

Group Work Online

How to effectively manage group work in your online course?

TIP
1



Assign groups in Blackboard using group function. You may select manual, random, or self-Enrollment for group sets. Provide each group with access to the Blackboard collaborative tools which will be needed for the group work.

TIP
2



Establish clear expectations about the tasks, timelines, and each group member's specific role. Have each group develop and agree on a team contract. Contact The Stearns Center for examples of team contracts.

TIP
3



Make group work assessment criteria and grading scheme clear from the start. Include assessments of the overall group product, the team process, and each individual's contribution to the team. Contact The Stearns Center for examples of group rubrics.

TIP
4



Direct students to online communication tools to check in regularly with each other. For extended, multi-staged group projects, require groups to submit progress reports at specific checkpoints.



Online group work promotes student skills for communication, project management, accountability, peer review, and self-regulation.

Assign Roles to Group Members

Have groups establish and agree on roles for each team member.

Roles can rotate or remain the same, depending on the duration of the project.

Roles can include team leader, scribe, editor, researcher, etc., depending upon the group project.



Prepare a Contingency Plan

What happens if a group member drops the course? What happens if a group member is a no-show or refuses to participate in the team?

Make sure that you have a plan in place with clear policies to guide teams through such situations.

Best Practices from Mason's Online Faculty

How do YOU manage group work in your online course?

Clarify Expectations

"To set the tone and clarify expectations, I developed a document which I post on Blackboard called "Group Work Ground Rules". In order to allay fears and anxiety, group work is not required each week. I also developed a "Peer Evaluation of Group Members" which they have access to at the beginning of the semester. It is an easy-to-use Likert scale based tool.

Group members are evaluated on three main attributes: quality of contributions, engagement and communication. I use the Discussion Board, File Exchange and Email tools in Blackboard to facilitate communication among group members."

-Dr. Beverly Middle, DNP, RN, AGCNS-BC,
Assistant Professor,
School of Nursing (CHHS)

Use Blackboard Collaborate for Group Interactions in Real Time

"Building an online community in which students can network and share resources with one another is a primary reason I use Blackboard Collaborate in my synchronous [online] teaching. I create student interactions through purposeful planning of several distinct areas including: student groupings, follow-up questions, whiteboard use, incorporation of breakout rooms, and the incorporation of multiple means of interaction. A student can ask questions in the chat box or mark up a whiteboard slide to demonstrate connections between content while other students are taking notes, or utilizing other media sources. My advice to anyone trying to increase student interaction with both content and peers in Blackboard Collaborate is to purposefully plan each activity to maximize student interaction. Using the graphic organizers from the resource "Making Thinking Visible" (Ritchhart et al. 2011) provided me with several great structures that naturally incorporate group communication and collaboration."

- Dr. Courtney Baker, Assistant Professor, Mathematics Education Leadership & Elementary Education (CEHD)

Use Wikis for Collaborative Group Learning Activities

"Here are my tips:

- Instruction should be clear, so students know their expectations.
- Assign each student a role and provide an individual's task. Then, give students tentative due dates for each task.
- Provide a concrete rubric with each criterion for assessment of the final outcomes for students to use as a guide of quality expectations
- Get in Wikis often and check each group's progress. Then, send an appreciation & encouragement announcement in the mid way period. (for example, if it is a two-week-group work, send the announcement after one week)."

-Dr. Yoosun Chung, Assistant Professor, Graduate School of Education (CEHD)

Learn More !

Wells, G. (2015). Five steps to improving online group work assignments. Faculty Focus, Magna Publications.
<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/five-steps-to-improving-online-group-work-assignments/>

Milman, N. B. (2015). Navigating online virtual group work: Tips for instructors and students. Distance Learning, 12(4), 51-54. [Available from Mason Libraries]

Ritchhart, R.; Church, M.; Morrison, K. (2011). Making thinking visible: How to promote engagement, understanding, and independence for all learners. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass. [Available from Mason Libraries].



Creative Commons License

Digital Teaching Tips: Group Work Online, by The Stearns Center for Teaching & Learning, George Mason University is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License