

Group Work

Faculty Group Work guidelines

Quality Unit

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Monash University Expectations for Group Work Assessment

<http://policy.monash.edu.au/policy-bank/academic/education/assessment/unit-assessment-procedures.html>

Where a unit involves group assessment, the Chief Examiner must ensure that explicit procedures are made available to students that indicate:

- 7.1. The proportions of the mark for the assessment that will be allocated to the outcome of the group work and to the process followed to obtain the outcome;
- 7.2. How the group will be formed and managed;
- 7.3. How the contribution of the individual students to group work will be assessed, and who will determine the criteria to make this assessment (group, teaching staff or both);
- 7.4. Who will assess the contribution of the individual students (peers, teaching staff or both);
- 7.5. the requirements for timely notification and resolution of disputes among group members; and
- 7.6. the requirements for all members of the group to sign off on the submitted work.

Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences Guidelines

Chief examiners should ensure that group work is used to enhance student learning and that:

- the objectives for the group assessment are clearly stated (including how they link into the unit and course graduate attributes/assurance of learning);
- students know how the groups will be formed;
- the teaching team is trained appropriately to manage and assess the task, and to foster the development of the required skills;
- information is captured about each member's contribution so that individual performance can be evaluated; and
- problems are triggered at an early stage so that intervention can occur in time to keep the task on track.

The provision of explicit processes and procedures

The following three questions may be helpful in preparing information for students:

1. Why are we doing this in groups and not individually – what is the advantage of group work and group assessment here?
2. How does this group activity help me achieve the learning objectives of this unit?
3. How will my contribution be fairly assessed?

Weighing-up the options for group assessment

Decisions about how to structure the assessment of group work need to be focussed around four factors:

1. Whether it is the product of the group work, the process of the group work or both (and if the latter, what proportion of each) that is being assessed;
2. What criteria will be used to assess the group work aspect(s) of the project (and who will determine this criteria – lecturer, student or both (see below));
3. Who will apply the assessment criteria and determine marks (lecturer, students – peer and/or self-assessment or a combination)
4. How will marks be distributed (shared group mark, group average mark, individual marks, combined marks)

Methods for assessing group work

Students must be made aware of all elements of the assessment strategy before commencing the group work assessment task both in terms of method and criteria. When designing the task, the assessment methodology needs to be defined. Some of the assessment methods that can be used, either alone or in combination, include:

Peer assessment – the task is assessed on the basis of evaluations submitted by each student. This method is particularly useful when the learning outcomes are related to the experience of working in a team.

Summative assessment – on the basis of a seminar presentation and/or written report.

Formative assessment – assessment by the teaching team based on observation of the groups at different stages of the task.

Weight of group assessment within a unit

Group assessment tasks need to suit the unit's learning objectives and teaching mode. The development of collaborative skills can be seen as a cumulative process. Group work in first and second year units should facilitate the acquisition and practice of skills for working in groups. Therefore it is more appropriate to tailor team work activities in Years 1 and 2 and provide group work activities in third, fourth and graduate years.

First year units – academics might use minor team-based tasks in tutorials, to empower students for undertaking formal group assessment in subsequent levels of study.

Second year units – the use of team tasks in tutorials should be continued. Minor pieces of formal group work can be introduced but they should not account for a significant proportion of the unit assessment. Planning needs to take prerequisites into account – it should not be assumed that all students will have the same degree of preparation for group work assessment at this level.

Third and Fourth year and graduate units - more sophisticated group work assessment can be included in higher level units. Depending on the subject matter, as much as 50-60% of the total assessment strategy may be allocated to group work assessment. The learning outcomes for the unit should be a guide in determining the final weighting of any piece of assessment.

Managing group work

Complaints and general student dissatisfaction with group work is symptomatic of inadequate planning or oversight. It is important that group tasks are carefully planned and managed by the unit coordinator and students are given clear information about all aspects of the task.

Creating groups

There are three main ways that groups can be formed:

- **Random selection:** Students grouped according to a lecturer/tutor randomly determined criterion e.g. numbering, background, characteristics, names etc
- **Self-selection:** Students select their own group. This may be appropriate where learning about group dynamics is not fundamental to the task.
- **Lecturer selection:** Lecturers/tutors select the groups based on their knowledge of the students and their abilities. The groups may also be determined by asking students to fill in questionnaires about preferred working style, linguistic proficiency, study habits etc. Student may be assigned 'job' titles. This may be preferred if the focus of the task is on group dynamics and the challenge of working effectively as a group.

