



Online Group Work

Making Group Work Work

Group work is difficult to get right on or offline. Students have particularly strong reactions to online groupwork. Read Debbie Morrisons post [How Not to Design a MOOC](#) for an in-depth view of the things that can go wrong for students doing group activities online. In her post she gives great advice on how to get group work right. In other words, *give clear and detailed instructions; describe the purpose of the assignment and why the group project is required rather than individual activity - explaining how the student will benefit from the group activity; and make sure students can use the technical tools required for group work, such as a dedicated discussion space for each group.*

A further three posts in in her excellent blog [Online Learning Insights](#) are well worth reading:

- [Why we need group work in online learning](#)
- [Strategies for effective group work in the online class](#)
- [Making peer evaluations work in online learning](#)

Assessing Online Group Work

There are many assessment methods suitable for assessing group work. They may be used to assess a range of skills and knowledge and to generate a group mark or an individual mark. The Higher Education Academy's (HEA) Physical Science Centre offers an excellent primer for assessing group work: [Assessing group work: Advice and examples](#). While their post is aimed at physicl science

disciplines, the principles are sound for all disciplines and apply in online or offline activities.

According to the HEA, the assessment of group work is the issue which most concerns academics. Giving the same a group mark to members of a group rather than an individual mark to each student presents a dilemma because some members of a team contribute more than others. While a group mark mirrors the world of work more closely, as teams generally all share in the success or failure of a project, a student depends on fair assessment of her or his individual learning. The answer to this dilemma is making the assessment methods and criteria to students clear before they begin group work.

Using a combination of approaches may combine group and individual assessment more equitably; such as students anonymously assess each other's contributions to the activity and a mark given based on peer assessment. What must be clear, however, is what exactly is being assessed by a given method; for example, is an oral presentation being assessed on content or presentation skills, or both?

Receiving and providing feedback to their peers, helps students gain a better appreciation of the skills being developed as well as how to work effectively as a group; especially if they have to assess their peers on the same criteria with which they will be assessed.

Some of the methods that can be used for assessing group work are:

- Individual report or assignment
- Group report or assignment
- Observation and interview
- Oral presentation
- Poster presentations
- Peer assessment of contribution to the group

[The HEA Primer](#) gives the pros and cons of each method, as well as the procedure for each method.

Simple Group Work and Assessment Examples

Simple group exercises which require little intervention from the teacher can help to encourage members of a group to work together and link what they do online

to the face to face element of your course. These can be a simple, but effective, ways to link the research students do outside a face to face setting to what they do when they are together in a seminar or workshop. Use the groups tool to provide spaces for learners to communicate and collaborate and for them to evidence their participation in group collaboration and learning.

Example of an introductory group activity

FROM ORIGINAL POST BY JIM PETTWARD JAN 14, 2013

1. Identify a range of useful web links related to aspects of a topic which you are currently covering in your module.
2. Give each group 2 or 3 links - you may already have groups set up on your module.
3. Ask each group to evaluate each of the links for reliability as a source, and to synthesise the key information from the links.
4. Use the group blog or discussion forum and ask each group to post a summary of what they've found.
5. Next time you meet in a face to face situation, have each group informally present a summary of what they've found from their set of web links.

Further resources on assessment of group work

How to assess group activities by engaging students

Lynne Kennette and Wes Haznuk list a number of practical ways to assess group activities involving students in collaborative creating, investigating, critiquing and games:

[Four Types of Group Work Activities to Engage Students](#)

How can I assess group work?

Carnegie Mellon University's [Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence](#) have some excellent resorces on how to:

- [Assess individual, as well as group, learning and performance.](#)
- [Assess process as well as product.](#)
- [Make your assessment criteria and grading scheme clear.](#)
- [Find samples of group project assessment tools here...](#)

<https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/instructional-design/group-work-collaborative-activities/>

Case Study: Complex Group Work and Assessment

In my course *Facilitating Online Learning and Collaboration* class, we study how to set up, manage and assess group work by participating in a fairly complex online exercise. See below for the brief and assessment procedure:

Complex Group Project Brief

FACILITATING ONLINE LEARNING AND COLLABORATION PROJECT BRIEF

You are required to contribute to a group project in which your contribution will be marked individually. The project and presentation together are worth 25% of the overall course marks.

As a group, you are to deliver a face to face presentation on the following topic: *Integrating Online Open Resources (OERs) such as social media within a formal LMS.*

During the presentation we would expect you to address the following issues:

1. How you went about doing the group project and what you learned from doing it?
2. What worked well and why?
3. What did not work so well, and;
4. Given the lessons you learned from collaborating online what you would do differently if you had to do the project again?

Now here's the thing... you all live in different counties and you only get one chance to meet face to face - that is today. From this point on, the rest of the project has to be carried out entirely by virtual means. Any evidence of face to face meetings will be penalised at -5% of allocated marks per meeting. (Let's get in to the spirit of things, people!) At this single face to face meeting you will need to decide on how you are going to go about presenting face to face on the due date, knowing that there will be no other opportunity to meet face to face before the presentation.

The participants are given the grading scheme and assessment criteria (see below):

Complex Group Assessment

How you will be assessed for group project

You will earn the marks by a combination of self-reflection in the e-portfolio, by peer grading of your contribution to the group and by tutor assessment of your contribution to the presentation.

Your contribution to the group will be assessed on an individual basis in terms of the SEDA ((Staff and Educational Development association) and United Kingdom Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) outcomes and values during the face to face presentation and by self, peer and tutor evaluation of online contributions and reflections relevant to the group project. You will find these outcomes and values in the Group Presentation Criteria.

25% of total course marks is allocated to the group project. The 25% final course mark allocation for the group project will be weighted as follows:

- 12 %for the presentation. An **individual mark** for the combined group presentation will be given to each of you. The mark will be averaged and each member will receive the averaged mark.
- 10% for **online and e-portfolio group contributions**
- 3% for **peer assessment of your contribution** to the group

Complex Group Presentation Criteria

FOLC Group Presentation Criteria and Mark Scheme

NAME OF PRESENTER
GROUP

NAME OF

Each group is to give a face to face presentation on the following topic:

Integrating Open Educational Resources (OERs) such as social media within a formal LMS

Presentation time: 20 minutes per group. Question time: 5 minutes per person

During question time each of you will be asked the following question to be answered individually:

Online group collaboration: what worked, what did not work and what would you do differently next time?

Support what you say by comparing your experiences and your views critically with the theoretical models provided by recognised leaders in the field of online learning, for example, Garrison and Anderson, Diana Laurillard or Gilly Salmon.

You will be assessed individually according to the evidence each of you provide of having met the following SEDA criteria and outcomes in presenting with the group:

| CRITERION | OUTCOME | MARK |
|--|--|------|
| Was your aspect of the brief presented effectively? | An understanding of how people learn | 5 |
| Was your aspect of the brief presented effectively? | Continuing reflection on professional practice | 15 |
| Is there evidence that you collaborated with the group? | Working in and developing learning communities | 10 |
| Is there evidence that you contributed to forming the thinking of the group about the brief? | Scholarship, professionalism and ethical practice | 10 |
| Is there evidence that you contributed to forming the thinking of the group about the brief? | Developing people and processes | 5 |
| Is there evidence that you assisted others if they were uncertain of what to do? | Working effectively with diversity and promoting inclusivity | 10 |

GENERAL COMMENTS

OVERALL MARK OUT OF 50 (weighted in the final marks to 12%)

ASSESSOR'S NAME:

ASSESSORS

SIGNATURE:

Assessment guide used to frame rubric: [Assessing group work](#)