

Some Principles & Procedures for Forming Teams

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

1. Never use student-selected teams.
2. Make the selection process transparent.
3. Spread the ‘wealth of resources’ across teams – e.g. competency, ethnic and gender diversity, extroverted and detail-oriented attitudes.

Forming Teams vs Group Work

Keeping these principles in mind, 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 will work together over a series of assignments, the stakes are higher than when the team will be disbanded after completion of a single short task.

If the objective is complete a single in-class assignment by assigning 4 or 5 students to work together, then you may just want a group division. The first of the two principles still applies – teacher-selected teams formed in a transparent manner – but the last of the three, spreading the wealth, is potentially time-consuming. An investment in this principle should reflect the amount of time the students will spend in the work group you assemble for them.

For one-time, short assignments use a random but transparent method:

Example: Have the students count off, one to four -- (“one, two, three, four, one, two, three . . .”) until 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.

Comprehensive recourses on team-based learning can be found at

<https://www.ucmo.edu/management/team.cfm>