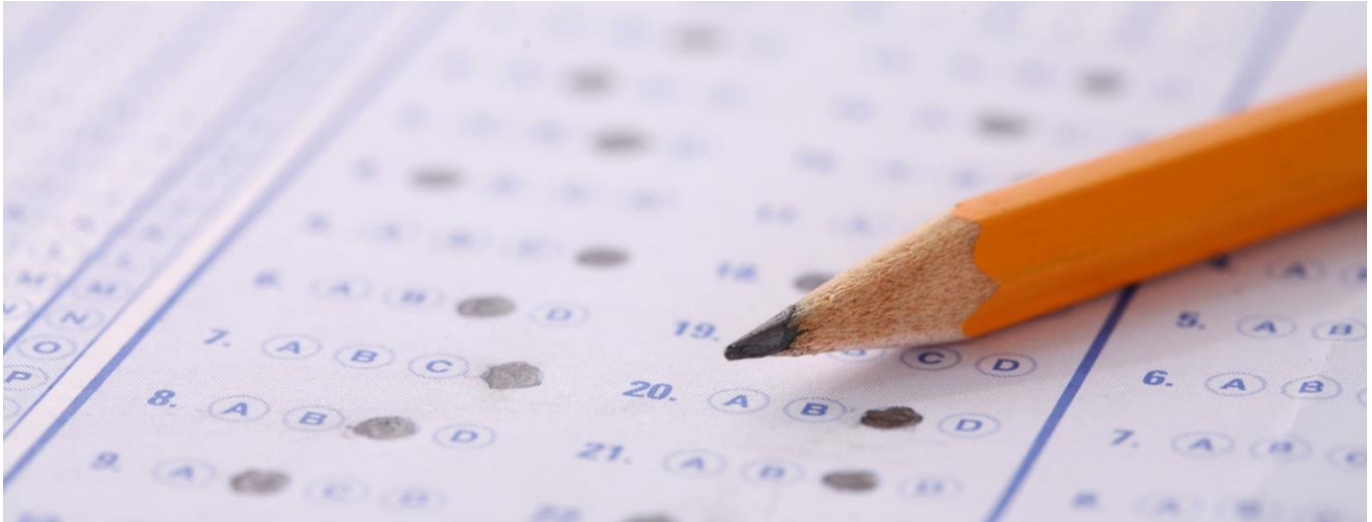


This handout is for instructors who are using group work either in face to face classes or online.



1. Be clear about your instructional objectives

Make sure that the group project / activity aligns with your course objectives. Think about:

- Is group work the best way of meeting this objective?
- Is the activity sufficiently complex to warrant using group work?
- Does the activity require collaboration, or can students work on their own to complete this course objective?

2. Assess both the process and the product

Multicultural groups may take longer to find a positive group dynamic due to negotiating different cultural ways of communicating. If students know that finding a way to work well together is as important as the final outcomes of the project / task, there is an incentive for them to work together as a group.

- Assign marks for learning *skills* as well as producing *content* (e.g., for demonstrating the ability to work effectively in a diverse group as evidenced by peer/self-assessment)
- Assign marks for student reflections on the process of working together (e.g., what did they identify as their own strengths in terms of group work and what other skills would they like to develop?)

3. Ensure students know precisely how they will be assessed and the specifics of what they will get marks for

This sounds obvious, but some students have no experience of working in groups in the manner that is typical in many Canadian classrooms. Not understanding the difference between where they have to collaborate, versus where they have to cooperate, and what they will be graded on, can lead to conflict and miscommunication.

4. Ensure students track their own and others' contributions to the group project

This encourages accountability of all group members. It also makes it harder for some individuals to get the others in the group to do all the work and for their lack / limited contribution to go unnoticed.

5. Allocate marks for individual effort

While this can be hard to do for some tasks, this addresses the concern many students have that their contribution to the project will not be sufficiently acknowledged, and that they may get a lower grade if others do not work as hard / perform as well.

6. Include peer / self-assessment

Again, while some students may not be used to assessing each other, if you model how you would like students to conduct a peer/self-assessment, this provides an opportunity to demonstrate that everyone is accountable for their contribution to the group project.

7. Be intentional in how you design a task

Beyond making sure that the task warrants students working together:

- Use a collaborative verb which makes it clear to students the rationale for having to work with others (e.g., compile, compare, comment on, prepare different positions on etc.)
- Ensure the task is sufficiently complex and has multiple parts that can best be done by including diverse perspectives (e.g., prepare a product launch, outline a complete marketing campaign etc.)
- Require students to identify the roles needed in the group and to decide 'who will do what'
- Make sure the task requires a contribution from diverse students (e.g., include a global perspective that requires everyone to do the research, rather than one that requires 'local knowledge' that gives an advantage / puts unnecessary pressure on local students), and / or involves unusual contexts about which none of the students are likely to know much about (e.g., investigate the animal populations in Ittoqqortoormiit, Greenland).

8. Assign students to groups

Research indicates that the most successful groups are ones that the instructor creates (even if the instructor creates them randomly) rather than self-selection by students – the exception being when completing quick, non-complex tasks. Therefore:

- Consider where possible, equal distribution of international / local students
- Avoid having groups where there is only one female student
- As an initial task, ask students to come up with a 'group contract' on what they expect from each other, and the consequences of not fulfilling their obligations (e.g., how they will handle the situation if one person doesn't attend group meetings or do their share of the work)
- Consider creating a BlueJeans meeting session for each group – a link that students can use to connect together in their work groups, beyond any 'live' sessions you may have planned for your course.

References / Resources

Arkoudis, S. (n.d.). *Teaching international students: Strategies to enhance learning*. Centre for the Study of Higher Education. Retrieved from https://melbourne-cshe.unimelb.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/2299045/international.pdf

This is a useful resource in general for those who teach international students and includes suggestions regarding group work (p. 11).

Dolan, M., & Macias, I. (2009). *Motivating international students: A practical guide to aspects of learning and teaching*. Higher Education Academy. Retrieved from <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/motivating-international-students-practical-guide-aspects-learning-and-teaching>

Again, this is a useful general resource and delves into ways of motivating international students, along with suggestions regarding group work (p. 19) and how to help students feel included.

University of Waterloo, Centre for Teaching Excellence. (n.d.) *Implementing group work in the classroom*. Retrieved from <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/alternatives-lecturing/group-work/implementing-group-work-classroom>

This is a great 'quick how to' for preparing for, implementing and debriefing group work. The page also has useful links to other relevant resources such as tips on inclusive instructional practices and tips for students.