



Group Work Guide

Recommendations and resources to support effective practice



Introduction

Group work, where two or more students work together to achieve shared learning objectives, is an enriching aspect of the university student experience. It is versatile in its application, with the capacity to engender a sense of community and belonging. It can be used as an engagement tool in the classroom, and as a measure of student development and achievement via assessment. It is also a key employability skill.

Why group work?

Research has shown that group work has many benefits. Strategically applied, group work can reduce continuation and awarding gaps for students from minorities (McNeil et al.*), while the Education Endowment Foundation** found that collaborative learning has a greater impact on student success than higher cost initiatives, such as reducing class sizes and one-to-one tuition.

The ability to work effectively in a group is also becoming increasingly valued as a graduate attribute, as graduates of the future will need to work collaboratively to solve many complex real-world challenges.

This guide

Despite these advantages, group work can also be one of the most challenging forms of assessment for staff and students alike. In recognition of this, this guide has been created to support colleagues to navigate some of the most common challenges associated with group work. Many of the examples or advice provided is drawn directly from good practice at the University of Bath, where colleagues have explored practical solutions to these **commonly experienced challenges**. Although the guide's focus is on group work as an assessment type, many of the approaches outlined can also be applied more broadly to group work as a general tool to enhance teaching and learning.

Throughout, we emphasise a range of preventative measures which can be incorporated at the point of design to help minimise challenges arising at a later stage. We also identify digital tools that can help streamline the design and delivery of group work, recognising the importance of building these in from the start. The guide does not constitute a code of practice. For this we refer you to [QA16 \(Assessment, Marking and Feedback\)](#). This guide is also necessarily limited in scope and will not cover every problem that colleagues have faced or will face in the design and implementation of group work.

*McNeil et al. (2019). [Scaling up active collaborative learning for student success. Final report](#). Office for Students.

**Education Endowment Foundation (2021) [Teaching & learning toolkit](#).



A note on inclusive practice

We have included approaches throughout the handbook which will promote inclusive group work practices to support the needs of all learners. From actively encouraging students to embrace diversity as a fundamental driver of group success, to developing clear and transparent marking criteria for group assessment, look out for the inclusive practice icon throughout this guide.

By its very nature, group work can create additional barriers for many students. In addition to the general good practice outlined in this guide, refer to individual student Disability Access Plans (DAPs) to anticipate any adjustments which may need to be made for your students, as well as signposting students to additional support where appropriate and helpful. If you wish to discuss suitable inclusive adjustments contact [Disability Advice](#), or if you have concerns over a student's wellbeing contact [Student Support](#).



Contents

You may wish to work through the sections in order or simply dip in and out of each section as is most useful to you.

The complex nature of group work means that there is often not one single intervention or solution which will ensure group work runs smoothly.

You will likely find that a combination of different strategies from each section, adapted to your individual, course or department requirements is most successful.

01 CONCEPTUALISING YOUR APPROACH

02 CREATING EFFECTIVE MARKING CRITERIA

03 STRATEGICALLY FORMING GROUPS

04 STRENGTHENING GROUP COLLABORATION

05 RESOURCES



01 Conceptualising your approach

Group work can be a highly effective tool for helping create a sense of community and belonging amongst your cohort.

You may wish to harness group work as a method for inducting your students. You might also use it throughout your course as a learning aid, such as in a team-based learning approach: informal peer-to-peer learning in groups can be both enlightening and empowering for students.

Designing group work, for whichever purpose, is a complex task, yet this is perhaps particularly so when designing group work for summative assessment.

In this section we first look at some key points to consider when designing for assessment, **before looking at the issue of 'interdependence'** – ensuring that students work together as a team rather than reverting to tackling the task as individuals.

If you are considering whether to select group work as your assessment type, we recommend you:

- Consider whether the intended learning outcomes are best met by a group of people working together, rather than an individual working alone. The overall task should be larger than a single person could complete.
- Consult the course assessment map (if available) to ensure that adding a group assessment would add useful variety to the course.
- Consider whether the assessment will continue to be a useful and sustainable assessment type for you to use. For example, it is scalable if your cohort size increases.
- Calculate roughly how long it should take students to complete the task overall (this should align to the unit credit weighting, which reflects the notional hours of studying time).
- Decide whether self or peer assessment will be used to allocate a proportion of the marks (if well-designed and clearly introduced to students, including peer or self assessment can reduce staff marking burden).
- Identify and access tools which might be used to help you design the task and support marking. The CLT Teaching Hub has many useful resources to draw upon regarding the various features of Moodle. Tailored support is also available on request from tel@bath.ac.uk.



Key considerations

The checklist below recommends actions to take when designing or adapting a group work assessment, though we recognise they may not be applicable or possible in every context.

01 Course and unit intended learning outcomes (ILOs)

- Identify which of your ILOs align with the group work assessment.
- Think about the roles students could adopt, which would enable all participants in the group to contribute meaningfully and meet the relevant ILOs.

02 Course-wide design

- Consider the situatedness of the groupwork at this point in your students' course, identifying the types of groupwork task undertaken to date (upon which your task will build) as well as the subsequent assessments they will face.
- If your assessment type is new to your cohort, they will require support to build their skills in this area.

03 Optimal deployment of staff resource

- Identify which staff members will be involved in running the assessment and established what support or training they require in running and ultimately assessing the task. This might involve training in the effective use of tools or equipment, as well as a consideration of moderating processes.

04 Time, space, equipment and collaborative tools

- Estimate how long group work will take to set up, taking into account both physical and digital tools and resources and the time taken to induct students into their use. Supporting learners in the use of collaborative tools, such as Microsoft 365, wikis or blogs, both at the start and at key milestones, is particularly crucial for online-only learners.
- Decide whether to allocate students time in-class to work on their group projects. To do so gives you the opportunity to support the development of healthy group dynamics.
- Arrange access to necessary equipment, tools and space. The nature of the task will determine the size of the groups and therefore the level of resource needed.

