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ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING EFFECTIVE TEAMS AND GROUPS



This resource is for you if you want to:

- ✓ Effectively establish, maintain, and monitor groups to support student learning and course outcomes
- ✓ Ensure your purpose for using groups is clearly linked to robust formative and summative assessments
- ✓ Promote course, personal, industry and employability outcomes for students to improve engagement and communication in groups
- ✓ Ensure you have sufficient resources and processes to improve group effectiveness with your students
- ✓ Continually evaluate, reflect upon and challenge your practice in supporting groups and teams

Group work is a crucial element of many student-centred teaching and learning approaches for Under-25 students.

Group and team projects help students develop a range of skills, including:

- Learning to delegate and coordinate efforts
- Undertaking more complex problems than they could do on their own
- Considering diverse perspectives
- Using each other's knowledge and skills
- Appreciating mutual accountability
- Giving and receiving peer support and encouragement to take risks
- Developing new skills to resolve issues and differences
- Fostering a shared identity with other group members
- Developing their own communication, sharing ideas and perspectives and listening to others, including peers
- Increasing opportunities to engage with the teacher as facilitator

Step-by step preparation for effective groups

Using a variety of pedagogical and practical activities in a step-by-step way helps students work through the process of creating and get the most from groups and teams in their course. The following activities provide a proven and intentional process for you to follow and adapt.

Activity: Critical questions for leading discussions with students before setting up effective groups and teams

- What makes a good team?
Start with a class brainstorm. How does a good group or team behave?
- What makes a good team member?
Ask students to list what they look for in a good team member.
- What are the features of an unhelpful team member?
Ask students to record unhelpful behaviours. What are the impacts?

This activity is a reinforcement of what being a good group or team member means and may prompt items that will contribute to a verbal or written contract.

Activity: General strategies for teacher oversight to facilitate effective group processes

- Keep groups small (4-6)
- Timetable some class time for group meetings
- Enable students to engage with digital tools that facilitate flexible meetings (e.g. use Google Docs and cloud storage for easy access to team documents)
- Warn students about time-consuming stages and tasks (forming, storming, norming, performing). Remind them that the process and outcomes are worth the struggle and are good preparation for work environments
- Ensure time and support to foster communication
- Timetable team time to integrate individual contributions for feedback prior to submission of work
- Think about teaching conflict-resolution skills, including role-playing responses, to support resolution in conflict scenarios
- Check on team make up. This could be undertaken as a teacher-led questioning session with each group (also see step-by-step activities to assist):
 - Why did you form like this?
 - What are your strengths?
 - What may be some challenges?
 - What will you need assistance with?
- Ask a student from a previous class to share experiences of how important teams are to the projects and success in the course, as well as for deep learning and effective transition to higher level programmes and work
- Suggest that students invite their teacher into the team's shared document repository to assist tracking progress and provide regular feedback
- Observe and check group processes via periodic process reports, student self-evaluations or peer evaluations (see templates)

Activities: Step-by-step activities for establishing effective groups

The following activities are designed to improve outcomes for teams and groups. They can be used sequentially, or be replaced or redeveloped for different situations and students.

Activity 1

Students record their strengths and the areas in which they would like to develop further, relating them to the topic or project outcomes. This information can be completed pictorially with students drawing around each of their hands. On the dominant hand, students list their strengths finger by finger; on the non-dominant hand, they identify the areas in which they would like to improve.

Activity 2

Students complete an online assessment of their attributes for teams. For an example, go to www.kent.ac.uk/careers/sk/teamwork.htm

Activity 3

Students interview each other (to establish who would be good to work with in a team). This interview is based on the outcomes of their strengths and also the attributes from the online self-assessment in Activity 2. This activity stresses the importance of mixed skills in a team.

Activity 4

Teams are negotiated and formed post interview, either by agreement or allocated by the teacher, to balance out identified skill sets. They then complete the **Team contract**.

Activity 5

Teams assign roles to members in order to facilitate collaboration. These roles can be rotated so that everyone in the team has a turn. See **Possible roles in teams**.

Activity 6

Teams agree upon communication protocols such as meeting times and digital storage of resources to ensure availability for the group (encourage the use of cloud-based flexible document storage as a place for all their work). This activity confirms the importance of helping each other and sharing skills to optimise everyone's learning and success by discussing concepts of self-management and the study group approach.

Activity 7

Team members complete the **Self-evaluation form for group work**.

Activity 8

Upon completion of the self-evaluation activity (activity 7), students complete the **Peer evaluation form for group work**. This activity also provides an opportunity to encourage content accuracy when editing (not just proof reading each other's work). Ensure the teams hand in their work together.

Team contract

Team name

Date

Goals
What are our team goals for this project? What do we want to accomplish? What skills do we need to develop or refine?

Expectations
What do we expect of one another in regard to attendance at meetings, participation, electronic storage of allocated work, frequency of communication, the quality of work, etc.?

Guidelines
What rules can we agree on to help us meet our goals and expectations?

Consequences
How will we address non-performance in regard to these goals, expectations, and guidelines?

All team members sign:

Possible roles in teams

Student groups and teams often function most effectively when members have agreed on designated roles that can be rotated to assist in the acquisition of a variety of skills. The roles chosen are dependent on the goals of the project/ assignment, size of the team, etc. This list of roles is not exhaustive.

