



Support inclusive teamwork

Inclusive teamwork develops through clear expectations, structured interactions and explicit teaching of collaboration skills. These approaches help students build relationships, work across different perspectives, and contribute in ways that draw on their strengths.

Implementing this strategy

Getting ready

- **Align teamwork with learning outcomes** - Make teamwork an explicit part of the learning design by aligning: learning outcomes → learning activities → assessment → feedback.
- **Determine group formation** – Explicitly support students to develop collaboration skills and working relationships. This requires building teams by gathering information about students' and allocating teams accordingly.
- **Design activities to develop teamwork skills** - Identify the interpersonal, communication and conflict-resolution skills students will need to coordinate their work and navigate different perspectives.
- **Scaffold collaboration** - Plan how to scaffold teams to break the task into manageable components, agree on responsibilities, and distribute work according to members' strengths and opportunities for learning.
- **Plan for flexibility** - Anticipate that students may need different forms of support or reasonable adjustments to teamwork to participate meaningfully in activities. Build flexibility into how instructions and resources are provided, as well as how students can contribute.

With students

- **Introduce the teamwork task** - Clearly communicate what students are expected to achieve, why working as a team matters, and how teamwork will operate, using concise, staged instructions.
- **Monitor and support group dynamics** - Actively monitor team interactions throughout the teamwork tasks as team dynamics can change quickly. Provide responsive and timely educator support with teams that cannot resolve issues independently.
- **Apply reasonable adjustments** - Work with the student to apply their approved reasonable adjustments to the teamwork task.

Spotlight on allocating roles in the team

Effective teams draw on a mix of people-focused, task-focused and thinking-focused roles, with students contributing in different ways to the shared work. The following process can be used to support students to identify their strengths, and then work with their team to complete an activity or a task.

Step 1: Complete a short team-role inventory

Ask each student to complete a brief questionnaire identifying their preferred ways of working, strengths and contributions to teamwork. Provide a short questionnaire through Moodle or Google Forms for each student to complete.

Step 2: Identify preferred team roles

Use the results to connect students' strengths with Gibbs' (1994) roles: innovator, investigator, chairperson, shaper, evaluator, team worker, organiser and finisher ([See appendix 1 in Healey, 2024](#)).

Step 3: Map the team's strengths

Bring individual results together on a simple team inventory to identify the roles already represented and any potential gaps or overlaps.

Step 4: Agree and allocate roles

Ask the team to discuss the inventory and allocate roles that draw on members' strengths while ensuring the needs of the task are covered. In smaller teams, students may take on more than one role.

Step 5: Review and rotate roles

Revisit roles as the task progresses and encourage students to rotate into less familiar roles where appropriate, giving them opportunities to practise and develop a broader range of teamwork skills.

Inclusive principles



Universal design for learning

[Consideration 8.3](#) identifies the importance of collaborative and team-based learning for students. In particular, it reinforces notions of interdependence as teamwork supports students to understand that learning is collaborative and that student actions and decisions impact other learners.



Cognitive load theory

Teamwork requires students to manage the learning task alongside communication, coordination and relationships, placing additional demands on working memory. Scaffolding the processes of teamwork enables students to focus their cognitive resources on learning. Clear roles, explicit expectations, structured tasks, communication protocols and guided practice can reduce unnecessary cognitive load helping students to focus on learning.

References

- Belbin, R. M., & Brown, V. (2022). *Team roles at work*. Routledge.
- Gibbs, G. (1994). *Learning in teams: A student manual*. Oxford Centre for Staff Development, Oxford. Brookes University, Oxford.
- Riebe, L., Girardi, A., & Whitsed, C. (2016). A systematic literature review of teamwork pedagogy in higher education. *Small Group Research*, 47(6), 619-664. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1046496416665221>