

Improving the odds of students effectively engaging in collaborative work

A few basic definitions

Tenets of collaborative/cooperative learning ~

- Positive interdependence
- Individual accountability
- Promotive interaction
- Development of teamwork skills (with guided practice)
- Regular assessment of teamwork functioning

Groupwork ~

- Activity spans short time frame.
- Groups formed spontaneously.
- Groups breakup after a session (little or no commitment).
- Most students are equipped with skills to do groupwork.

Teamwork ~

- Activities span long time frame.
- Teams formed carefully.
- Teams stay formed and have commitments.
- Students are ill equipped with skills to do teamwork.

Creating a supportive structure for students' collaborative work

1. Balance individual and collaborative work, online and off-line work.
2. Make sure collaborative work is relevant, and that students understand the relevance.
3. Even if you are not involving students in collaborative projects, assign students to study/support groups or involve them in other collaborative activities: role-playing, debates, discussion protocols (e.g., jigsaw, rotating stations, the final word), peer review, case studies, game/quiz show, competitions, group test taking, "Naked Came the Manatee" co-construction/writing, and so on.
4. Schedule time in class for collaborative student group meetings and work.
5. Make available a variety of collaboration tools, specifically those tools and technologies commonly used in the profession for which you are preparing students.
6. Provide instruction on being an effective collaborator.

Forming collaborative student groups

7. Assign students to teams with 4-5 members. Form team with goal to spread abilities, skills and learning preferences/styles. [Follow a method, such as mixed ability, or learning preference assessment, or learning goal focus.]
8. Keep students in same teams during the whole semester.

9. Build time into the course schedule for team formation.
10. Establish explicit individual student roles and responsibilities (e.g., organizer/project manager, main researcher, section writer, editor, etc.). Roles and responsibilities should lead to a fair division of labor. Rotate roles with each project.

Helping collaborative student groups manage the work

11. Have students construct a team agreement, including ramifications of non-compliance with the agreement. This Agreement (see Figure 1 for an example) should include information on:
 - o Who will post: Which team member will be responsible for submitting the group's deliverables?
 - o Leader or not: Some groups chose a leader to keep things moving, some groups change that leader each week (or every other week or whatever), and some groups decide not to do this.
 - o Communication and deadlines: How will they communicate with each other? How often? Will they set interim deadlines? Some groups like to set certain deadlines, such as initial work done by Wednesday, rewrites by Friday, and final completed Sunday.
 - o Equal contributions: How will work be distributed?
 - o Preferred work style: Some people like to get things done during the week and take the weekend off and others prefer the opposite. What is your style? How will you handle style differences?
 - o Not getting work done: What will the group do if one member cannot fulfill his or her obligations? Will that member be docked points, or can the member make up the work?
 - o Known problems: Issues you know will come up, how to handle dates you know you will be out of town?
12. Consider easier team projects early on, building towards more complexity.
13. Establish a mechanism for checking in on teams and individual team members.
14. Break a collaborative project up into a subset of deliverables (smaller, more manageable team projects), with due dates spread out across the timeframe.
15. Engage in structured walkthroughs at various points during the project. [Ask pointed questions of each team member regarding contributions to the project, etc.]
16. Require weekly status reports from each team/team member (e.g., summarize what the team accomplished this week, describe your most significant contribution to the project this week, describe why the contribution was significant, describe with other team members contributed, and describe what you need to accomplish on the project next week).

Assessing collaborative work

17. With each project, include a team-graded component and an individual-graded component.
18. Assess process, and/or product, and/or outcome.
19. Consider "no jeopardy" approaches to collaborative work that allow for a submitted product to be complete without a missing member's contribution. Examples include: each student completes an allocated task that contributes to the final team product and gets the marks for that task; each student writes and submits an individual report based on the team's work on the task/project; each student takes an exam, with exam questions that specifically target the team project, and can only

be answered by students who have been thoroughly involved in the project; each student's contribution is assessed via individually-produced evidence such as status reports, journals, time logs, and direct observation; each student produces an individual paper based on the team project.

20. Use a teamwork rubric. Create or borrow a rubric for assessing collaborative contribution (see Figure 2), with clear criteria. Make that rubric available to students well in advance of a collaborative project.
 21. Team Review Form: Figure 3 is a form students use to assess each other's contributions to team projects (as well as their own contributions). These assessments can have ramifications, such as if a team member receives less than 50 points on the Team Review Form from more than one team member then that student's points for the deliverable will be reduced by 20%. This form can be completed at the end of projects, or at key points throughout a project.
 22. Weekly status reports. Have students submit weekly (or biweekly) status reports.
 23. Public and semi-public structured walkthroughs. In advance, provide the group with a set of questions you will ask about the project. When together, randomly select group members to respond to particular questions.
 24. Project quiz/exam. Once the project is complete, test team members on the content of the project.
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Team E Agreement

