

# Group work

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### Why would I use group work?

Group work involves a team of students collaborating on an assignment or learning activity, often creating a work product that is used to assess the group’s learning.

The benefits of group work *for students*:

* Solidify their skills and understanding of key course concepts by learning from, practicing with, and teaching their peers.
* Build confidence through engagement with course material in an intimate, peer setting.
* Practice valuable collaboration skills (e.g. shared planning, decision-making, goal-setting, problem-solving, conflict resolution, etc.) required in professional contexts (Fearon et al., 2012).
* Identify their strengths, and contribute their unique knowledge, skills, or experiences toward a shared goal.
* Expand their social network and increase their sense of belonging in the class, department, and university.

The benefits of group work *for instructors*:

* Increase efficiency and decrease workload in grading.
* Improve students’ understanding of expectations and decrease duplication of effort in answering questions when groups serve as a source of information.
* Improve overall student performance with additional learning, reflection, and practice modalities.
* Increase student engagement by breaking down barriers to participation (e.g., performance anxiety, fear of public speaking, fear of making a mistake, etc.).
* Decrease anonymity and increase accountability through the peer collaboration process.
* Assign more meaningful projects that might otherwise be too complex or extensive for individual students to complete on their own.

This document provides an overview of common questions you may have when assigning group work in courses, considerations for planning and assessing group activities and assignments, strategies to promote effective group collaboration, and an appendix of group work tools and templates.

We acknowledge that all teaching contexts are unique. For individualized support, [contact CET for a consultation](https://cet.usc.edu/contact-us/).

### Pro tips: Common questions about planning group work.

Although group work can ultimately create efficiencies and add depth to the learning process, it can require some additional effort in planning and coordination. Ensuring equitable participation and fair assessment in group work also requires slightly different approaches, but do not let this dissuade you from exploring how group work can support your teaching goals. Faculty often start out using group work for a small part of their course, but like the results so well they expand it to other or even all parts of their course design.

This section provides quick strategies for addressing some of the key questions you may have when incorporating group work into your course. Further information on these and other topics can be found in the [“Deeper dive”](#_heading=h.2s8eyo1) section of the document.

#### Variable participation in group activities

Sometimes a few students will take on the majority of the work in a group while others offer minimal contributions. **How can I promote equitable effort and participation among group members?**

*Pro tip strategies:*

* Provide opportunities for students to get to know the other students in their group by:
  + engaging in icebreaker activities to reduce social inhibition and build collaboration skills,
  + creating an inventory of skills needed to complete group assignments. Students can then share their strengths and weaknesses with one another and delegate roles or tasks accordingly.
* Establish clear expectations for group participation and accountability using [group agreements](#_heading=h.2bn6wsx).
* For longer group assignments, periodically assess group processes through [progress reports](#_heading=h.qsh70q) and [self or peer evaluations](#_heading=h.1pxezwc).
* Assign roles to group members. [Roles](#_heading=h.1y810tw) can be based on:
  + function (e.g. material coordinator, notetaker, spokesperson, data manager);
  + responsibility for a particular theme or type of content (e.g. policy documents, scientific research, public communication);
  + a persona or position (e.g. in a role play or a planned debate).

#### Lack of structure in groups

**How do I help students learn to stay on track and *really* collaborate (i.e., set goals, allocate tasks, make decisions, communicate effectively, and manage time and scheduling)?**

*Pro tip strategies:*

* Keep group sizes small (3-5) and allocate time in class for students to meet with their groups to make coordination of their project easier.
* Suggest digital tools (including the learning management system) that facilitate virtual and asynchronous communication and collaborative work.
* Provide a [project management template](#_heading=h.2xcytpi) to help students establish goals, identify tasks, assign responsibilities, and keep track of deadlines and progress.
* Encourage students to start each group session by using their project management document to decide what they need to accomplish by the end of their time together (e.g., decisions they need to make, drafts they need to compose, tasks they need to delegate). Encourage them to end the session by documenting clear next steps for individual members of the group.

See the [Group organization and process](#_heading=h.2jxsxqh) section of this document for additional tips.

