

Effective Group Assignments

Most group problems (member conflict, unequal contributions by members) arise from poorly designed assignments. Assignments that can be “parceled out” among members typically result in poor group interaction and unequal contributions.

This is particularly true when a group is asked to create a lengthy written assignment, such as a term paper or report. An inherently individual activity such as writing allows groups to divide the task among members, and have little interaction until the work is done.

Ensure your assignments truly require group interaction.

*Require teams to use course concepts to make decisions

*When assignments emphasize making decisions, interaction among group members is higher and higher learning is improved

Avoid tasks that can be divided among members of a team.

Employ “Three S” Tasks

Same Problem

Group members work on the same problem, then review and their work with one another. This fosters collaboration, questions, and resolution of different ideas between members. It also sets up a clear way for students to receive feedback on their own work in comparison to others’.

Simultaneous Reports

Groups must report their answers simultaneously to the class. This lessens the pressure a group feels to change their answer to the popular one. Groups must make a choice, and be ready to defend it.

Specific Choice

Word the assignment so that students must make a specific choice.

“Read the following passage and identify the sentence in which passive voice is used most effectively.” Rather than: *“List the mistakes that writers frequently make when using passive voice.”*

Doing so fosters discussion, higher-level thinking and group interaction.