1. Will you have a leader who keeps the team on track during team assignments?
After a preliminary review of the projects, Team E has decided that it is best to have a different team leader for each of the weeks that have a team assignment. The team leader will be assigned a week in advance based on personal schedules at that time.
 2. How do you prefer to work?
After reviewing individual work schedules, we have decided to assign a team leader a week in advance so that he/she can organize and assign tasks to be completed by the weekend before the due date. This will provide an adequate amount of time for completion and review by our teammates. The team leader will assign a preliminary due date prior to the actual due date for all to adhere. This offers flexibility to each team member to work on his/her task, yet hold him/her accountable to successful completion of his or her task by the due date.
 3. Do you agree to provide timely, substantive feedback?
We all agree that it is important to provide feedback that is positive. This benefits the team and provides open communication. It is important to critique constructively...the team wants to create a superior product.
 4. How will you handle a team member who does not do what he/she has agreed to do?
The team is comprised of professionals and we expect if an individual has a problem (technical or personal) hindering him or her from performing the assigned task, the team will be notified ASAP so the team can assist in the completion of that task. The team may advise, inform, break the task into smaller and more manageable parts, or assign to another team member. The team leader will be the focal point for managing these activities. At that point the team will also negotiate how the team member's assignment score should be affected.
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Figure 1. Sample Team Agreement describing the team's plan of action for working together.

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Contributions	Routinely provides useful ideas when participating in the group and in classroom discussion. A leader who contributes a lot of effort.	Usually provides useful ideas when participating in the group and in classroom discussion. A strong group member who tries hard!	Sometimes provides useful ideas when participating in the group and in classroom discussion. A satisfactory group member who does what is required.	Rarely provides useful ideas when participating in the group and in classroom discussion. May refuse to participate.
Problem-solving	Actively looks for and suggests solutions to problems.	Refines solutions suggested by others.	Does not suggest or refine solutions, but is willing to try out solutions suggested by others.	Does not try to solve problems or help others solve problems. Lets others do the work.
Attitude	Is never publicly critical of the project or the work of others. Always has a positive attitude about the task(s).	Is rarely publicly critical of the project or the work of others. Often has a positive attitude about the task(s).	Is occasionally publicly critical of the project or the work of other members of the group. Usually has a positive attitude about the task(s).	Is often publicly critical of the project or the work of other members of the group. Is often negative about the task(s).
Focus on the task	Consistently stays focused on the task and what needs to be done. Very self-directed.	Focuses on the task and what needs to be done most of the time. Other group members can count on this person.	Focuses on the task and what needs to be done some of the time. Other group members must sometimes nag, prod, and remind to keep this person on-task.	Rarely focuses on the task and what needs to be done. Lets others do the work.
Working with Others	Almost always listens to, shares with, and supports the efforts of others. Tries to keep people working well together.	Usually listens to, shares, with, and supports the efforts of others. Does not cause "waves" in the group.	Often listens to, shares with, and supports the efforts of others, but sometimes is not a good team member.	Rarely listens to, shares with, and supports the efforts of others. Often is not a good team player.

Figure 2. Example of a teamwork rubric.

For an online team to be successful, it requires that each member of the team works toward the achievement of the group's goals and helps support the group working processes. Each member must also participate actively in online discussions and interactions in ways that are sensitive to the needs and feelings of other members of the group.

Use the following rubric to evaluate your colleagues' contributions and effectiveness as online team members. Then, use this same rubric to evaluate yourself as a team member. When evaluating yourself, please use the Comments field to describe in detail your contribution to the group's work.

As an aside: A group member may have an emergency that keeps him/her from being able to participate on an activity. If the group agrees that this person will miss helping on one assignment but will make up for it on another assignment after returning from the emergency, then you can let me know that you will not be submitting a form for that individual on the missing assignment (please refer to your "Rules of Engagement" team contract to verify how your group has decided to handle such events). In the past, these sorts of arrangements have been made, and the form doesn't accommodate deal making (but I will).

For each item, select the score you believe best reflects that person's efforts and contributions.

If the person:

- Always demonstrates the quality, you would give a score of 5.
- Frequently demonstrates the quality, you would give a score of 4.
- Sometimes demonstrates the quality, you would give a score of 3.
- Seldom demonstrates the quality, you would give a score of 2.
- Never demonstrates the quality, you would give a score of 1.

Your Name:	<input type="text"/>				
Team Member Reviewed:	<input type="text"/>				
1. Is willing to frequently share ideas and resources.	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1
2. Accepts responsibilities for tasks determined by the group.	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1
3. Respects differences of opinions and backgrounds.	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1
4. Is willing to negotiate and make compromises.	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1
5. Provides leadership and support by taking an active role in initiating ideas and actions.	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1
6. Respects decisions of others.	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1
7. Provides positive feedback of team members' accomplishments.	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1
8. Is willing to work with others for the purpose of group success.	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1
9. Online communication is friendly in tone.	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1
10. Keeps in close contact with team members for the purpose of maintaining team cohesion and collaboration.	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1
11. Produces high quality work.	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1
12. Meets team deadlines.	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 1
13. Comments (Please provide your teammate with positive and constructive feedback.):	<input type="text"/>				

Figure 3. A Team Review Form is a tool that students can use to assess the contributions of team members, as well as their own contributions.