#### Perceptions of unfair assessment of group work

Sometimes students complain that the group grade does not reflect individual contributions fairly. **How can I create a grading strategy that addresses assessment concerns?**

*Pro tip strategies*:

* Combine group assessments with individual assessments to increase individual accountability.
* Clearly communicate grading criteria and include how peer review may be used in your assessment.
* Require group members to log their contributions in a shared document or in an individual self-assessment and adjust grades accordingly.
* Require group members to anonymously review and comment on each members’ log entry, or briefly evaluate each member’s contribution to the group, and adjust grades accordingly.
* Teach and model conflict-resolution skills to resolve group conflict scenarios such as:
  + a student who frequently misses meetings or does not complete assigned tasks.
  + a student who dominates conversations and decision-making.

For more strategies for assessment, see the section in this document on [evaluating group work](#_heading=h.3o7alnk).

#### Group conflicts

**How can I teach my students to manage group dynamics and address conflict for effective collaboration?**

*Pro tip strategies:*

* Normalize that collective envisioning, decision-making, and task execution are expected and challenging, and emphasize that conflict-resolution skills are critical to collaboration in academic and professional contexts.
* Anticipate conflict triggers and proactively give students guidance to address common issues. For example:
  + encourage students to make [group agreements](#_heading=h.2bn6wsx) at the start of a project to establish communication norms and accountability practices,
  + provide a [project management template](#_heading=h.2xcytpi) to help groups delegate and track tasks,
  + model processes for shared decision-making and compromise.
* Teach and model conflict resolution skills, such as:
  + using “I” statements and observations,
  + naming impacts rather than assuming intent,
  + soliciting solutions rather than defense of actions,
  + giving students example statements or scripts to help them frame their interactions.

*Example*: “I have noticed that you have made several decisions about our project without consulting the group. I feel like my perspectives and ideas are not valued. Can we develop a system to ensure that major decisions are made collectively in the future?”

* Offer to mediate if students feel unable to address conflict productively.

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### A deeper dive: Strategies for facilitating group activities.

#### Setting the stage for collaboration in your course

Your students may be uncomfortable with the idea of group work at first. It is possible they have had negative group work experiences in the past. Perhaps they don’t feel like they know their classmates well enough to effectively collaborate. Maybe they do not understand why you are asking them to work in groups. There are steps you can take to overcome these reservations and motivate students to engage in group work.

##### Making the case for group work to students

Students want to understand why you are asking them to work on a task or project in groups rather than individually. Start by making the case for assigning group work.

Explain to students why collaboration makes sense for the activities and assignments you have designed for them. For example:

* The undertaking is too complex or labor intensive to be tackled by just one person.
* The collaboration skills involved in the group project are relevant to the course objectives and highly valued in their profession.
* You want students to learn from the perspectives and approaches of their classmates as they work together on their task.

##### Community building activities

You can help the students to get acquainted before group work is assigned. Sometimes students do not know their classmates well enough to feel comfortable working with them in a group. You can do this by:

* Using icebreaker activities, both for the whole class and within the groups.
* Co-creating community or group agreements with students. For more information, see the full CET resource on [Community Agreements](https://cet.usc.edu/teaching-resources/community-agreements/).
* Having non-graded or lower-stakes group activities before a larger group project (e.g., small group discussions) to normalize working together.
* Asking groups to inventory their skills and interests that are relevant to the project at the start of a collaboration so that group members can learn more about each other and begin to think about delegating duties at the same time.

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#### Forming student groups

When assigning group work, you’ll want to first consider how your student groups will be formed. There are multiple ways to form groups, and the method you choose will depend on 1) your goals for the assignment, 2) the complexity of the project, 3) the course modality, and 4) the size and social dynamics of your class. You can also take advantage of group work tools in your learning management system that help with group formation.

##### Self-selected

###### By social connections

In a self-selected group, students form groups organically, often based on social affinity or prior social connection. Many students prefer this approach, but these groups are likely to be more socially or academically homogenous (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, academic major, etc.), which may not support the objectives of the project, and students may feel left out if they did not immediately know which group to join (Seethamraju and Borman, 2009).

###### By activity or topic

You can also allow students to self-select into groups based on their interests. For example, in an environmental policy course with a research assignment, students could form groups based on their preferred work product (written report, podcast, video presentation, staged debate, etc.), or students could form groups based on a topic of interest (climate change, pollution, water rights, etc.).