05 Barriers and adjustments



- Consider the characteristics of your class, including any DAPs and prevailing cultural norms. Consider how you could remove any barriers to engagement. For example, students with social anxiety conditions will often be more comfortable with clear roles and structure rather than an open-ended task.
- Identify ways in which you could build choice into your task design, e.g. choice of task, choice of activity within task, or choice of output. This supports inclusion and helps to motivate your students. It can be supported by tools in Moodle such as Choice and Fair Allocation.
- Group composition, as discussed in the next section, will also impact significantly on the student experience.

Encouraging interdependence

When designing group work assessments, we recommend considering how to encourage interdependence between group members so that they build group working skills and do not simply revert to working in isolation.

Avoiding isolated working

To help ensure this doesn't happen, it can be useful to consider whether:

1. The assessment task is bigger or more complex than individual students can manage.
2. The students can apply higher order thinking and undertake complex problem solving.
3. There is potential for effective sharing of labour.

Designing-in Interdependence

You can also promote interdependence between group members through designing-in:

- **Goal Interdependence:** designed to encourage the group to work towards a shared outcome such as reaching a consensus answer or solving a problem.
- **Resource Interdependence:** designed to ensure different members of the group have access to different resources. These then need to be shared for the project to be completed.
- **Role Interdependence:** designed to ensure specific tasks are assigned to team members. The functioning of the group depends on the success of these roles. Roles can be rotated.

(adapted from a resource created by the University of Warwick)



What are the key messages to communicate to students about the value of the tasks they will undertake?

- Groupwork will help build tolerance, understanding of diversity, and that there are differences in how others work and learn.
- They should act for the good of the group rather than focusing narrowly on their own performance.
- Where peer assessment is present, they must pay careful attention to the marking criteria and try and guard against unconscious bias.
- Where issues impacting on the group arise, they should raise these as early as possible.

Opportunities to communicate the rationale for group work include the start of the unit, Moodle spaces, and assessment briefs. This is particularly important for distance learners.



02 Creating effective marking criteria

It is through marking criteria and the weighting of those that we demonstrate to students the value we place on different aspects of an assessment task.

When it comes to group work in particular, marking criteria give us an important method for framing the way in which students approach the task. For example, we can choose to **either mark the 'product' of the group work** - the output - or we can mark the process whereby that product was arrived at.

Furthermore, we can choose to be entirely responsible as tutors for the marks students receive or turn over some of that power to the students themselves, creating a new dynamic in the group.

Marking group work also plays a crucial role in the fairness, real or perceived, of the marks student receive. The [Office for Students sector guidance](#) refers to the 'contribution' made by group members, as do many of the policies at the University of Bath, such as the School of Management's 'Unequal Contribution Policy'.

In this section we introduce our 'Iceberg of Equal Contribution' as an attempt to reposition what constitutes contribution. We also cover the concept of marking lenses and discuss possible approaches to peer marking. Example peer marking grids, editable to suit your context, are included in the **Resources** section.

It is through marking criteria and their weighting that we demonstrate to students the value we place on different aspects of an assessment task.



Measuring the process alongside the product

There is an important decision to make when setting group work that will shape the way your students approach the task: how many marks to allocate to the process of group working and how many to the eventual product.

Product:

An output such as a presentation, report or a solution to a problem. This end product is taken as a measure of how effective the project has been as a whole.

Whilst a product approach to assessing can indicate a group has worked well to achieve this result, the product model of assessment can also be misleading in relation to this. A group could **'fail' to produce the desired end results but could** make great leaps in their learning whilst engaging in the process of working together. Likewise, a group could produce a very strong output, without necessarily working effectively together to achieve this result.

Key features:

- Focus is on the quality, completeness and accuracy of the final product
- Involves tangible metrics such as correctness, creativity and adherence to guidelines
- Results driven

Examples:

Projects, presentations, reports, prototypes

Process:

The skills or attributes that students develop whilst working towards a shared aim. Assessing process can help to promote greater creativity and reduce fear of failure, as this is seen as an integral and iterative part of the project as a whole.

When assessing the process of group work give thought to how this could be evidenced. For example, the School of Management requests **groups complete a 'group log' tracking their** activity. If you adopt this approach you will need to support your students to effectively engage with this resource. An example group log is included in the **Resources** section.

Key features:

- Focus on group dynamics, collaboration, methods used to achieve the final product
- Overcoming hurdles and negotiation
- Encourages greater experimentation, less fear of failure

Examples:

Peer evaluations, reflective journals, teamwork logs, instructor observations, group discussion forums

Combining product and process:

A combination of both product and process can help to ensure a balanced approach and mirror real world conditions where many group projects **don't end with a** successful end product. If we think about scientific endeavour for example, much of this is characterised by incremental steps, risk taking, and versions of failing.

When considering whether you are assessing the product or process of group work, refer to the learning outcomes for the unit or course as a whole.



Tools such as digital rubrics or marking guides can streamline the process of marking group work, whether marking process or product.

When you decide on the mix of product and process you would like to assess, make sure this is clearly communicated to students

Marking lenses

Marking 'lenses' help us to focus on what we value most when we assign marks.

Refer to your learning outcomes and consider what the assessment is intending to measure.

Marking lenses are broad headings that can be understood as covering the following areas:

- Knowledge - what students know
- Communication - how they convey that knowledge
- Application - how students apply what they know

These should be reflected in the marking criteria you share with your students.