Role: character	Role: function
Leader or facilitator	Moderates team discussion, keeps the group on task and distributes work - recognising individual skills
Encourager	Helps to energise the group with positive talk and may use humour
Summariser or clarifier	Clarifies group objectives and facilitates summaries of ideas of others to support conclusions
Compromiser	Tries to facilitate a harmonious positive atmosphere within the group – is diplomatic
Innovator or ideas person	Suggests new ideas to solve group problems or new ways the group could organise tasks. Encourages imagination and contributes new and alternative perspectives
Recorder	Takes notes summarising team discussions and decisions and keeps all necessary records
Timekeeper	Keeps the group aware of time constraints, priorities and deadlines and makes sure meetings start on time
Evaluator – the explorer or “devil’s advocate”	Raises counter ideas and introduces alternative explanations and solutions to ensure the group thinks through the issues and avoids rushing to agreements
Techo	Ensures digital repository is updated for the team to contribute to

Sources: These roles are adapted from lists found on the University of Kent website (www.kent.ac.uk/careers/sk/teamwork.htm) and in Barkley, E.F., Cross, K.P., & Major, C.H. (2005). Collaborative learning techniques. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Self-evaluation form for group work

Team name

Date

Evaluation: criteria	Rating		
	Seldom	Sometimes	Often
Contributed good ideas			
Listened to and respected the ideas of others			
Compromised and cooperated			
Took initiative where needed			
Came to meetings prepared			
Communicated effectively with teammates			
Did fair share of the work			

My greatest strengths as a team member are:

The group work skills I plan to improve are:

Peer-evaluation form for group work

Team name	Date
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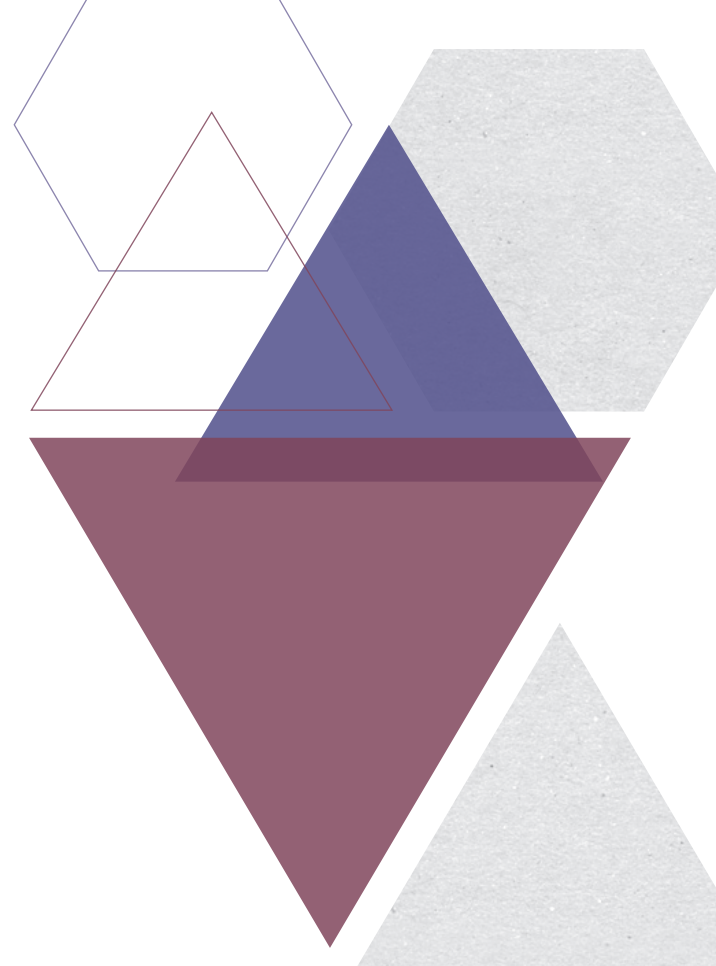
Write the name of each group member in a separate column. For each person, indicate the extent to which you agree with the statement on the left, using a scale of 1-4 (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=agree; 4=strongly agree). Total the numbers at the bottom of each column.

	Group member:	Group member:	Group member:	Group member:
Evaluation criteria				
Attends group meetings regularly and arrives on time				
Contributes meaningfully to group discussions				
Completes group assignments on time				
Prepares and provides quality work				
Is cooperative and supportive				
Provides ideas and suggestions to contribute to the success of the project				
TOTALS				

Source: Adapted from a peer evaluation form developed at Johns Hopkins University (2006) and Carnegie Mellon University (2015) Eberly Center www.cmu.edu/teaching/design/teach/design/instructionalstrategies/groupprojects/

Feedback on team dynamics

1. How effectively did your group work?
2. Were any of the behaviours of your team members particularly valuable or detrimental to the team? Explain.
3. What did you learn about working in a group from this project that you will carry into your next group experience?



About this resource

This work was supported through the Ako Aotearoa National Project Fund 2012. This resource is one of eight developed as a result of the study by Honeyfield et al (2016). *Research Report: Professional Development Decision-making to Support Under-25 Student Success*. These resources, the research report and a literature review can be downloaded at www.ako.aotearoa.ac.nz/projects/professional-development-improve-outcomes-under-25-learners. The resources are also available for purchase at www.shop.ako.aotearoa.ac.nz.

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