##### Instructor-selected

###### Randomized

Randomized group formation is an effective way to prevent cliques and to avoid students feeling left out. It also promotes diversity in skills, perspectives, and identities within the groups. You could form random groups by having students count off or give out numbered playing cards, or you could use a digital tool to pre-assign groups.

###### Intentional configurations

Assigning students to groups based on their individual characteristics requires you to find out more about them. In a very small class, this might be easier, but in medium and large-sized classes, you may want to have students complete a questionnaire or self-assessment that is relevant to the group project.

Consider the following when configuring your groups:

* To what extent do you want groups to be heterogeneous? Do you want students in a single group to have diverse skills, identities, experiences, personalities, and perspectives, or would you rather have students in more homogenous groups formed around affinity or preferences?
* What characteristics will you consider when composing groups?
  + **Prior knowledge, experience, skill.** This is beneficial if you want to distribute particular types of knowledge across different groups (e.g., public speaking skills, experience with data analysis, etc.).
  + **Perspectives and identity**. If diversity of perspectives is important to the project, it can be helpful to compose diverse groups. However, you’ll want to avoid putting students in the position of being the “representative” of a particular social identity.
  + **Personality.** Decide if a balance of personality types (e.g., introverted and extroverted, detail-oriented, or big picture thinker) is important to your grouping strategy, or if you want to encourage students to develop proficiencies outside their comfort zones.
* What tools or methods can be used to aid your group formation?
  + **Student surveys or questionnaires** can provide information about preferences, skills, experience, schedules, working style, and personality. You will want to avoid asking questions that force students to disclose parts of their identity, private information that they do not want to share, or information that is not relevant to the activity objectives.
  + [**Group skills inventories**](#_heading=h.vx1227) allow students to self-assess their strengths and weaknesses in skill areas related to the assignment.
* How will you explain the criteria for your group formation to students? For example:
  + *I grouped students based on the topical interests that were expressed in the questionnaire.*
  + *I grouped students to ensure that groups each had members who reported being a strong writer, a strong speaker, and having strong organizational skills.*

Avoid explanations that draw attention to social identities, grades, or general performance (i.e., *I put students with similar grades on the midterm together*).

##### Hybrid methods

###### Self-selected with instructor parameters

One way to allow students to select their own group members while encouraging a diversity of skills or perspectives is to put some constraints on the self-selection process. For example, “groups must include at least one non-major.”

###### Instructor-selected with student input

If you want to compose the groups but want to give students the opportunity to give input on the selection process, you can:

* Have students fill out a short survey about their potential assets (e.g., strong writing skills or experience building models).
* Consider allowing students to opt-out of an assigned group and join another if there are interpersonal issues that would affect their learning. Be mindful of not requiring students to share specific details that may be very personal for them.

###### Grouping by proximity

This can be a practical approach for shorter group activities in spaces not conducive to group work (e.g., auditorium-style lecture halls). You can ask students to form a group with people in close physical proximity to them, which gives students some choice in grouping while maintaining an element of random grouping.

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#### Group organization and process

Working in teams requires communication, coordination, and conflict-resolution skills, but your students may need support in developing these skills. When designing a group work assignment, particularly for larger, more complex projects, consider the following strategies to support students’ during the group work process.

##### Group size

The more people in a group, the more difficult it is to coordinate schedules, delegate tasks, make decisions, and resolve conflicts. Smaller groups help mitigate coordination challenges, and reduce the risk of “free-riding” because each individual student is more visible. However, there may be situations where larger groups more accurately reflect future professional environments (e.g. performances, design teams, research teams, clinical settings). Choose the size that works best for your learning objectives.

##### Time

Coordination of group work takes time. Consider designating class time for group meetings, particularly at the beginning of a project when goals, strategies, and accountability need to be established. Provide structured guidance on time-consuming tasks or phases of a project. Ask students to determine what work can be done asynchronously and what work is best done synchronously. Encourage the use of digital tools that facilitate remote meetings or asynchronous communication and collaboration.