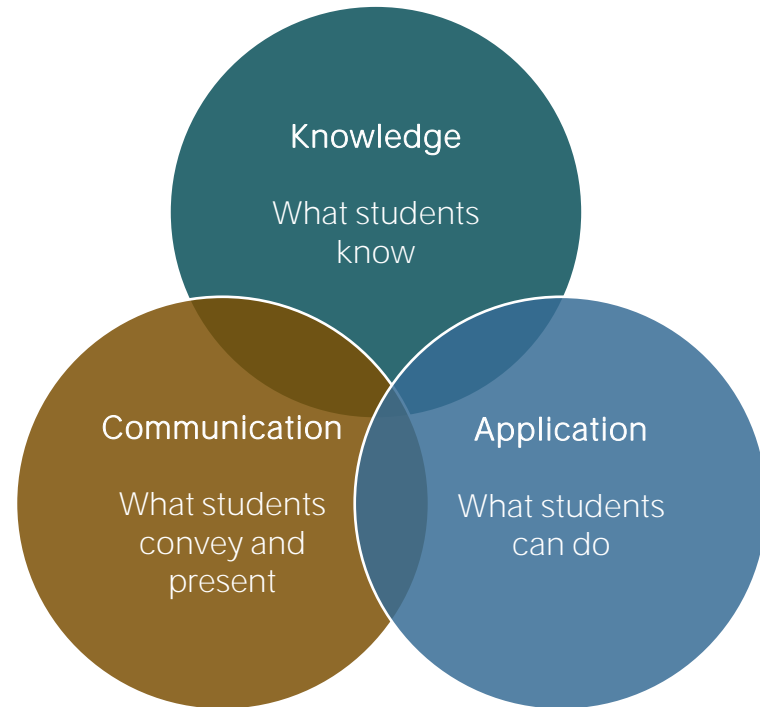
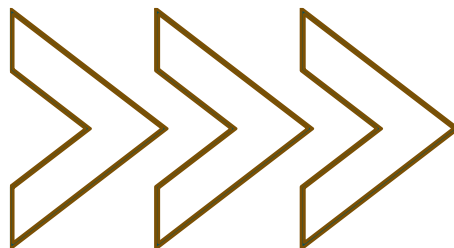
Specific assessment types, due to their nature or where they fall in the course as a whole, might focus on certain lenses more than others.

It may be that the weighting of each lens changes through the year, or during the course as a whole. For example, you may weight the knowledge lens more during the first year, while application weighs more strongly towards the end of a course as students build on that foundational knowledge and put it into practice.



digital tools

See the **Resources** at the end of this guide for an example Moodle Rubric showing how you might weight these areas.



Are you most interested in what your groups know, how they demonstrate that knowledge, or how they apply that knowledge?

Marking criteria weighting

Once you have decided the extent to which you want to reward students for their effectiveness in communicating, applying ideas or demonstrating knowledge (or for their product or process), the next step is to reflect this in your marking criteria weightings.



digital tools

Moodle Rubrics

In Moodle Rubrics you can do this by adjusting the marks available for the different criteria.

For example, in the Moodle Rubric shown on this page, the marks available for *'knowledge of analytic or statistical techniques'* are double that of *'knowledge of methodology and theoretical frameworks'*.

More guidance on [advanced grading in Moodle](#) can be found on the Teaching Hub.

× ↓ ☐ Reading and research: knowledge of methodology and theoretical frameworks.	No, or minimal, understanding of the original study's methodology and theoretical framework. 0 points ×	Demonstrates basic understanding of the original study's methodology and theoretical framework. 1 points ×	Demonstrates a good understanding of the original study's methodology and theoretical framework. 2 points ×	Demonstrates a very good understanding of the original study's methodology and theoretical framework. 3 points ×	Demonstrates exceptional, or excellent, understanding of the original study's methodology and theoretical framework. 4 points ×
↑ × ↓ ☐ Reading and research: knowledge of analytic or statistical techniques.	No application, or little to no comprehension of, analytical or statistical techniques. 0 points ×	Shows a basic comprehension of relevant analytical or statistical techniques. 2 points ×	Shows a good comprehension of relevant analytical or statistical techniques. 4 points ×	Shows a very good comprehension of relevant analytical or statistical techniques. 6 points ×	Shows mastery, or excellent comprehension of, relevant analytical or statistical techniques and their nuances, including advanced applications and limitations. 8 points ×

Measuring contribution

'Contribution' is a recurrent term within Office for Student guidance and is a topic that can cause the most disagreement between group members.

A note on equal versus unequal contribution

Although it seems undeniable that contribution is rarely completely equal and consistent across a group, it is also true that our group assessment processes and the language we use around group assessment can perpetuate this sense of 'unfairness', often encouraging students to consider unequal contribution as something which should be measured, quantified and 'used in evidence'.

A shift toward inviting students to note examples of *equal contribution* may go some way to help groups create a more positive and supportive environment.

It can be useful to encourage groups to look beyond the more obvious or explicit forms of contribution, such as producing an output or carrying out a specified role, to consider factors such as creativity, thinking differently or facilitating group dynamics which are equally important to the success of the group.



The challenge of measuring contribution

It can be hard to measure and judge what 'equal' contribution looks like especially as this can take on many different forms, some more obvious or visible than others. For example, an individual's contribution could be measured through participation in meetings, time spent working on something, or by the number of words written.

Yet contribution to the group can also be made in ways that are more subtle or less obvious, such as an individual helping the rest of the group to keep the big picture or aims in mind, or a group member who provides empathy and support for others when needed.

Member contributions might also vary across the life cycle of the group project, as some group members may be naturally better starters or finishers and people all work at different paces.

