GROUP WORK

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🔍 WHAT IS IT?

Collaborative or group-based learning is a significant part of active or student-centred learning. Group projects can help students develop a host of skills that are increasingly important in the professional world (Caruso & Woolley, 2008; Mannix & Neale, 2005). It often allows for assigning more complex, authentic problems to groups of students rather than individual assigned tasks. Student collaboration can be facilitated in face-to-face contexts, and also using tools, such as wikis, in online environments.

☑ WHY USE IT?

- Collaboration and working in teams to accomplish specified goals is often the rule rather than the exception, so group learning provides authentic experience.
- Setting up an assessment activity as group work automatically expands the range of learning outcomes that can be developed and assessed to include areas like communication, team work, leadership, sensitivity to cultural diversity and awareness of social and ethical responsibilities.
- Peer and self-assessment techniques can be incorporated as part of the task design to enable students to develop their own voice and perspectives.

🛠 WHAT COULD I USE?

- vUWS Group Tools
- Google Docs
- Wikis, Blogs, Journals
- Learning Studio or Collaborative Spaces

💡 CONSIDERATIONS

- Clarify group purpose, ground rules, responsibilities, meeting guidelines, agendas and possible challenges.
- Consider building group dynamics by facilitating ice breaker activities and discussing what makes an effective group.
- Address issues relating to fairness, where some students believe they have contributed more to a task than others. Build in requirements or related assessments such as an assessable presentation, peer review or an indication of the contribution of other team members.
- When incorporating reflective activities into group work, it is important that students have the opportunity to apply what they have learnt through their reflections to be relatable to future tasks and ultimately assist in improving their learning.

💼 HOW DO I DO IT?

1. Provide students with context, clear instructions and connections to learning outcomes and assessment criteria for the group work task.
2. Help students learn how to identify group issues, listen reflectively, give constructive feedback, structure discussions, manage their groups, give group presentations and compile reports, review individuals' contributions and deal with common group work issues.
3. Obtain feedback and monitor the progress of groups as they work through the process. Guidance may be required and it may take the form of general information for the whole class (strategies for group meetings, guidelines for preparing written reports etc.), or it may be specific to the needs of a particular group.

🖱 WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- Assessing group work (Macquarie University) (Word Doc 159kb)
- Group Writing (UNC College of Arts and Sciences, The Writing Center)
- Woking in groups (Colorado University)
- Five steps to improving online group work assignments (Faculty Focus)
- Working in Groups – A note to faculty and a quick guide for students (Harvard University)
- Group Work: How to Use Groups Effectively
- Caruso, H.M., & Wooley, A.W. (2008). Harnessing the power of emergent interdependence to promote diverse team collaboration. *Diversity and Groups. 11*, 245-266.
- Mannix, E., & Neale, M.A. (2005). What differences make a difference? The promise and reality of diverse teams in organizations. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 6*(2), 31-55.