##### Roles

Assign or encourage groups to assign specific functional roles to individuals (e.g., scheduler, notetaker, task manager, etc.). Ask students to create a [group skills inventory](#_heading=h.vx1227) to help students assign roles or delegate tasks.

##### Process guides

Consider building, over time, a process guide for group projects where you outline specific roles, tasks, templates, resources, and conflict-resolution tips for students. You can revise the guide for future assignments based on feedback or observations in each course.

##### Project management templates

Students may not have experience in project management. Consider providing [templates](#_heading=h.1v1yuxt), online task management tools, or spreadsheets to help students organize steps, delegate tasks, create internal deadlines, and stay accountable.

##### Goal setting and next steps

Encourage students to create specific, achievable goals at the beginning of their group meetings about what they need to accomplish during their time together. This helps students align their discussions and actions to the objectives they have identified, and can reduce off-task behaviors and ensure a productive use of time. Additionally, advise students to spend their final few minutes in a meeting discussing and documenting the next steps (i.e., tasks that need to be completed) to move the project forward.

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#### Accountability practices

Student resistance to group work is often grounded in concerns about individual students not contributing enough while others over-contribute to the collective effort. They can also get frustrated when it isn’t clear what the expectations are and how they are supposed to contribute (McKay and Sridharan, 2024). When designing group work, consider the following tools to help students create accountability in their groups.

##### Group agreements

Groups can create a group agreement document together outlining the group processes (e.g., communication and decision-making), as well as each members’ accountability for their individual contribution. As with general community agreements, these can be co-created between group members, provided by you, or developed in a hybrid method (i.e. you provide suggested agreements with flexibility for students to adapt them to suit their needs and working styles). Some sample agreement points include:

* We agree to establish internal deadlines for all individual tasks and commit to meeting those deadlines or communicating proactively when we need more time or help.
* We will use the group chat for general questions and comments and use the project management tracker to update the status of tasks.
* We will take steps to distribute responsibilities fairly between members to avoid uneven contributions to the project.

A [group agreement](#_heading=h.3fwokq0) can also house information about role delegation, communication preferences, major deadlines, and processes for conflict management.

##### Progress reports

To facilitate group productivity and individual accountability, consider having students create brief periodic progress reports. This report can be shared with you or used internally within the group. This helps students assess the overall health of the project, identify challenges, and prioritize work moving forward. A progress report can include the following information:

* Updates on tasks, both completed, initiated, and not started.
* Identification of challenging or “stuck” tasks where assistance is needed.
* Short-term goals or next steps.

##### Contribution logs

If not already part of a project management plan or tracker, consider having students complete a [contribution log](#_heading=h.4f1mdlm) where they:

* outline their roles and responsibilities,
* describe their individual contributions to the project,
* and/or track their time spent on their tasks.

This can help students visualize their part in the group effort, help the group assign or reassign tasks based on current workload, and help you identify specific student contributions if you choose to assess part of the group work individually.

##### Self-assessment and peer feedback

Similar to a contribution log, having students engage in a self-assessment to reflect on their collaboration skills encourages students to identify where they could improve their communication, organization, or personal contributions to the project. Possible self-assessment questions could include:

* What are the general strengths I have brought to this project?
* What challenges did I encounter in working with my group?
* To what extent have I done my fair share in contributing to my group’s work?

You can also utilize peer assessment in the feedback you solicit from groups. A [peer evaluation rubric](#_heading=h.2u6wntf) or feedback survey could be used to facilitate this process. The feedback can be private (i.e., only you can see the responses) or shared with the whole group. Students sharing peer-to-peer feedback will likely need guidance on how to give and receive feedback constructively (e.g., focus on behavior or performance, not the person; focus on supporting improvement rather than “calling out,” etc.). Peer feedback should not be used to determine a large percentage of the overall project grade.

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#### Group dynamics and conflict resolution

Working in teams requires making collective decisions about vision, goals, operations, and creating the final work product. Individual students may have varying skills or experience working in groups. It can be helpful to provide support in managing challenging group dynamics and interpersonal conflicts. Below are a few group dynamics that can be mitigated using a few simple strategies.

##### Common challenging group dynamics to monitor

###### Groupthink

*What is it?* The tendency of group members to conform to a perceived majority view rather than considering multiple approaches or perspectives.

