“I hate group work!”

Common complaints among students regarding group work and how to address them.

Although it is true that students will need to work collaboratively in most work environments once they graduate, telling your students “welcome to the real world” when they raise concerns is not an effective defense for group work.

The benefits of good, collaborative projects are well documented, but students who have had bad experiences are often resistant to group work. Here are some common concerns students have, and strategies for dealing with them.

! “I don’t understand why this has to be a group project”
  Explain the benefits of cognitive/affective learning
  Discuss how the project connects to the learning objectives of the class
  Clarify why the project is important as a group project

! “I always do more work than the others”
  Divide tasks; set up roles
  Discuss how equitability will be monitored
  Ask students to determine how they can hold each other accountable

! “Our responsibilities aren’t clear”
  Assign group roles
  Create a clear guide for the project: Who does what? When?
  Establish deadlines for parts of the project that build to a larger whole

! “My group wouldn’t listen to me”
  Discuss the value of disagreement
  Brainstorm together how everyone gets heard
  Decide how the group can monitor this and refine their efforts when needed.

! “I’m worried my group grade will hurt my overall grade”
  Balance individual grades and group grades
  Ask students to participate in how the grading percentages will be divided
"We couldn’t schedule enough time to work together"
- Plan for significant group work to occur during class time
- Keep groups small enough that coordinating schedules is manageable
- Set realistic goals for due dates.

"The “social” structure of different group members interfered with our ability to work together"
- Work with groups to build community
- Assign roles for students in the group
- Discuss how students can monitor each other.

"I wasn't challenged by the material"
- Consider ways you may reward advanced students.
- Can they help you in the research lab?
- Can you recommend an extra project if they want to go deeper?

"I couldn’t show the way I learned the material"
- Provide different ways for students to demonstrate their learning.