Building group dynamics

The quality of the relationship with other group members is a major factor in the overall success of the group, so it is important for members to spend time getting to know their colleagues. This can include finding out about cultural backgrounds and interests, common goals in relation to the task and discussing work styles and individual strengths and weaknesses.

Dysfunctional groups

If a problem arises that seems insurmountable, the lecturer should have a back-up plan, such as splitting the group or specifying additional individual assessment. However, if the purpose of the group work is to develop collaborative skills, a student who is unable to perform well in the group is arguably not displaying these skills and could be assigned a fail for the task. If this happens there is a need to consider how the group can be compensated for failure on the part of one of the members of the group.

Recognition of unequal contribution

Recognition of unequal contribution through mark adjustments needs to be explicitly stated and documented. Such arrangements can address the issue of 'shirkers' and ensure they are encouraged to contribute equally and receive an appropriate grade reflecting their actual contribution. This arrangement can also reward individual group members who carry a proportionally heavier load or who make a more significant contribution to the group activity.

Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences Supplementary Guidelines

Why Choose Group Work as a Learning Strategy?

There is a history of academics promoting the educational benefits of group work (Maiden and Perry, 2011). Group work encourages students to:

- Sensitively consider another's perspective about a topic
- Collaborate to achieve a defined learning goal/s
- Identify personal learning needs
- Acknowledge gaps in their knowledge base
- Articulate and justify their attitudes towards a topic
- Develop time management skills
- Understand the potential power of an informed group perspective

Group work assignments and projects provide an opportunity to develop interpersonal and learning skills including communication, cooperation and compromise, which are also seen as key employability attributes. Interdisciplinary group work may be particularly effective, where students from a range of disciplines and backgrounds interact together to tackle larger more in-depth projects. Delvin (2002) suggests group work can be justified because

1. Peer learning can improve the overall quality of student learning
2. Group work can help develop specific generic skills sought by employers
3. Group work may reduce the workload involved in assessing, grading and providing feedback to students.

<http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/assessinglearning/docs/AssessingLearning.pdf>

However the notion that group work may reduce an academic's workload is repudiated within the *Group Assessment Guidelines* published by the Faculty of Business and Economics. Academics are advised not to regard group work "as a way of reducing the marking load". Instead, the point is made that "group work requires active involvement by the teaching team, particularly in terms of monitoring problems and intervening should a group become dysfunctional". This view is supported by Burdett (2003), Johnson and Miles (2004), Maiden and Perry, (2011) and Caple and Bogle (2011).

What is the purpose of group work assessment?

Group work is most valuable where it is designed to achieve learning objectives regarding the development of collaborative skills. Their argument, that assessment tasks set for groups should not focus on detailed content learning, is worthy of consideration. This is because “individual learning outcomes in relation to content are likely to vary considerably across the group and are difficult to assess accurately through group assessment”.

Thus the assessment focus should be on assessing the *process* of working in groups:

1. collaboration and cooperation; interpersonal skills
2. analysing the task and assigning responsibility for its components; project management
3. leadership, teamwork, delegation and coordination;
4. preparation and presentation of a report; and
5. techniques for managing any difficulties that may have arisen in the course of achieving the objectives for the task.

Groups vs. Teams

In the literature there is a tendency to use the terms group work and team work interchangeably. Does it matter? To some extent the answer is a qualified yes. It is when consideration is given to the challenges that surround the successful implementation of group work it becomes apparent that if the benefits of group work are to be realised, some of the characteristics attributable to team work need to be adopted when articulating group work expectations to students. Without due diligence, what starts out as a good idea of students cooperating with each other ends up with members of the group working in isolation and the final version representing little more than “a combination of each member’s section of a document without any serious reflection upon each member’s contribution”.

In *Managing Teams for Dummies*, Marty Brounstein argues that despite its name, group work can still be little more than the effort of a collection of individuals. Whereas once a team is formed, students are more likely to work as a collective. Hence it is prudent to look closely at how the ideas around teamwork can be brought to bear upon student group work. Whilst Table 1 reproduced from the publication has a business orientation, the points of difference have relevance to academic managed group work assessment.