*Strategy to address it:* Encourage individual brainstorming or reflection before group discussion to help groups generate more diverse ideas and strategies from each group member.

###### Transparency Illusion

*What is it?* The assumption of group members that their thoughts, rationale, or preferences are more obvious to others in the group than they actually are.

*Strategy to address it*: Encourage students to solicit feedback and answer clarifying questions when presenting an idea or approach to the rest of the group. This gives the presenting student the opportunity to clarify their reasoning and the listening students the opportunity to name their need for more clarity, or their hesitation or assent.

###### Dominant students causing others to defer or shut down

*What is it?* The tendency for a clear leader, often an outgoing student with strong oral communication skills, to emerge in a group, leaving other students reluctant to contribute to decision-making or project direction.

*Strategy to address it*: Encourage group members to first write their thoughts about group decisions, and then ensure each member’s thoughts are heard before decisions are made. You can also ask students to reflect on and/or log their individual contributions to the group and assess the balance of decision-making in their group in periodic evaluations.

###### Sunk-cost fallacy/plan continuation bias

*What is it?* The tendency for a group to continue along with a plan or strategy even when it is not yielding the desired results because they have already invested so much time and energy in that approach.

*Strategy to address it*: Create structured opportunities throughout the project to allow students to reevaluate their approach and revise tasks. Normalize that approaches and processes can be revised for efficiency and effectiveness to meet a successful outcome.

###### Unwelcome conduct

*What is it?* Unwelcome conduct is any behavior that is unwanted, offensive, or inappropriate and may be based on an individual’s identity, such as their race, ethnicity, religion, sex, gender or gender expression, sexual orientation, age, disability, or political affiliation.

*To address it*: If a student reports, or you witness, this behavior during the course of their group work, regardless of where it occurs (i.e., in class or out-of-class), as a designated employee, faculty must follow reporting procedures. For more information about when and how to report, see [USC’s Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, Title IX](https://eeotix.usc.edu/) (EEO-TIX).

You can also ask for a consultation with EEO-TIX and CET to identify next steps that you can take with the group and the class. If you are unsure, please don’t hesitate to ask for a [consultation](https://cet.usc.edu/contact-us/) to get support and guidance. We are here for you.

##### Supporting conflict resolution skills

Conflict is a natural, healthy part of the group process. It is the challenging and examination of ideas that leads to greater progress, which makes group work so valuable. But, students may not yet have the skills to manage productive conflict, which can lead to differences being communicated or perceived as rejection. When students take these differences personally, it can impede progress or lead to poor engagement.

Help students understand that differences in opinions, working styles, and personality are to be expected and even welcomed. They can help groups push farther on a project than students would be able to go on their own. Provide tips for how to productively manage, and even harness, these differences to produce better outcomes.

Student conflicts that can distract from the group process can often be minimized by proactively addressing common sources of conflict in groups around process and accountability (see [Group organization and process](#_heading=h.2jxsxqh) and [Accountability practices](#_heading=h.3whwml4) for tips). Conflict around ideas and strategies can be productive for the group, and sometimes unproductive conflict will occur despite preventative measures. In both cases, you can help students through the conflict using the following strategies.

* Model conflict resolution. Advise students to:
  + Use “I” statements and observations (e.g., “I am feeling upset because the strategy I proposed is being replaced.” or “I am feeling frustrated because the last two deadlines for data collection were missed.”),
  + Name impacts rather than assuming intent (e.g., “I am not sure if I am doing something wrong, so I don’t know how to proceed.” or “Because the tasks weren’t completed on time, I can’t move forward with the report and am worried I won’t be able to finish by the project due date),
  + Solicit solutions rather than defense of actions (e.g., “Can we talk about the decision to change strategies, and provide me guidance on what I can contribute?” or “Is there any way you can pitch in to support me so that I can make sure to finish the report on time?”).
* Offer private support and mediation if students feel unable to productively address conflict independently.
* Consider your contingency plan for groups that need to be reorganized due to irreconcilable conflict, absences, or specific accommodations.
  + Can students join other groups? If so, how would you support groups in integrating new members?
  + Will you offer an alternative assignment if a student cannot continue with group work?
  + How will you support groups that lose members and need to rethink their division of labor?