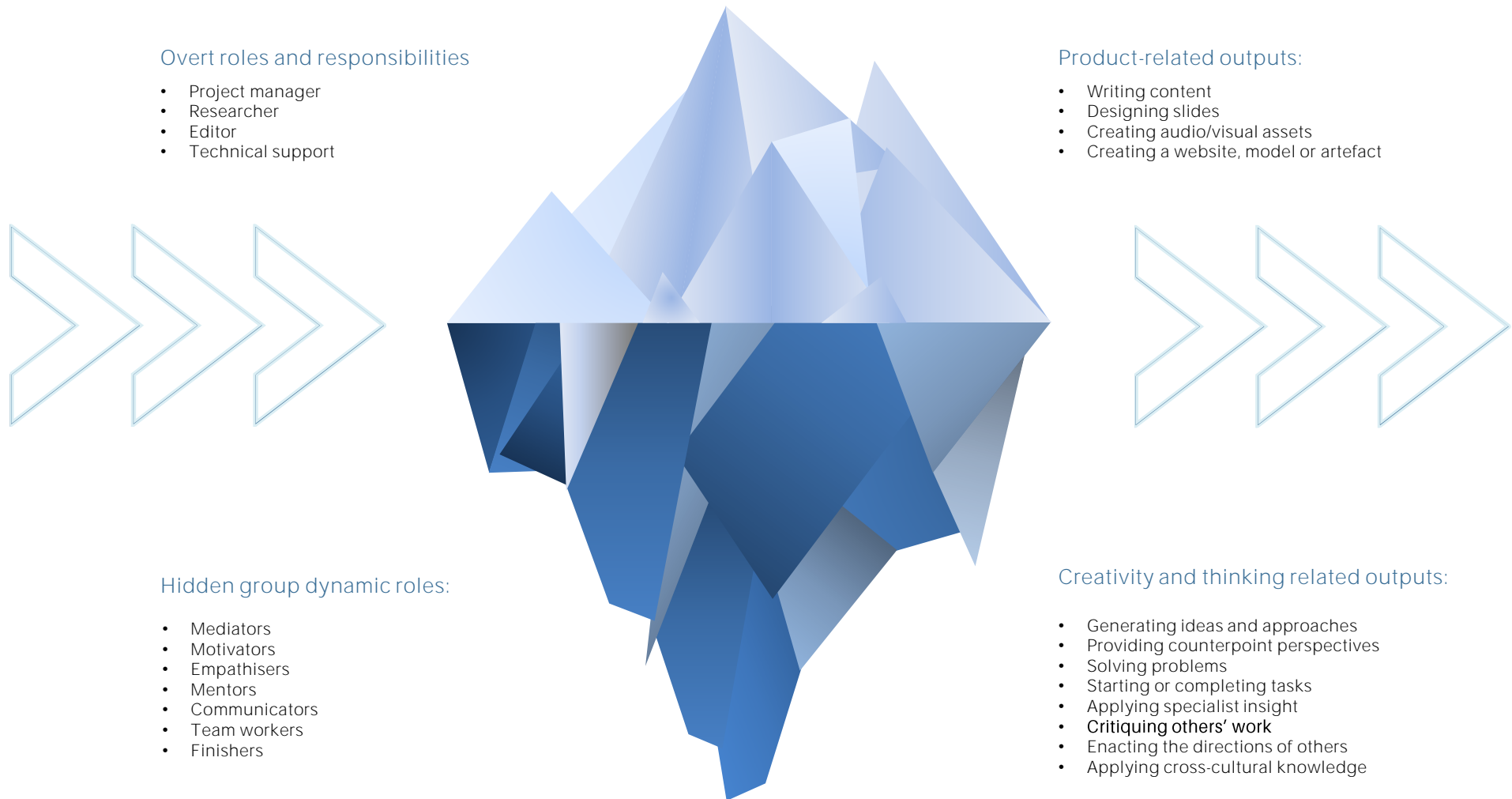
Students can be supported to capture this activity in a group log (see the **Resources** section for an example).

A sense of the more visible and invisible contributions that individual group members can make is captured in our **Iceberg of Equal Contribution** on the following page.

Iceberg of equal contribution

More obvious contributions are listed above the waterline and the less obvious contributions below.

This can be used to aid your thinking as you design process-based marking criteria, or to help broaden students' conception of contribution and feed into their group log.



Employing peer and self-assessment

Handing at least some responsibility for assessment of group work over to your students can help them place more weight on the process of group-working over product.

Responsibility for assessment can mimic workplace situations, assisting students to develop a sense of involvement and responsibility and the skill of independent judgment. It can also go some way to ameliorating the perception of unfairness that often accompanies group work (Boud and Falchikov, 2007*).

However, it requires careful set up to reduce the perception that self or peer assessment is biased or uninformed.

Recommendations

1. Giving students a clear and objective list of criteria that relates to the process of group working rather than the product. For some projects it may be practical to allow students to devise their own list of criteria or participate in its creation.
2. Investing time in explaining their role as reviewers is crucial, as students need to have a shared understanding of what the criteria means in practice. Without this step, students could mark their peers unfairly.
3. Retaining the ability to moderate self or peer marks given by students. Averaging of marks is common but can be impacted by outliers (where students give unexpected high or low marks compared to others).
4. Ensuring staff award the bulk of the marks. Weighting the peer review as a smaller proportion of the overall individual project grade is common as this ensures that students do not feel overly rewarded or punished but can appreciate that their contribution has been considered.
5. Giving students anonymity to allow honesty in their feedback - though this may not be appropriate if seeking to simulate workplace accountability.

Peer and self-assessment for formative group work

For formative projects you may wish to have entire group projects peer or self assessed. FeedbackFruits, for example, has functionality that allows groups to peer review the work, that is, the product, of other groups. This ensures students are given different perspectives on their project, whilst not overburdening staff with additional marking.



Various digital tools can help administer peer review activities and project grades can be adjusted to take account of individual contribution through Moodle's Group Peer Review activity or FeedbackFruits' Group Member Evaluation function.

*Boud, D., & Falchikov, N. (2007) *Rethinking Assessment for Higher Education: Learning for the Longer Term*. Routledge.

03 Strategically forming groups

Selecting the right groups for collaborative working is a critical step that significantly impacts the success of any assessment (Kilfe and Bonner, 2023*).

This section outlines some of the benefits of strategic group selection, before discussing the pros and cons of various allocation methods in different situations. It also outlines the tools available at the University of Bath to help support group allocation.



*Kilfe and Bonner (2023) [Successful group work is all in the selection process](#), Times Higher Education



Benefits of thoughtful group selection

Selecting groups appropriately will save you time down the line, particularly if the reason for your group allocations is clearly outlined to your students at the start. Clear explanations foster trust and an open mindset leading to more effective collaboration. This minimises conflicts, reducing the need for tutor intervention. This is particularly the case when students have a say in group formation. This helps enhance their commitment to the project and encourages active participation.

Creating well-balanced and diverse groups can encourage creativity and quality of output. When students engage in **constructive debates and challenge each other's assumptions**, the quality of their work improves: a diverse group brings fresh perspectives and varied approaches to problem-solving, reducing group think and echo chambers.


Working in well-devised groups also gives students the opportunity for peer learning. Through discussions, feedback, and shared experiences, they deepen their understanding of the topic and develop essential collaboration skills.

