

## Forming Learning Groups

Experts in team-based learning agree on three principles for forming teams in the classroom:

- Avoid student-selected teams
- Make the selection process transparent
- Spread the ‘wealth of resources’ across teams – e.g. competency, ethnic and gender diversity, extroverted and detail-oriented attitudes

The first step in assigning student teams is to decide whether you want your student teams to work together on a **single assignment**, for the **whole semester** or **somewhere in between**. When teams work together across a series of assignments, the stakes are higher than when the team will be disbanded after completion of a single task.

### RANDOM METHODS

For one-time, short assignments use a random but transparent method. If the objective is to complete a single in-class assignment by assigning 4 or 5 students to work together a simple group division is desirable. The first of the two principles still applies but “spreading the wealth,” is potentially time-consuming.

*Example:* Have the students count off, one to four -- (“one, two, three, four, one, two, three . . .”) until in turn each student has said aloud one number. That is the number of the student’s team assignment. The rationale for this method is people who like to sit next to each will never work together on the same team.

*Other examples:*

1. Lining up students **alphabetically** (by first name , last me, birthday month, street a student lived on a particular age (say 10 or so), state, brand of shoes student is wearing, favorite subject in high school, etc.)
2. **Numerical** listing (by year of birth, number of pets at home, number of books in school bag at the time, number of movies seen in the last month, number of states traveled to, etc.)
3. **Draw** numbers/names out of a hat
4. **Hand** students playing cards as they walk in the door and have them match the suit or number of the card to form their group.

### SURVEY METHODS (“spreading the wealth”)

One benefit of these methods is that instructors can ensure that there is an appropriate mix of students in each group for diversity and student skill purposes. Additionally, instructors can help students who do not usually work together to do so.

Ask students to complete a questionnaire about their experience with:

- Technology (if the project is going to require a computer research)
- Project management – for group dynamics purposes
- The subject itself--this way the group has a mix of people familiar with the topic and novices so that the students can learn from one another.

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#### Sources:

1. Comprehensive resources on team-based learning can be found at <https://www.ucmo.edu/management/team.cfm>
2. Online resource. *Teaching Methods, Tipsheet 1: Forming student groups*. Baker College.  
<http://www.baker.edu/?#>