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#### Evaluating group work

There are two main components that you can choose to assess in a group assignment.

* You can evaluate the collective work product (e.g., presentation, design, report, performance, etc.),
* You can also assess the collaborative process (e.g., equitable distribution of labor, resolving disparate approaches or ideas, meeting deadlines, effective communication, etc.). This might be a good choice if developing collaboration skills are included in your learning objectives for the course.

You also have options for how you assign grades.

* You can assign each participant in the group the same grade, or
* You can assign individual grades to each student based on your assessment of their contributions to the process.

##### Finding balance between individual and group evaluation

When assessing both a work product and a group process to produce individual grades, you may need a hybrid approach to ensure that students receive a grade that is an accurate reflection of their individual learning in a group. It can be challenging to discern the dynamics of the collaboration and each member’s contribution to the project. You may want to consider:

* Adding an individual assessment to a group assignment. For example:
  + short reflective essay,
  + record of contributions,
  + individual test.
* Use self-reporting methods to gain an understanding of group dynamics and individual contribution. These methods include:
  + [Team evaluations](#_heading=h.2u6wntf)–each group member evaluates the group dynamics as a whole.
  + [Contribution logs](#_heading=h.4f1mdlm)–each group member logs their specific contributions to the project.
  + [Peer-evaluation](#_heading=h.2u6wntf)–each group member evaluates the work of the other members of the group.
  + Self-Assessment–each member documents and evaluates their specific contributions to the group effort.

These self-reporting evaluations can be quantitative or qualitative and can evaluate a wide range of skills or aspects of group work, such as respectful dialogue, effective communication, organization of labor, leadership, decision-making, etc.

Be aware that self-reporting methods can be subjective: students may not always provide honest evaluations of themselves or their peers. However, when combined with assessments of the final product and/or individual assessments, they can provide important insights into team dynamics and highlight significant issues, such as team member issues or serious imbalances of work.

If you use self- or peer-evaluation methods, let students know that as the instructor of record you will make the final determination of a grade earned.

##### Creating clear evaluation criteria for process and product

Clearly outlining your grading criteria is essential for helping students understand your expectations and focus their time and energy on what is most important. This is particularly true when assessing process skills that are not typically evaluated, like conflict resolution or task delegation.

* Provide a group work grading rubric or checklist before the project starts to clarify your evaluation criteria and enable meaningful feedback. Using a rubric can provide many benefits to group work assignments, including:
  + providing clarity on grading criteria for both group and individual performance.
  + improving efficiency and fairness in grading,
  + helping you organize both formative and summative feedback to students,
  + organizing assignment expectations for each element of more complex projects, and

You can find sample group work rubrics in the CET [Rubrics](https://cet.usc.edu/teaching-resources/creating-a-rubric/) resource.

* Consider how to weigh different aspects of group projects in your grading. Here are some key questions to answer for students when communicating your criteria:
  + What percentage of the project grade will come from the group's performance versus individual contributions?
  + How will you divide the grade between product and process assessments?
  + What weight will you give to peer- and self-evaluations? (To preserve the integrity of students’ grades, peer evaluation should only inform a small percentage of the grade.)
  + If the project involved working with outside entities (e.g. organizations, research subjects, interviewees, etc.), will you include feedback from those external clients? If so, will it focus on the product (e.g., Does it work well?) or the process (e.g., Did the group communicate effectively?)—or both?

##### Feedback

As with individual assignments, constructive feedback on student performance can promote student growth and motivation. There are multiple ways to provide feedback to groups, depending on the complexity of the assignment and the need for individual feedback.

* **Whole group written or verbal feedback**–You provide feedback on the project as a whole to the entire group, whether using a rubric, in writing, or as part of a debrief conversation. This is the most efficient method of feedback, as the collective effort is given collective feedback.
* **Individual written or verbal feedback**–You provide individualized feedback to each group member. This may be particularly appropriate in cases where not all group members were assigned the same grade for a project.
* **A combination of whole group and individual feedback**–You provide feedback to the whole group but may also give shorter notes to individual participants on their contributions.
* **Group debrief**–This less formal method entails an open conversation between yourself and the group members, where you can give feedback to students, they can process that feedback and ask questions, and they can provide additional feedback to one another.

