate and engage in your class, and group work is no exception!
- ✓ Consider the following approaches for establishing clear roles in a group project or activity.

Suggest roles yourself:

In this approach, you will suggest some roles for students to use in their groups. For example, you might have them select someone who will report out the entire class following a group discussion, someone who will serve as a note-taker, etc. This approach can work well for more discrete group activities or discussions.

Have students determine and assign their roles:

In this approach, students will determine, amongst themselves, how they would like to divide up the work of their group project. While you can still suggest some ideas and roles, students will have more responsibility and control in determining their group structure.



Participation

- ✓ Aside from group roles, having clear expectations and guidelines for participation can help students who are engaging in a group project.
- ✓ Setting these expectations can be particularly important in online environments, where you might be working with students more asynchronously. Consider the following.

Methods of and expectations for participation:

You might have specific tools or methods you would like students to use as they work together. Or, you might want students to determine and select their own communication and working methods as a group. As you are structuring your project, make sure to include things like check-in dates, ways to submit content, and clarification around how you expect students to work together to ensure that students understand the flow of the project and your expectations for them. Clarifying and setting these expectations can be even more crucial in online classes, where you will likely be engaging with your students in more asynchronous ways.

Community Interactions

Aside from clarifying methods of participation, consider providing students with guidance on ways to work together productively and resolve any conflicts that might arise. If you have classroom community interaction guidelines you can have students use those as a starting place. This can not only empower students to take ownership of their group interactions and work but can also be a way to provide structure and support for more remote or asynchronous class situations.

Group Contracts

- ✓ A group contract can be a way for you to synthesize the above ideas and have students actually compile a group contract that outlines roles, responsibilities, workflows, expectations, and participation guidelines.
- ✓ An extension of this could involve pulling from project management tools and best practices. Having students compose a project management plan for their project can expose them to ideas and concepts from the world of project management and help them develop highly transferable skills in planning, time management, collaboration, and communication.



Creating Groups:

Start with the Purpose of the Assignment

- ✓ As you begin designing your group activity, think about how you want to group the students together.
- ✓ There are many different ways to do this, so think about the goals of the activity and what group dynamic is best suited to meet the learning goals.

Consider: What is the goal of the group project?

- For students to learn to work as part of a team?
- To create the best project possible?
- For individual students to apply their personal skill-set to a task?

Strategies for Grouping Students

What you are trying to accomplish might help you decide how you want to create your groups:

Randomly:

- This could be useful in introductory classes or early group projects. Students have complete control of roles, contributions etc.
- This can be a good way to help build camaraderie between students.

Based on differentiated knowledge:

- You might see this in cross-listed classes where students bring different background knowledge to the group

Based on different skill-sets:

- Groups are often made up of different roles- leader, presenter, designer, coordinator etc.
- Maybe students are developing different skills or are bringing different strengths to the group.

Let them choose:

- This can be a good strategy later in the semester once students already know each other.
- Students will likely feel like they have more control over their group experience and will continue to build their skills in communication and collaboration.



Assessing Group Projects:

- ✓ Assessing group projects can be tricky since you will ideally assess multiple levels of work, including a student's individual contributions, how they group worked together overall, and the actual content they produced, individually or collectively.
- ✓ Try to use a variety of assessment methods to get a full picture of the group project.

Rubrics

A rubric can be a valuable way to assess multiple aspects of a group project, from more behavioral elements, such as collaboration, to content understanding. Rubrics can also help students clearly understand your expectations and how the different parts of their project fit together.

Peer and self-assessments

If you opt to assess not only what students produced but how they worked together as a group, consider using self and peer assessments as well to let students reflect on their experiences and constructively comment on their peers' work and contributions to the group.

Peer review options:

- You can have students conduct peer reviews during a class session in breakout rooms. This has the benefit of letting you and your students reflect on the process together.
- You can also have students conduct peer review as out of class activity and turn it into an assignment. This can let students have more time to think about what they are seeing and provide deeper feedback.
- You can have students fill out a guided survey or rubric for their peer reviews, which can provide them with structure and you with valuable insight into how your students are doing with a project.

Smaller assignments and check-ins

For online classes, having more frequent check-ins and smaller assignments can help students stay engaged and can help you better keep track of how everyone in your class is doing. For a larger group project, have a blend of check-ins and smaller assignments that you can use to see how the group is doing. These smaller assignments can also help you more quickly grade as you go rather than receiving a large amount of content at the end of the project.



Informal Learning Activities:

Group activities can be a valuable way to build community in your class and help students engage with each other in online environments.

Think pair share and small group discussion

Use Breakout rooms in Zoom to let students engage in small group discussions, as you would in an in-person classroom. Be sure to be very clear as to your expectations for what students will discuss (and for how long) and what they will share out when they return from a breakout room, since you can't wander a room and check-in on groups as easily in Zoom as you can in an in-person class.

Breakout room tip – have students take notes on a shared Google Doc or Google Slide so you can see what they are discussing and have some useful assessment!

Group activity or worksheet

If you have a small activity in your class, consider having students work together in small breakout rooms to complete a worksheet or task together. This can help keep up the energy and engagement level in an online class and provide some variety in your class session.

Group presentations and discussion

While you can have a group presentation be part of a larger project, you might consider having a smaller, less formal presentation on a reading, or have classes where a small group leads the discussion on a reading.

Group Research:

- ✓ A group research project can be a really excellent way for students to develop and deepen their research skills and other highly valuable transferable skills, such as communication, collaboration, project management, and time management skills.
- ✓ Group research projects can also provide students with the opportunity to produce more content and to translate their research into different formats.
- ✓ The following ideas are ways that students can research larger, more complex topics, where each student can explore a part of the larger topic and work with their group to synthesize their individual contributions and turn their work into a cohesive whole.

Research project ideas:

- Group research report
- Online exhibit
- Project website
- Group presentation
- Podcast or video
- Poster session
- Infographic



Group Research project examples:

Group Research Project with a Presentation and Website Component

In this example, students in a class were broken into four groups and were assigned an overarching topic to explore. From there students had to select an angle of the topic they each wanted to explore and divide up their work. Students had to produce a proposal detailing their individual contributions and each student wrote a brief report on their individual research. As a group, students then presented their research findings and synthesized their work into a project website. Finally, each group member filled out a reflection and an assessment about their experience working together.

Local Neighborhood Research Project and Presentation

In this example, students were broken into small groups and were asked to select a neighborhood in their city. From there students had to research the neighborhood and produce a multi-media presentation on their findings. Students were asked to produce a group contract and a project plan, explaining how they were organizing and dividing up their work, as well as an annotated bibliography in advance of their presentation.