Table 1: The Difference between Work Groups and Teams

Individual accountability	Individual and mutual accountability
Come together to share information and perspectives	Frequently come together for discussion, decision making, problem - solving, and planning.
Focus on individual goals	Focus on team goals
Produce individual work products	Produce collective work products
Define individual roles, responsibilities, and tasks	Define individual roles, responsibilities, and tasks to help team do its work; often share and rotate them
Concern with one's own outcome and challenges	Concern with outcomes of everyone and challenges the team faces
Purpose, goals, approach to work shaped by manager	Purpose, goals, approach to work shaped by team leader with team members

The University of Queensland

<http://www.uq.edu.au/student-services/learning/problems-associated-group-work>

Problems associated with group work

Due to the nature of working in teams, group members can sometimes find that they are not working effectively, which negatively impacts on their progress, and their ability to be successful. Some **common problems** identified by individuals working in teams are:

Tasks not being completed by deadline

To ensure your task is completed on time it may be beneficial to:

- Discuss and establish timelines that ALL members can agree on.
- Ask each member to present a progress report each meeting on what they have completed since the last meeting.
- Offer to assist one another to complete tasks if necessary.

Difficult to get started

To ensure that your group gets off to a good start it may be beneficial to:

- Take time for all members to introduce themselves, including name, background, specific strengths.
- Develop a shared understanding of the task by brainstorming.
- Ensure each member has an opportunity to speak and make suggestions.
- Develop an agenda and a timeline.
- Nominate someone to act as the manager or leader, either for that team meeting or for the term of the project.
- Exchange names and contact details, including email addresses and phone numbers.
- Decide on jobs or sub-tasks for each member.

Ideas are not thoroughly discussed as a team

To ensure that you have enough information to complete your task it could be beneficial for your group to:

- Engage in more brainstorming, particularly focusing on the 'What if ...?' and 'What else ..?' type questions.
- Ask each member individually for ideas.
- If few ideas are generated, organise to complete some further research individually and then meet up as a team at a later date.

Members not contributing

To ensure that all members contribute to the group task it may be beneficial to:

- Establish why a member is quiet or not participating.
- Communicate that all opinions will be valued.
- Ensure that each member gets their turn to contribute, this may mean 'going around the circle'.

Ineffective communication

To ensure effective communication between members it may be beneficial to:

- Identify specific issues which seem to affect communication.
- Consider how to address such issues. For example, if team members seem to be misunderstanding each other, it may be helpful to clarify what is being said.

Conflict between team members

To ensure that disagreements between members are dealt with effectively it is important to:

- Respect the ideas of other group members.
- Show that you have heard other member's ideas and when disagreeing do so politely and respectfully.
- Understand that working in a team requires some negotiation and compromise.
- Take a break to diffuse the situation and recollect thoughts at a later meeting.

Domineering personalities

To ensure that people do not dominate group discussions it may be beneficial to:

- Create time limits on individual contributions or have a 'talking stick'.
- Ensure that each member has a chance to speak, without interruption.
- Remind all members that it is important to hear all opinions in relation to the topic and respect those opinions.

Inability to focus on task

To ensure that your group does not get off task it may be beneficial to:

- Set particular tasks to be completed in each session
- Meet first and then go for lunch after you have completed some work to give yourselves a reward for staying on task
- Ensure that individuals prepare for meetings and talk through what they have completed since the last meeting

References

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Devlin, M (2002). Assessing group work. In James, R., McInnis, C., and Devlin, M (2002). Assessing Learning in Australian Universities: ideas, strategies and resources for quality in student assessment. Centre for the Study of Higher Education, the University of Melbourne, Victoria and the Australian Universities Teaching Committee Canberra, ACT
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Johnston, L., & Miles, L (2004). Assessing contributions to group assignments. Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education 29 (6) downloaded 20 January 2014
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0260293042000227272>

Maiden B., & Perry., B (2011). Dealing with free-riders in assessed group work: results from a study at a UK university. Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education 36 (4) 451-464
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02602930903429302>

Resources:

Assessing Group Work

<http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/design/teach/design/instructionalstrategies/groupprojects/assess.html>

Assessment Criteria for Group Work

<http://www.flinders.edu.au/teaching/teaching-strategies/assessment/assessment-criteria-for-groupwork.cfm>

The assessment of Group Work: Lessons from the literature- University of Sussex

<https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=brookes20groupwork20gibbs20dec2009&site=44>