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### CET resources mentioned in the document.

[Rubrics](https://cet.usc.edu/teaching-resources/rubrics/)

[Community Agreements](https://cet.usc.edu/teaching-resources/community-agreements/)

### Research on group work.

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### Appendix: Group work tools and templates

Use this section to find ideas and templates for the group work tools mentioned in this resource.

#### Group Skills Inventory

###### What is it?

A group skills inventory, also referred to as a group resume, is a way for students in a group to reflect on and document skills, working style, academic background, or any other information relevant to the group project.

###### Why use one?

Group inventories can help students identify and leverage the strengths of each individual member to improve the group effort. It can form the basis for task delegation, role assignments, group agreements, goal-setting, and scheduling.

###### What elements could be included?

* Academic major, minor, and other interests.
* Time constraints (i.e. work, school, or caregiving schedules).
* “Superpowers”: general skills relevant to the project (e.g. public speaking skills).
* Specialized skills relevant to the project (e.g. expertise in a particular graphic design platform).
* Approach to group collaboration, including lessons learned from previous group work.
* General preferences for communication and collaboration.

Table 1. Sample group inventory

|  | Team Member A | Team Member B | Team Member C | Team Member D |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Major/Minor |  |  |  |  |
| Superpowers  (e.g., research, design, technology, interpersonal, writing, production or presentation skills) |  |  |  |  |
| Tasks you would be excited to lead. |  |  |  |  |
| Tasks you are willing to support. |  |  |  |  |
| Communication preferences. |  |  |  |  |
| Time constraints. |  |  |  |  |
| Based on prior experience doing group work, what are your concerns, if any? |  |  |  |  |

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#### Group agreements

###### What is it?

Group agreements, also known as a group charter or a group contract, is a document that outlines group expectations for contributions, behaviors, and communication. It can be a simple list of statements that the group agrees to follow, or a more detailed outline of expectations and procedures.

###### Why would I use one?

Group agreements allow students in a group to identify the elements of collaboration that they feel are important to the success of their overall group performance on an assignment. Creating the charter requires students to think about what the collaboration will require (e.g. timely feedback or frequent communication) and what challenges they might encounter (i.e. missed deadlines or uneven contribution). The process also increases a sense of investment in the group process and can be referred back to by group members or the instructor if problems arise over the course of the project.

###### What elements could it include?

* General agreements or commitments (e.g. We agree to listen to and value each other’s contributions and perspectives).
* Agreements specific to different aspects of group work. For example:
  + Communication (e.g. We will use the group chat for time sensitive communication about the project).
  + Attendance (e.g. We will notify the group if we will be unable to attend a meeting and take responsibility for getting up-to-speed on group progress).
  + Project management (e.g. we will update the project management spreadsheet frequently to track progress).
* Outlines of procedures or process (e.g. feedback on drafts process).
* Contact details for each group member.
* Expectations for attendance, contributions, communication, mutual support, engagement, etc.
* Approach to conflict resolution.
* Signatures.

###### Sample group agreement template.

Team name:

Project goal(s):

The following are the terms of conduct and cooperation that we agree will help us reach our goals for this project.

Table 2: Agreements

| Aspect of our work | Agreements |
| --- | --- |
| Participation | We agree to… |
| Communication | We agree to… |
| Meetings | We agree to… |
| Conduct | We agree to… |
| If conflict arises | We agree to… |
| Deadlines | We agree to… |
| Feedback on drafts | We agree to… |

Table 3. Member contact and signatures

| Group member name | Contact info (email, phone) | Group member signature |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

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#### Project Management Template

###### What is it?

A project management plan is a graphic organizer or spreadsheet that helps groups plan and track progress for tasks and deliverables. These can be created in a project management software platform or in a shared document or spreadsheet.

###### Why use one?

A project management plan helps students identify deliverables, tasks, and steps involved in a larger project, assign responsibilities, create internal deadlines, indicate status, and communicate other information about progress. It can be a tool for both organization and accountability.

