Assessing group work

The design of group work assessments need to be considered carefully to prompt the best efforts and participation of all students.

Group work assessments are used for a variety of important reasons to:

- increase the amount and quality of discussion between students
- enable students to be involved in larger-scale, more complex and more open ended tasks than they could manage on their own
- develop students’ team work skills, and other skills such as leadership, negotiation, conflict resolution, time management, problem solving and oral communication
- foster a culture of co-operation and collaboration expected in real-world employment settings.

The main problem with group work is that it is often resented by students, who do not always see the point of it, and consider it unfair when a group mark is awarded for significantly unequal individual contributions. Thus the design of group work assessments need to be considered carefully to prompt the best efforts and participation of all students, and the most meaningful outcomes overall.

When designing a group work task, consider some of the following key questions:

- What are the aims of the group work? Is it the quality of the product you most value, or is it the quality of the teamwork and the student insights into their own developing abilities as team players more important? This needs to be clarified through marking criteria and the rationale explained thoroughly to students.
- How will you allocate grades for group work? In some instances it may be feasible to allocate individual grades based on students’ relative contributions within the group. But, in many
cases, overall grades based on the quality of the product are shared equally among group members. How will you handle this and justify it so that students feel the assessment is fair?

- How will students manage themselves in groups? How will groups be formed? How much cooperation is required? How will work be divided between group members? Who will coordinate efforts? What happens if a group member is loafing? How is conflict negotiated? To what degree should groups self-manage without reference to the unit coordinator? Clearly it is preferable that groups self-manage as much as possible, however these issues require careful thought and discussion in advance with students.

- Is the effectiveness of the group assessed? In addition to the group product, the effectiveness of the group processes may need to be assessed, particularly if the emphasis is on the development of team skills. Consideration could be given to an individual piece to accompany the group product, enabling students to reflect on group processes and their own developing skills as a team player.

- Do students understand why they’re doing this? Students need a clear and compelling rationale for why group work is being undertaken, what it offers them as an authentic assessment, and how marks will be awarded fairly and transparently.

**Web resources**

*Assessing group assignments*, Deakin University

This page looks at How to assess? What to assess? and When to assess? supported by a wide range of resources.


*Enhancing group work*, University of Technology Sydney

This site is a resource kit that covers all aspects of group work assessment tasks. Topics covered include: Designing group assignments; Preparing students for group work; Forming effective groups; Getting groups started; Monitoring groups; Assessing groups; Helping groups reflect on their experiences; and Resources. You may also be interested in the Group Work Wizard, an online tool that allows lecturers to prepare students for group work by preparing a briefing sheet. This wizard is available to site visitors by providing an email address and password.