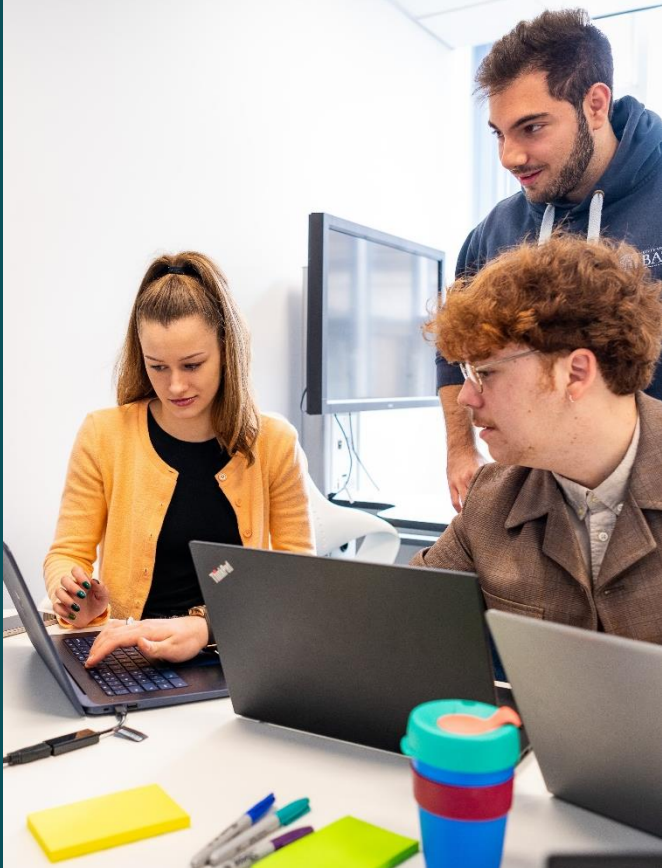


Recommended group types

Here are **the CLT's recommended group** types that will work for most group work activities.




For the first activity in the first year of a course deliberate, tutor selection is likely to be the best option. Once students know each other, you may find mixed pairs to be the best approach. More detail about these and other group type options are on the following page.

Year group	Group type
First year of study, early activities	Deliberate tutor selections <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students who have yet to make connections with their peers report preferring tutor-selected groups.• Could be allocated according to student interest or characteristics, such as gender, nationality and student background.• Ideally, groups should be no larger than 6 people.
 digital tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student choice can be managed by Moodle tools such as Group Choice and Fair Allocation, while FeedbackFruits provides a Group Formation activity.• Moodle provides an auto-group creation and allocation option or a CSV upload to populate groups (where allocation has been done offline following discussion).• Creating groups digitally allows you to restrict the numbers automatically.
Subsequent years of study	Mixed pairs <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mixed pairs allow an element of student choice and tutor choice.• Students choose a partner, ensuring at least one member of their team is someone they know. Tutors then take the pairs to create deliberate and considered larger groups.



Comparing group selection approaches

The table below provides you with an overview and comparison of ways to define and select your groups.

Type	Example	Pros	Considerations	Tools
 Mixed pairs	Students select a partner to form a pair. Tutor then takes student selected pairs to make larger groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students are given autonomy by selecting one member of their group. Students have at least one supporter in the group, which can ease anxiety and boost confidence. Tutors can still form larger groups to fit their criteria or to enhance diversity. Tutor can reduce opportunities for group think. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May not be beneficial to first year groups where students do not know their peers. Will require time for students to form their pairs before the tutor can create final groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moodle's Group Choice activity can assist in forming the initial pairs, which you can then export to a spreadsheet. The Course group upload feature allows staff to upload a spreadsheet with the newly formed larger groups into Moodle.
 Student choice by topic	A selection of topics are provided to students. Students choose a topic to work on and are put in groups based on chosen topic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students are given autonomy in their choice. Student engagement may increase as they have the opportunity to work on a project that is meaningful to them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Popular topics may fill up and students may feel aggrieved if they do not get their topic. Depending on topic, it may attract similar students increasing group think. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moodle's Fair Allocation activity allows students to rate/rank their preferences in topic options and fairly allocate students into groups.
Student self-selection	Students select all the members of their group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students may feel more comfortable with who they work with. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students new to university tend to not favour this option as they do not know their peers. Students can be left out of groups. Can create echo chambers and limit students considering other voices, as they may choose to work with people who think the same as them. Can lead to a lack of diversity and inclusion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moodle Forum can be used to help students express interest in finding group members if they are struggling to create a complete group. The Group Choice activity allows them to register a group, saving tutors time from manually inputting group information.
Randomised	Done without any order, system or criteria, like a tutor pulling out names from a hat to form groups. Can be done using online tools and software.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Considered fair as each student has an equal chance of belonging to any group. Can mimic team selection in the real world. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Randomisation can still generate groups lacking diversity. Students might perceive randomisation as arbitrary, which can lead to student complaints. May generate unforeseen groupings. May not address the learning outcomes and the reason for group work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moodle can auto-create groups with randomly allocated students. Ensure on the forum under 'Group members' that 'Randomly' is selected for 'Allocate members'.
 Deliberate tutor selection	Tutor creating groups based on certain criteria or characteristics, such as gender, nationality, student interest, student background, performance, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More diverse voices in groups improving creativity and quality of output. More opportunity for peer to peer learning, as groups are diverse. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The tutor will need to gather information about the characteristics of their cohort before creating groups. Can lead to student complaints about lack of autonomy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Course group upload feature allows staff to upload a spreadsheet with their well-balanced and diverse groups into Moodle.

Group composition should align with the specific learning goals of the course

Whether it's fostering teamwork, enhancing communication skills, or promoting critical thinking, thoughtful group selection supports these objectives.



04 Strengthening group collaboration

There are many methods that can be employed to help strengthen the collaboration within your student groups.

Key to this is considering your students' current knowledge and capabilities and then supplying stepped support to ensure they reach their goals, whilst also allowing them space to learn the skills of self-management.

This section explores ways in which you might build trust and confidence within your groups and possible barriers students might face which might undermine their ability to collaborate with others.

