Engage Students Effectively with Group Work

Engage students with this idea for a group exercise

Worst-Case Scenario Group Work Exercise: Lost at Sea

This exercise is intended as an ice-breaker and works best as a blended learning exercise. However, the exercise can be carried out online altogether.

- *Purpose: Ice-breaker activity to engage students online and to create social learning. presence*
- *Skills: Communication, collaboration, problem-solving.*
- *Online tools needed: Group tool, dicussion or blog tool, voting tool (examples provided below).*

Come up with a scenario that requires students to work together to solve problems such as getting lost at sea and assign students into groups of five using the collaborative group tool in your learning management system.

You may need to demonstrate how to use the tool before you begin the online activities.You may also need to demonstrate the discussion tool or blog and the voting sytem you use, depending on the digital skills level of your students. In a blended learning situation, you could use a handheld student response device or mobile phone app here.

Instructions to students

1. Work together in your assigned group. Devise a solution that ensures that all of you arrive safely on land after getting lost at sea. Agree on a list of ten essential items that will help you a create a passage to safety. Appoint a scribe to report back. *Use the group tool to do this.*
2. The group scribe must list items that your group comes up with and explain how they will be used to get to safety. *Use the discussion tool to do this.*
3. Post a comment on at least three other group solutions saying why you think the solution is a good one. Do not comment on your own group's solution. *Use the discussion tool to do this.*
4. Vote for the best group solution. *Use the voting tool to do this.*

This group work exercise you help familiarise your students with the online tools they will be using in your course, as well as engaging them in online activities from the start of your course. There are some great videos in the drop down list below to getyou started.

Blackboard group tool

Blackboard Groups

[Create and Manage Blackboard Groups](#)

Find out about:

- [Group enrollment methods](#)
- [Accessing groups](#)
- [Creating a single group](#)
- [Enrolling students in a group](#)
- [Creating a group set](#)
- [Removing a group member](#)
- [Managing groups](#)
- [Deleting a group](#)

Blackboard Groups Management

Moodle group tool
Moodle.Org decribes three group modes

- No groups – There are no sub groups, everyone is part of one big community
- Separate groups – Each group can only see their own group, others are invisible.
- Visible groups – Each group works in their own group, but can also see other groups. (The other groups' work is read-only.)

[Moodle Groups](#)

The University of New South Wales gives instruction to create groups manually, auto-create groups, import groups from a spreadsheet, create groupings to release resources and activities to groupings, and to manage groups in general.

[Create a group in Moodle, and assign an activity to it](#)l

Moodle Group Tool

Dr. Karl Sienerth discusses how he creates group in Moodle where students can collaborate online.

Discussion tools

Apart from the discussion tools found in learning management systems like **Moodle Forum** and **Blackboard Discussion Board**, there are many other discussion tools that you can use to get students discussing online. One such discussion tool is Google+ Communities.

Ben Hommerding of [Inside Higher Ed](#) says why Google+ Communities is excellent for online, open discussions.

- Can control who can see and/or post into your Community
- Can be completely open, completely closed or somewhere in between
- Easy to engage students with each other and in the material
- Can post links, images, videos, polls or text as posts or in comments
- Users control notifications
- Has a great mobile app.
- Is free to join (you just need a Google account)

Hommerding gives a useful basic rubric for grading discussions:

  0 — Didn't post.
  5 — Posted, but didn't contribute in a meaningful way to the

discussion.

    10 — Posted and did contribute in a meaningful way.

A complete guide to Google Plus Circles and Communities

Voting/polling tools
Blackboard Collaborate has synchronous online voting (polling) system, as does Moodle. In a blended learning situation, you can use a variety of tools to vote on issues or poll opinions, including handheld student response devices or a number of mobile phone apps. An excellent way of incorporating a poll or vote wihin Powerpoint presentation is to use an addon such as **PollEverywhere**

Using PollEverywhere to engage students in the classroom

Jim's group work exercise

<div align="center">ORIGINAL POST BY JIM PETTWARD JAN 14, 2013</div>

The following simple group exercise requires little intervention from the teacher but 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. This can be a simple, but effective, way to link research students what do outside a face to face setting to what they do when they are together in a seminar or workshop.

The exercise will engage online students, motivate them to participate in collaborative learning, and keep them online.

Use the Groups tool (see alongside) to provide a space for them to communicate and collaborate and to evidence their participation in the exercise.

1. Identify a range of useful weblinks related to aspects of a topic which you are currently covering in yo the attachment below 'How to set up Groups in Weblearn'ur 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.