

Guidance for Group Work

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Assignments involving team work can increase engagement, improve student learning behaviour and reduce the burden of marking. Students learn best when they are actively involved in collaboration, communication, planning, and problem solving. Team working is a key employability skill, particularly in professional disciplines such as management and journalism.

Conversely, assessment of team work can be a source of frustration, anger and dissatisfaction among students, much of it attached to “free riders” (Brooks & Ammons, 2003). Allocating the same mark to all members of a team rarely leads to appropriate student learning behaviour. In a dysfunctional group, since it inherently penalises students who do more work and rewards students who may do nothing, it is often perceived as unfair.

Differential marking using mechanisms such as self-assessment and peer-assessment can provide a fairer, more reliable and transparent method of assessing teamwork by allocating different marks to members within a team. These methods distinguish between the product and process of team work and reward and encourage appropriate student behaviour. Theresa Winchester-Seeto has prepared a useful summary of the advantages and disadvantages of methods of tutor and student assessment (Winchester-Seeto, 2002)

Team work assessments may need careful support, facilitation and design, particularly in terms of clarity of expectation. Students work best when provided with clear goals and instructions, assessment criteria and defined roles within a context of the purpose and benefits of working in teams. Consideration may be given to:

- size and selection of teams (self-selected, random selection, allocation by lecturer. If teams are too large, motivation and effort can be less. High ability students gain higher grades in streamed teams of high ability students than in mixed ability groups. The reverse may be true for low ability students.
- students with learning differences. Also gender and cultural biases (although specific evidence on this is inconsistent across different studies). (Gibbs, 2010)
- the University of Kent provides specific support for students connected to working effectively together as a team. <https://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/sk/teamwork.htm>

Graham Gibbs has prepared a review of available literature. (Gibbs, 2010)

Team Work assessment at City

- Greg Layther in the school of Health Sciences recognises individual contributions to a postgraduate consultancy report the module HMM025 Health Management Consultancy using a self-assessment Team Work Audit document with an opt-out mechanism for teams of students who cannot agree distribution of marks.
- Richard Evans in journalism uses an adapted and simplified version of the same process to assess undergraduate enterprise presentations JO2212 Employability and Enterprise Skills for Journalism. Undergraduate journalism newsday exercise involving larger groups of up to 90 students assess individual contribution to team work through reflective journals.
- Ruth Windscheffel's case study on her experience of assessing groupwork on the MA Academic Practice module EDM118 Student Support and Personal Tutoring includes a helpful list of "dos and don'ts" for running group work assessments.

Reference List

Brooks, C., & Ammons, J. (2003). Free Riding in Group Projects and the Effects of Timing, Frequency, and Specificity of Criteria in Peer Assessments. *Journal of Education for Business*, 78(5), 268-272.

Gibbs, G. (2010). The assessment of group work: lessons from the literature. Retrieved July 2, 2018, from <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=2147552225>

Winchester-Seeto, T. (2002). Assessment of collaborative work – collaboration versus assessment. Retrieved July 2, 2018, from http://academic.shu.ac.uk/sbs/lta/documents/assessment/Group_assess_strategies1.docx