Next, building on the theme begun in the first section, we look at the practicalities of supporting students, before finishing with a look at conflict resolution when things go wrong.



Barriers to group work



Being aware of common challenges which can undermine students' ability to engage effectively in groups can help to strengthen group collaboration.

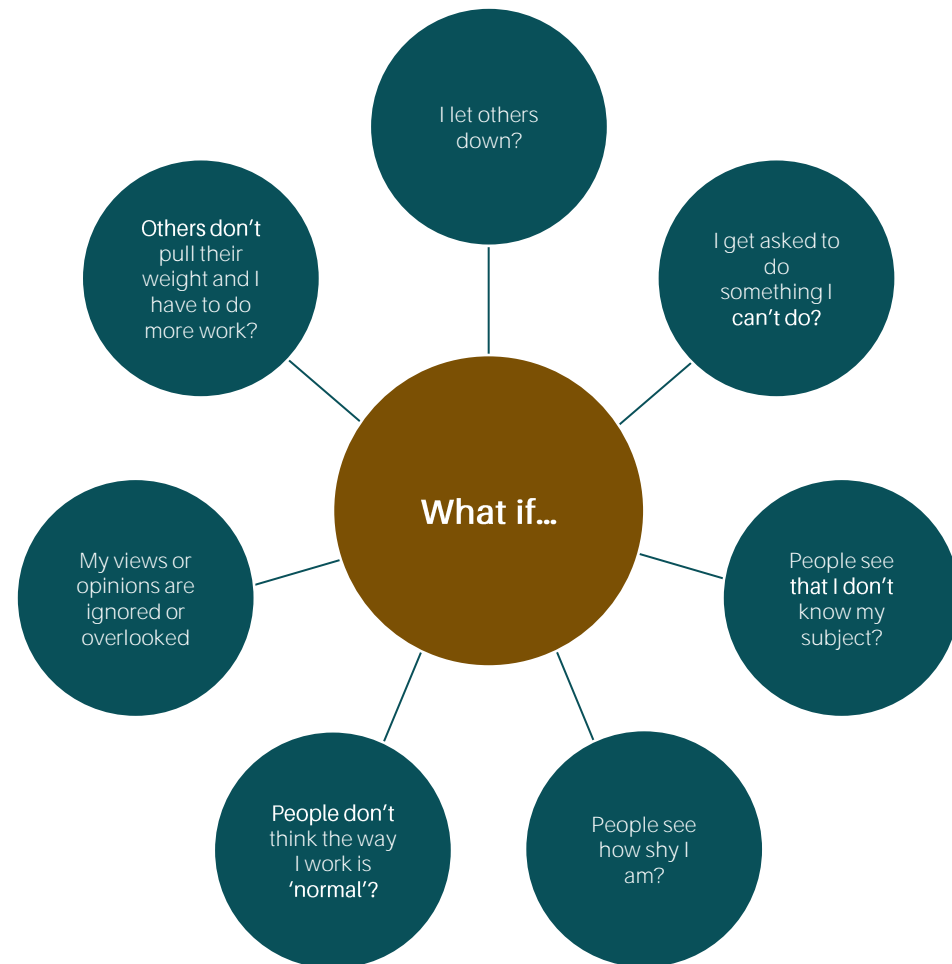
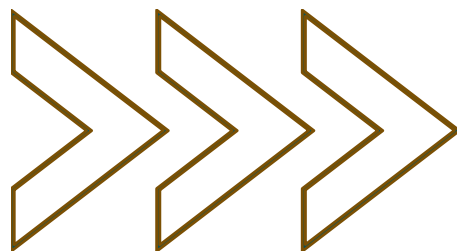
For example, individual members may feel that they are more vulnerable or exposed, or open to judgment from their peers; students may experience a sense of being out of control when working as a group; some students may also have limited experience of working in groups or have had negative experiences of group working in the past, or English may not be their first language.

Breaking down barriers

The **What if...** infographic on the right can be used to help students reflect on specific challenges they may face rather than seeing group work as one insurmountable problem. Breaking barriers to group work down in this way can then help us to identify more focused interventions and solutions to ensure effective group collaboration.

Support strategies

The strategies on the following page can be used to support the needs of all learners. In addition, also ensure that you identify any recommended adjustments for group work for those students with a DAP. For further assistance with implementing support recommended in DAPs, contact Disability Services.



Building trust and confidence



Group work will be most effective where students feel confident in their own abilities and trust their group mates to support them.

There are a number of methods you can adopt as an educator to help build confidence and trust. Encouraging students to be more open and honest about potential challenges that can arise, and sharing strategies to help them build their confidence, work flexibly and manage the process of group work itself, can help to ensure all members thrive, rather than merely survive group working.

01 Icebreakers

Quick, fun and engaging, these are a great way to facilitate group socialisation, introduce task formats and any relevant technological components.

Taking a course-wide approach to the design of your tasks will mean these skills can be built gradually and progressively through a course of study.

02 Establishing ground rules

Though these may have some tutor input, they should be developed by the groups themselves as much as possible.

They should include how often they will keep in contact and the medium for this; how they will monitor progress, and a system for speedily flagging where an individual is struggling with a task.

Each group can have a Moodle discussion forum where they post their agreed ground rules for future reference by the group or their tutor. An example group contract is included in the **Resources** section.

Encourage students to raise accessibility needs with their peers upfront and incorporate these needs into their ground rules.

03 Role allocation

Encourage students to identify clear roles within the group and divide up tasks accordingly, whilst ensuring a fair and even distribution of workload. There may be an opportunity to rotate roles through the task.

04 Strengths analysis

Encourage your students to recognise each other's prior learning, and skills, e.g. do they have specialist knowledge of a certain area? Are they more of a starter than a finisher? Are they big picture or detail-oriented?

Encourage students to celebrate the diversity within their groups and recognise that a deficit in one area is often accompanied by a strength in another.

05 Regular check-ins

It is important that students check-in regularly both with each other and with their tutors to monitor progress and catch any problems early



Group Peer Review in Moodle or Group Member Evaluation in FeedbackFruits can support this process and provide tangible evidence of any issues that need addressing.

