

Assignment Design Guide

Instructional Strategies to Improve Group Work

A practical guide for faculty on designing, facilitating, and assessing student group work grounded in evidence-based pedagogy and inclusive instructional practice.

WHY USE GROUP WORK?



DEEPER LEARNING

Students teach one another, identify knowledge gaps, and build higher-order thinking through peer discourse.



PROFESSIONAL READINESS

Students practice, communication, leadership, compromise, and shared accountability - skills central to every career.



CIVIC & GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY

Group work promotes collaborative, reflective, and engagement in communities, paired with the ability to clearly express, share, and advocate for ideas in multiple formats.

Designing the Assignment

Purpose:

Build tasks that are interdependent and require each member's contribution.

Group Size:

Aim for 3-4 students. Smaller groups improve accountability.

Stable vs. Rotating Groups:

Stable groups build trust over time; rotating groups expose students to more peers and diverse working styles.

Group Contracts:

- Have groups co-create a working agreement before project begins
- Assign rotating roles (facilitator, recorder, researcher, presenter)
- Address conflict resolution procedures in advance so groups have a shared plan
- [See group contract templates on the CTLE website](#)

Intentional Instruction

Purpose:

Instructors do not step back during group work, they step in differently. Design conditions for equitable participation and intervene purposefully to support learning.

Before:

Set clear goals & expectations

During:

Monitor, check in, and redirect. Support students in navigating power dynamics within their settings first to relate to dynamics in a larger context.

After:

Debrief process and product. Students can reflect on the collaboration process by sharing feedback, perspectives, and lessons learned, improving future teamwork.

Assessment

Purpose:

Capture both what the group produced and what each individual contributed - rewarding genuine collaboration while holding all members accountable.

Refer back to the group contract:

- What worked well?
- What could be improved?
- Did students use the tool effectively?
- How is accountability being measured?

Assess:

Assess both the quality of the final product and the effectiveness of the collaborative process through a:

- Final product rubric
- Contribution statements
- Self-assessment tied to the group contract
- Post-project survey