

“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 a very effective way of convincing them now the value of group work later.

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”

- Engage your students in discussion to set certain parameters for themselves, such as project guidelines and deadlines.
- 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 can be 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.
- Encourage students to work collaboratively through the use of online technologies such as ICON and wikis.

“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.
- Provide strategies for balancing social time and work time, and setting intermediate process goals.

“I wasn’t challenged by the material”

- Consider ways you may continue to challenge 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 a variety of ways for students to demonstrate their learning.