06 Celebrate success

Check-in points can be framed as milestones with a corresponding opportunity to celebrate and further reinforce group bonds.



Download these and other [support strategies for group work](#) from the Teaching Hub to use with your students.



Practicalities

It may be that you pick up teaching a unit where supporting students effectively has been embedded into the task design right from the beginning. If not, there are still some practical steps you can take to make the process easier for your students.

01 In-class group working

If your cohort are inexperienced with group-working it is a good idea to schedule some in-class time for group working. This allows you to provide students with direct support and guidance.

For distance learning students, you can include group work as part of a residential, or support group work asynchronously via a Moodle Forum.

02 Forming and storming...

Particularly if cohorts are unfamiliar with one another, groups will need time to 'form, storm, norm then perform' (Tuckman, 1965*). Make sure you allow time for this 'bedding in' in your timelines.

03 Space

Consider booking a space that can be arranged so that groups can sit together face-to-face or access computers or other equipment should they need to.

04 Training in collaborative tools



Your students may not have experience of using software as collaborative tools, such as Microsoft 365 apps, Moodle Forums and Moodle Boards. You may need to invest time in teaching them this. One way to do this is by setting introductory activities for digital spaces, allowing them to learn by completing low stakes tasks.

05 Practice with tools



Activities that involve tools, such as Moodle Forum and Moodle Boards, set for each group, can give your students a collaborative space to share ideas. Copilot, Microsoft's Generative AI tool, can also be utilised by students to outline group roles or break down tasks in a group project.



*Tuckman (1965) [Developmental sequence in small groups](#). Psychological Bulletin, 63(6), 384-399.

Resolving differences

In any form of group working conflict is inevitable, but with the right plan in place this can be resolved constructively.

01 Minimising conflict

The measures outlined on the **Building trust and confidence** page should help minimise conflict, particularly regular check-ins with a tutor.

However, conflict is inevitable, and it should be emphasised to students that communication is key to resolution.

The **Iceberg of equal contribution** may also help broaden students' understanding of contribution.

02 Informal resolution

In seeking informal resolution of a problem, students can refer group members back to the ground rules or contract agreed at the start, and to the agreed roles and task distribution.

Emphasise to students the importance of respect, empathy and finding compromises where possible.

03 Formal resolution

If they are unable to resolve issues amongst themselves, a tutor can act as a mediator. Students should be informed at the start when and how to enact this procedure.

The first step in this procedure might be to emphasise that conflict is normal **within group work**, then to **dig deeper into the cause of the group's dysfunction**. This is best done by asking students to articulate this individually either in person or through a written reflective account.

Next, if possible, invite all group members to a discussion facilitated by you where a solution is sought to suit all parties. If differences cannot be resolved, disband the group and redistribute the members. One approach is to place group members who are disruptive or do not contribute into a group together.

Consider whether there is a milestone before which it is possible to reorganise groups, and how individual student marks will be affected if they cannot demonstrate they have fully met all the intended learning outcomes.

You should ensure your students are aware of the University's [Dignity and Respect Policy](#) and the accompanying support and report tool.



For further advice on what to do when group work goes wrong, see [Chapter 4 of Phil Race's *The Lecturer's Toolkit* pp.12-19](#). Page 14 focuses on handling disruptive or domineering group members.



Group work delivered solely online

The recommendations for strengthening group collaboration are especially crucial for distance learning students.

Throughout their studies, distance learning students will have fewer chances to get to know each other in person, or to work together live. It can therefore take a long time to build trust and confidence.

Group tasks must be closely structured, with clear milestones, and targeted staff facilitation to help keep group work on track. Provide clear instructional guidance at each stage of the task and be clear about how students are expected to use technological tools to engage with group work. Be prepared to provide further guidance and technical assistance if needed.

Plan activities to introduce group work and to help identify the skills your students already have. Structured activities can also help support groups through the 'forming and norming' stages. Make sure it is clear to students how to raise questions or concerns and resolve conflict.



See this additional resource for further [strategies for building inclusive and effective online student communities](#) (UWE).



05 Resources

Example resources to support different aspects of group work implementation.

Downloadable versions of these resources are also available from the [Designing and Assessing Group Work](#) page on the Teaching Hub for you to edit and use.

Example: group skills peer assessment template

This template is structured to be straightforward for students to use, however it can be adapted to increase complexity. The key skills have been chosen as areas that are both important for success in group working as well as intentionally observable behaviours. Peers are not being asked to quantify nor comment on perceived characteristics. The score of 0-3 has been chosen to support learners to move away from predetermined notions of degree classifications and to encourage genuine feedback with a limited impact on a potential final individual grade.

Key skill	0	1	2	3
Contribution Generate, discuss and develop ideas (in person, or using remote communication)	Did not contribute, nor develop ideas from a discussion.	Completed some research, but did not share ideas. Or, shared some ideas in response to a discussion.	Brought ideas to the group for discussion but found critical discussion of these ideas more difficult. Or, made suggestions to develop the ideas of others.	Compiled findings from a variety of sources and shared recommendations with the group. Was able to critically and positively respond to suggestions from others.
Communication Share learning and skills	Did not share any learning or skills with the group. Did not listen to others.	When prompted, supported others with knowledge or skills. Listened to others to a limited extent.	Offered to share knowledge/ skills to aid the progress of the group. Took opportunities to listen to others.	Consistently supported the group with knowledge/ skills. Actively listened to others.
Ethical conduct Play a role in creating a healthy working environment	Actively created conflict with others or did not engage with issues facing the team.	Took a passive role in the group. Found it difficult to negotiate with or listen to others.	Was willing, fair and transparent in their interactions with the team.	Showed skill in identifying issues and sensitively discussing them with others. Was encouraging and respectful of all voices in the team.
Professional conduct Meet expectations and uphold commitments	Did not communicate updates, nor meet expectations/commitments to the group.	Met some deadlines and partially upheld commitments.	Met most deadlines and upheld most commitments. Gave some progress updates to the group.	Fully met expectations and upheld all commitments. Gave regular updates to the group on progress made.

