Options

Different ways groups can be used to maximize learning

Groups can be used casually or extensively depending on your goals, the course objectives, and the time you have to invest in group work. Here are several options for using groups to create higher-level learning experiences for your students.

Casual / quick implementation

Simple, improvised exercises
Needs little or no advance planning
Fits easily into the course structure
Ungraded

Benefits:
Research demonstrates that students who explain ideas among one another understand course materials at a deeper level

Instructors can quickly monitor students' understanding of the lecture material. For example, after students have a few minutes to work together, the instructor calls on several pairs to share their responses with the class, comments on their work, and then discusses the ideas further or moves on to the next topic, depending on students' apparent understanding.

Two examples:
"Turn to the student next to you and talk about this."
"Turn to the student next to you and solve this problem."

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is a term that describes the use of small groups (3 or 4 students) that are intentionally formed. Groups work to solve a common problem. Each member is responsible both for their own learning and for helping group members learn.

Carefully planned activities
Activities fit into the structure of the course
Group activities are directly associated with a particular learning objective
Groups can remain consistent or change over the semester
Some planning is essential:
Accountability
Group roles
Heterogeneous groups
Does not change the structure of the course
Benefits of Cooperative Learning:
Research shows that cooperative learning techniques increase retention, achievement, and oral skills. Students working in heterogeneous groups report greater understanding of different cultures and forms of communication.

Three examples:
Three-minute review - Instructors pause during a lecture to give teams three minutes to review what has been said. Teams ask and answer clarifying questions.

Team-Pair-Solo - Students do problems first as a team, then with a partner, and finally on their own.

This exercise is based on the idea of mediated learning. By allowing students to work on problems they could not do alone, first as a team and then with a partner, they progress to completing complex tasks alone that at first they could do only with help.

Jigsaw - The class divides into "expert groups" that are assigned separate topics that all relate to a common theme. Groups research the topic, and then form new groups. Each new group contains one member from each of the expert groups. Experts report their findings to their new group, and the new group solves a problem that incorporates all of the subjects.

Team-Based Learning

| Makes small group work a primary in-class activity |
| Groups typically have 5-8 members |
| Transforms "groups" into "high performance teams." |
| Develops, then takes advantage of, the special capabilities of teams |
| Often requires a change in the structure of the course |

Benefits:
Teams help individual members understand material better and then the team becomes capable of solving complex challenges that are well beyond the capability of the best student in class working alone.

Teams engage in significant learning tasks and significant critical thinking.