

Teaching Tips For Faculty

Assessing Peer Contributions in Group Assignments

One of the greatest challenges of assigning group assignments is the concern that some students will do all of the work while others will do very little. How can we ensure that our students collaborate in a way that maximizes the group’s potential? How can we avoid dominant students taking over the project? How can we discourage students from being passive or inactive? Here are some strategies:

Discuss the benefits of group work

Often we assign group work assignments without clarifying why the work is beneficial to students. When you are introducing the assignment, take some time to discuss how it was conceived with teams of students in mind and reinforce that in order to succeed, students will need to work together, trust and rely on each other.

Identify the characteristics of good group work collectively

Do not assume that students will know how to work together, regardless of what year or program they are in.



TIP

Dedicate approximately 10-20 minutes to an activity that encourages students to identify the characteristics of good group work. Come together as a group to define each criteria to ensure that everyone is in agreement what each term means and decide as a group that this is how team members will assess each other’s contributions.



EXAMPLE

Students may struggle to identify criteria for good groupwork. Consider providing them with some broad categories, or a handout to help guide the activity.

Group Work Component	Definition
Attendance at meetings	-Arrives on time -Stays for the duration of the meeting
Preparation at meetings	-Brings work to meeting -Arrives ready to work
Participation at meetings	-Volunteers ideas -Builds on the ideas of others -Makes the most of meeting time



Group Work Component	Definition
Communication	-Listens to others -Helps resolve issues -May be in person or online
Quality of work	-Work is high quality -Work is appropriate for the assignment -References are cited (where applicable)

Create a set of guidelines or a group contract

This may seem overly formal to some faculty (and students), but it is helpful to have a document that details the terms and definitions from the aforementioned activity. A contract between group members is useful for settling disputes should they arise. Remind students periodically about the guidelines or contract they created.

Assign group roles

One way to help the members of a group feel vital and integral to the process is to assign roles to the groups. One member can be the leader (or organizer), one can be a scribe (or notekeeper), one can be fact checker (or researcher), one can generate ideas (or brainstorm). Groups that have too many of the same roles are more likely to encounter problems, but it is important to note that no one stays in the role for the entire project. Everyone must continually contribute to the work.

Set-up mid-project meetings

Your role as a faculty member is to ensure that the group is able to complete the work, which can involve periodic check-ins and possibly even a group meeting. This is an opportunity to identify stumbling blocks or strategize with groups to help them iron out their issues. Bear in mind that you should only mediate problems as a last resort; it is best if students can work through their problems independently.

Have group members evaluate each other

The most obvious way to do this is have students anonymously complete a survey on each member of the team contributions, using the criteria the class identified/agreed upon. This can be a small overall sum of the overall assignment, but it should be a minimum of 5% to ensure students take it seriously.



TIP: Online Evaluation

Use an online survey to anonymously and easily collect student assessments of their group. Follow these steps:

1. *Login to Google Forms LINK using your Canvas/OCAD U employee information*
2. *Name your survey and add a description. Be sure to stress that the survey will only be seen by you, not the other members of the group*
3. *Require students to enter their own student ID and the name of the peer they're assessing*
4. *Add each criteria as a multiple choice question with a score from 1-5*
5. *Thank students for their score and encourage them to repeat the survey for their other team members*