Example: group behaviour rubric

This template is structured to be straightforward for students to use, however it can be adapted to increase complexity. The key skills have been chosen as areas that are both important for success in group working as well as intentionally observable behaviours. Peers are not being asked to quantify nor comment on perceived characteristics. The score of 0-3 has been chosen to support learners to move away from predetermined notions of degree classifications and to encourage genuine feedback with a limited impact on a potential final individual grade.

Key skill	0	1	2	3
Organised Hold regular meetings or have an organised platform for working together	No evidence of meetings or communication.	Inconsistent communication and/or attendance at meeting.	Regular meetings with objectives set for progress.	Regular meetings with objectives met for progress.
Inclusive Demonstrate equality of opportunity amongst group members	Poor working atmosphere. People in the group are not listened to. No attempt to facilitate involvement from team members/individuals are actively disregarded.	Group attempts equal involvement from all, but key decisions are dominated by one/some members of the group without consent from the others in the team.	All members of the group can contribute, but not all feel their full skills/knowledge were utilised/appreciated.	All members contribute freely, without fear of a negative reaction from others. The group supports each other to succeed as a team.
Strategic Evidence project planning	The project was not planned.	Evidence of basic planning, including a list of tasks to be completed with a timeline.	A mostly developed plan for the project, incorporating mechanisms for adapting to possible pitfalls.	A comprehensive plan was in place, with both the structure and flexibility needed to meet team goals.

Example: group contract

You may wish to provide your students with a partially completed group contract. Outlining your own ground rules helps set the tone, **let's them know your minimum expectations**, and will help them start thinking of their own rules. We recommend, however, that the majority of the rules are written by the students themselves. This helps them to take ownership of the project, as well as enabling them to specify rules that fit their own context. Ask your students to send their tutor a copy following an early milestone. This acts as a useful check on progress. Encourage the groups to reflect on their needs when putting together their contract. The contract should clearly set out some minimum expectations of the group, whilst incorporating a degree of flexibility to reflect the needs of the individuals within the group.

This example has been adapted from the group contract commonly used in the School of Management:

We the undersigned agree to (check as relevant):

- Treat each other with respect, resolving issues through open and assertive communication.
- Inform our tutor as soon as possible if the group is struggling to work effectively together.
- Keep a group log that briefly describes the dates and content of activities, such as meetings, decisions, etc.
- Mutually agree the time and location of meetings (in person or virtually) and contact the group if unable to attend.
- Additional rules: _____

Name: Signature:

Name: Signature:

Name: Signature:

Name: Signature:

Example: group log

An example of a completed group log.

You should guide your students as to what type of activities to outline and in what depth. The log can also be used as a tool for students to record progress on assigned tasks as they go along, or record unassigned yet valuable contributions. Whilst it is a live document, it may express tasks in the present or future tense and the status of each task will vary. **By the time the project is finished and ready to be submitted the status on each task will hopefully read 'completed'.** Note how the tasks listed provide a tangible snapshot of the process of group working, rather than focusing solely on the end product.

Date task assigned	Task/Activity	Group member involved	Status	Notes
1 Feb	Create the slide template	Diana	Completed	Done, but would like feedback on the colour scheme from the wider group.
1 Feb	Compile an initial resource list	Kiran	50% completed	Struggling to find more sources, would appreciate some help.
5 Feb	Diffused a heated discussion in the group enabling everyone to refocus	Mo	Completed	
5 March	Identified a key flaw in the design and suggested a fix	Wei	Completed	

References

Bath resources

- University of Bath (2025) [Group work assessment guidance](#)
- University of Bath (2023) [Effective Group Work](#) (self-access tutorial from the Skills Centre)

Bath case-studies

- [Improving students' critical thinking and design skills with FeedbackFruits and groupwork](#) (2025)
- [Groupwork - collaboration and engagement](#) (2023)
- [Groupwork with Peer Assessment - Supporting Students in the Online Environment](#) (2021)

Technology Enhanced Learning and Moodle at Bath

- [Managing Groups and Groupings](#)
- [Group Assignments in Moodle \(formative\)](#)
- [Group Assignments in Moodle \(summative\)](#)
- [Group Peer Review \(summative\)](#)
- [Moodle Group Peer Review for Teachers](#)
- [Moodle Group Assignment \(summative\)](#)

External resources

- University of Reading (2024) [Effective Group Work](#)
- University of Reading (2024) [Assessing Group Work](#)
- University of New South Wales (2023) [Assessing by group work](#)
- University of Warwick (2023) [Group work](#)
- Times Higher (2023) [Successful group work is all in the selection process](#)
- University of Reading (2022) [Making the most of group work - a guide for staff](#)
- UCL (2019) [Large Group Teaching | Small Group Teaching](#)
- Advance HE (2014) [Group Work](#)

This guide is produced by the Centre for Learning and Teaching at the University of Bath.

Additional academic references

Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2011) *Teaching for Quality Learning at University* (4th ed.). Open University Press.
Discusses constructive alignment and how group work can be effectively integrated into learning design.

Francis, N., Allen, M., & Thomas, J. (2022) *Using group work for assessment - an academic's perspective*. AdvanceHE.
Designing and assessing group work fairly and effectively.

Freeman, L., & Greenacre, L. (2011) *An Examination of Socially Destructive Behaviors in Group Work*. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 33(1), pp. 5-17.
Identifies and analyses dysfunctional group dynamics and strategies to mitigate those.

Gibbs, G. (2009) *Assessing group work*. Higher Education Academy.
Discusses the challenges of assessing group work and offers solutions for fair and transparent evaluation.

Laurillard, D. (2012) *Teaching as a design science: Building pedagogical patterns for learning and technology*. New York: Routledge.
Advocates for pedagogical models to be integrated into learning design.

Michaelsen, L. K., Knight, A. B., & Fink, L. D. (Eds.) (2002) *Team-Based Learning: A Transformative Use of Small Groups*. London: Paeger.
Provides a framework and examples of team-based learning in HE.

Winchester-Seeto, T. (2002) *Assessment of collaborative work - collaboration versus assessment*. The University of Sydney.
Explores the tension between fostering genuine collaboration in group work and the need for individual assessment.

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