

## Grouping Learners in Learning Activities

Many instructors prefer assigning students to groups to maximize their heterogeneity: a mix of males and females, verbal and quiet students. When arranging learners in groups, there are several factors that might be useful to take into account.

- **Shyness of participants** (if you know the group already): Participants who are more reserved will open more in smaller groups
- **Nature of content:** If the content is challenging, controversial, or uncomfortable, smaller groups are better. Learners are less likely to open up about these subjects in larger groups.
- **Complexity of the task:** As a rule of thumb, the higher the complexity of the task (how much the learners must move around, how they will interact with each other, the number of steps required, higher difficulty, etc.) the smaller the group.
- **Progression in the training:** Usually, the earlier in the course, the smaller the groups should be. When learners don't know each other, it is less threatening to interact in a pair or a trio. Later, when students are better acquainted, they might be just as comfortable in larger groups.
- **Experience, knowledge, and skill of the learners:** The deeper the learners' backgrounds with the content, the smaller the groups can be. When learners do not know very much about the content, larger groups can increase discussion, sharing, and synergy as they strive to "discover" new content.
- **Demographics:** Many instructors recommend spreading the 'wealth of resources' across teams – e.g. competency, ethnic and gender diversity, extroverted and detail-oriented attitudes.

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### Sources:

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Online resource: Davis, B. G. *Collaborative Learning: Group Work and Study Teams*.  
<http://teaching.berkeley.edu/bgd/collaborative.html>. Accessed on 25 January, 2010.