

FOCUS ON: ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

ASSESSING GROUP WORK



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Assessing group work fairly and inclusively requires careful consideration and planning to ensure that students feel secure that they can succeed in the activity regardless of the group dynamics.

The benefits of group work can be seen by giving students a more authentic and inclusive learning experience that enhances their graduate attributes, whilst improving efficiency by reducing workload for students and markers when embedded into regular teaching and peer/self-reflection.

Where assessed group work encounters problems, it is typically due to a lack of clarity as to whether the product of the group work is being assessed or the process of working in a group. Group assessment can lead to conflict or dissatisfaction when students struggle to work as part of a group dynamic, preferring to be assessed on their own contributions.

In considering how to assess group work, the module convenor should begin by reflecting upon why it is appropriate to do so. Reflection on this question will helpfully inform design of the assessment task(s). In particular, the convenor can usefully reflect upon whether it is the process of group work that is being assessed, or the product, or both.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

Implementing group assessment guidelines

- Communicate to students how group working fulfils the Module Learning Outcomes and assessment criteria, making sure they understand how their participation in group activities will be evidenced and assessed.
- Determine group membership, size, and formation process. Keep inclusivity in mind by creating diverse groups and encourage groups to create plans for scheduled group work activity. Support groups that encounter problems through causes outside of their control like illness.

Facilitating and recording group work activity

- Allow time in scheduled teaching for group work tasks, for example: engaging in discussions, idea generation, recording group progress and time to constructively feedback on one another's ideas to reach a consensus for progressing and individual actions.
- Scheduled activity can allow groups to analyse their group composition and agree individual roles, ways of working, organise and manage project work, discuss the assessment criteria, reflect on their individual experience within the group and assess their own, their group's and potentially other groups' effectiveness.
- Provide tools to collaborate, which can be used to evidence the process and product of their group activity. For example:
 - Using discussion boards on Blackboard as a space for them to communicate.
 - Encouraging meeting in person or online (via Microsoft Teams) and instructing them to work and record their work through collaborative co-authored documents via OneDrive and Office365.
 - Group check-ins or formative submissions of their progress, giving opportunity for self, peer or lecturer feedback and inform future direction.

Assessment criteria

Assessment criteria for group work must make clear to students that awarded marks will be balanced between individual and group effort, including reflection on the process and what was produced. See guidance on writing [Effective Assessment Criteria](#) for more.

Inclusive group work

Designing effective group work that is seen as inclusive and fair, is achieved by planning, considered group allocation and scaffolded group tasks that develop collaborative skills and group dynamics. See guidance on [Effective Group Work](#) for more.

Skills development

Through group work, can develop skills relevant to employment such as team-working, collaboration and organisational / personal time management.

Reassessing Groupwork

Deferred/reassessed work needs careful planning and while re-assessment methods can vary from the original, the replacement work needs to allow the student to demonstrate the learning outcomes.

HOW CAN GROUPS BE ASSESSED FAIRLY?

The issue of fairness in marking group work is a common concern when establishing this type of assessment. Typically, assessors may want to mark the product of group work, as this provides a reduced burden in the marking process. However, where there is disparate dedication of time and effort into group work amongst group members, this can lead to animosity, where members may feel that they are carrying the burden of work for their peers but being awarded the same marks (Boud and Falchikov, 2007).

Individual assessment

Assessing the product:

- Allocating students, either as the instructor or allowing self-allocation, into specific roles or focuses. This ensures that each student has an area of the overall product to focus on, and they are marked on the quality of their work in the whole product. Marks can be awarded for individual contributions.
 - Evidenced by individual output, against assessment criteria.

Assessing the process:

- Students are given assessment criteria and provided with guidelines for how they should keep track of the group work process. Students are awarded a portion of marks for the overall output of the group work, but also individual components based on their reflection and record-keeping of the process.
 - Evidenced by group output, against assessment criteria, and a reflective report on the process, including things like meeting minutes, work logs or presentations.

Peer and self-assessment of contribution

Handing the initial assessment of group work over to the students can be a powerful but personalised form of reflecting on the group task. This way, students can evaluate their own contribution and role in the larger group dynamic and assess the output through the dynamic of the group as a whole.

[Section 5.4.2](#) of the University of Reading assessment handbook outlines some important considerations and policy in regard to peer/self-assessment of group work.

In relation to the assessment of group work, it is a requirement that summative marks informed by peer assessment are considered provisional until approved by the module convenor (subject to the usual internal and external moderation procedures). This is consistent with the procedure given in the Assessment Handbook, section 10.2.1 that "Marking shall be carried out by appropriately qualified and properly appointed persons. It should be noted that peer assessment may be used for formative purposes and a marker's determination of a formal mark may be informed by peer marking".

Peer and self-assessment of the product(s) of group work

Students distribute marks among themselves	Students are given a set number of marks (e.g., 80 out of 100) and the group decides how the marks will be distributed among group members. If the group decides that each member has contributed equally, each member of the group receives a mark of 80. If some group members have contributed more or less than others, their mark is adjusted accordingly. Students may need support in negotiating marks, and conflict may arise in some cases. Generally, though, this approach is perceived to be fairer than a shared or average group mark.
Students allocate individual weightings	Students are given a shared group mark, and then this mark is adjusted according to a peer-assessment factor. The total mark is the group mark multiplied by the peer-assessment factor (e.g., multiplied by 0.5 for "half" contribution; or by 1 for "full" contribution).

Peer evaluation	Completed assignments are randomly distributed to students, who complete a marking sheet to identify whether their peer has met the assessment criteria and award a mark. These marks are moderated by staff and returned to the student with the peer marking sheet. This method can encourage a sense of involvement from students and reinforce assessment criteria, and students can give and receive feedback.
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PEER AND SELF-ASSESSMENT OF THE PROCESS OF GROUP WORK

Peer evaluation	Students in a group individually evaluate each other's contribution using a predetermined set of criteria. The final mark is an average of all marks awarded by members of the group. There are many advantages to this method (it reinforces assessment criteria, encourages involvement and responsibility, provides feedback and possibly reduces staff workload); however, some students may be concerned about being discriminated against.
Self-evaluation	Students evaluate their own contribution based on predetermined criteria and award themselves a mark. These marks are then moderated by the lecturer/tutor.

Table adapted by UNSW from the Griffith Teamwork Skills Toolkit pp. 20-24.

SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

Assessing group work requires planning an effective group work strategy, scaffolding of teamworking skills and a clear assessment criterion and marking strategy. Students will struggle with group work if they feel it is not being assessed fairly, so aligning the assessment to the learning outcomes for the module and ensuring that students have the tools and preparation to succeed. Building in reflective and individual aspects to the assessment helps students feel secure that, regardless of the group dynamics and workload, they will be assessed fairly on their own merits and efforts as well.

For help deciding on the best way to assess group work fairly, please contact the ADE (Academic Development and Enhancement) team.

To contact us and explore other guides in our Focus On: series, please visit:
<https://www.reading.ac.uk/cqsd/teaching-resources>



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University of Reading Library. Effective group work. <https://libguides.reading.ac.uk/groups>

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References and Further Reading

Boud, D., & Falchikov, N. (2007). *Rethinking assessment in the learning for the longer term*. Routledge.

CQSD. (2022). Making the most of group work. <https://sites.reading.ac.uk/curriculum-framework/wp-content/uploads/sites/35/2022/04/Making-the-most-of-group-work-A-guide-for-staff-2022.pdf>

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