###### What elements could be included?

* Primary task or deliverables.
* Sub-tasks or steps related to the primary task.
* Internal deadlines for tasks and drafts.
* Group members responsible for a task.
* Priority indicator.
* Status indicator (e.g. not started, in progress, completed, in review, stuck).
* Notes area.
* Links to drafts, resources, and deliverables.
* Communication documentation.

###### Basic project management template

Table 4. Project management template

| Primary task or deliverable | Sub-tasks | Status (not started, in progress, completed, or on hold) | Group member(s) responsible | Draft due date | Links to drafts or communications | Notes: |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

For a spreadsheet with more customization and functionality, see [Group project management spreadsheet](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/u/0/d/1zW8rZvPlylEYq1uCGvETsj7rXqe9mF2kU1dN4vH7p8o/edit) (opens in Google Sheets).

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#### Contribution Log

###### What is it?

A contribution log is a document or spreadsheet where students record their individual contributions to a group project deliverable or task, whether tangible (e.g. creating an interview script) or intellectual (e.g. a specific idea or critique).

###### Why use one?

Contribution logs can help students document and reflect on their individual contributions to the group effort. It can also help you understand how work was distributed in the group to assess individual performance.

###### What elements could you include?

* Student name.
* Group role.
* Responsibilities (lead and support).
* Reflection on intellectual contributions.

###### Sample Group Project Contribution Log

Please fill out the form below to indicate your contributions to your group’s work on this assignment.

1. Team Member Name:
2. Project topic:
3. Group role (if applicable):
4. Describe the responsibilities you had in your group project. What tasks did you lead or support?
5. Reflect on the intellectual contributions you made in your group discussion during the planning and execution of the project.
6. What parts of the final project deliverable do you feel you contributed to the most?

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#### Peer evaluation surveys and rubrics

###### What is it?

A peer evaluation survey or rubric allows a student to give feedback on the contributions and effectiveness of other students in their group. It can also be used to give general feedback on group processes.

###### Why would I use one?

A peer evaluation survey or rubric provides a way to evaluate group dynamics, responsibilities, and contributions to better assess both the effectiveness of the group’s process and individual performance in the assignment. Peer evaluation should not be the primary method used to determine individual student grades, but it can constitute a small percentage and help inform the final grade earned.

###### What elements could it include?

* Attendance.
* Meeting deadlines.
* Task completion.
* Contributions to content and process.
* Communication.
* Collaboration skills.

###### Sample Peer Evaluation Survey

Please fill out the following for each member of your group, indicating the level of agreement with the statement.

1. Strongly disagree.

2. Disagree.

3. Neutral.

4. Agree.

5. Strongly agree.

Group member name:

Table 5. Group member survey template

|  | Rating | Comments |
| --- | --- | --- |
| This group member was present for group meetings. |  |  |
| This group member met internal deadlines for the elements of the project they were responsible for. |  |  |
| This group member worked effectively with others in the group. |  |  |
| This group member produced high quality work in alignment with the project goals. |  |  |

###### Sample Peer Evaluation Rubric

**For individual group members.**

Instructions: Select the option that best reflects the extent to which each statement applies to the group member you are evaluating.

Table 6. Group member peer evaluation rubric

| Criteria | 3 points | 2 points | 1 point | 0 points |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Attends group meetings and arrives on time. | Always | Most of the time | Sometimes | Never |
| Contributes meaningfully to group discussions. | Always | Most of the time | Sometimes | Never |
| Prepares work in a quality manner. | Always | Most of the time | Sometimes | Never |
| Completes group tasks on time. | Always | Most of the time | Sometimes | Never |
| Demonstrates a cooperative and supportive attitude. | Always | Most of the time | Sometimes | Never |

###### 

**For the group as a whole.**

Instructions: Select the option that best reflects the extent to which each statement applies to your group.

Table 7. Whole group peer evaluation rubric

| Criteria | 3 points | 2 points | 1 point | 0 points |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| We work together professionally. | Always | Most of the time | Sometimes | Never |
| We share high performance expectations. | Always | Most of the time | Sometimes | Never |
| We listen to each other’s input. | Always | Most of the time | Sometimes | Never |
| We are clear on our individual responsibilities and roles. | Always | Most of the time | Sometimes | Never |
| We meet internal deadlines for tasks or communicate when we need more time or support. | Always | Most of the time | Sometimes | Never |

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