

Make Groups Work

SINGLE LESSON – Group Work Roles, Rules, and Strategies



ACTIVE LEARNING
FOCUS

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

This resource includes three strategies for planning and facilitating structured group activities with your students.

1. [Group Work Roles](#)
2. [Group Work Rules](#)
3. [Group Work Sentence Starters](#)

Each strategy begins with an explanation and tips for implementation, followed by an editable template and options or examples.

Before using these strategies for an activity or lesson, it is important to determine if the activity lends itself well to group work. Below are guiding questions you can ask yourself before grouping students.

COLLABORATION CHECKLIST

Ready to make collaboration happen?

Use this checklist to assess if an activity is a good fit and reflect on the preparation students need to collaborate successfully.

Rationale: What is my rationale for initiating group work? Will grouping allow students to...

- tackle more complex problems?
- delegate roles and responsibilities?
- share diverse perspectives?
- combine knowledge and skills?
- hold one another (and be held) accountable?
- engage in flexible paths or pacing?
- share learning that everyone contributes to?

Classroom Culture and Student Readiness

- What are my students' prior experiences with successful group work?
- What are my behavioral expectations?
- Consider classroom climate. Are student interactions generally positive or productive?

Planning for Learning and Reflection

- How will I explain to my students why this work is best done in a group?
- How long do I want this activity to last? How will I manage timing for this group activity?
- What are my plans to transition in and out of this group activity?
- What opportunities will I provide for students to reflect on...
 - how did their group function?
 - what they learned from their collaboration?

GROUP WORK ROLE CARDS

STRATEGY EXPLANATION

Assigning group roles encourages individual accountability. Group roles give students a purpose and a specific set of responsibilities. Group work roles help to distribute responsibility and encourage efficiency. They keep students focused and allow all students a chance to participate.

TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- When completing the template, include this or a similar line as the first responsibility for each role: “Contribute thoughtfully and respectfully by offering your opinion and listening to others.” All students are expected to be *contributors*, regardless of their role.
- Options for assigning roles:
 - Determine roles based on where students are sitting, or use a random [team generator](#) or birth order.
 - Break students into small groups, then have them advocate and negotiate for their desired role.
 - Distribute cards randomly, then ask students to form groups with one person in each role.
 - During a longer activity, pause for a moment and ask students to swap roles, taking on the new responsibilities for the rest of the activity.
- Grouping students by colors is a simple way to rearrange groups (red group, blue group, green group, etc.). Then, after groups have completed the activity, rearrange students into new color groups. In their new color groups, students can reflect on their experiences in the first group and share successes and areas for growth.

<< TEMPLATE >>

GROUP WORK ROLE CARDS

Review the example role cards for inspiration and customize this template as needed. Remember, *everyone* is a contributor, regardless of their role.

<p>[Role 1]</p> <p>Your responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Contribute thoughtfully and respectfully by offering your opinion and listening to others.●●	<p>[Role 2]</p> <p>Your responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Contribute thoughtfully and respectfully by offering your opinion and listening to others.●●
<p>[Role 3]</p> <p>Your responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Contribute thoughtfully and respectfully by offering your opinion and listening to others.●●●	<p>[Role 4]</p> <p>Your responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Contribute thoughtfully and respectfully by offering your opinion and listening to others.●●●

EXAMPLE 1

<p>Manager</p> <p>Your responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute thoughtfully and respectfully by offering your opinion and listening to others. • Help keep everyone in the group stay focused. Redirect group members who may get distracted. • Keep track of who participates and make sure there is room for everyone in the conversation. 	<p>Documenter</p> <p>Your responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute thoughtfully and respectfully by offering your opinion and listening to others. • Keep a list of students in the group and their roles. • Document important information (ex. evidence, answers, brainstorming).
<p>Spokesperson</p> <p>Your responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute thoughtfully and respectfully by offering your opinion and listening to others. • Share the group's ideas with the rest of the class/other groups. • Use the recorder's notes to guide how you share. 	<p>Reflector</p> <p>Your responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute thoughtfully and respectfully by offering your opinion and listening to others. • Help group members come to agreement on ideas, when needed. • Observe group dynamics and problem solve conflicts.

EXAMPLE 2

<p>Leader</p> <p>Your responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute thoughtfully and respectfully by offering your opinion and listening to others. • Start group meetings and introduce topics and tasks. • Keep the group on task and focused on the end goal. 	<p>Monitor</p> <p>Your responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute thoughtfully and respectfully by offering your opinion and listening to others. • Ensure all group members have a chance to participate and learn. • Invite group members who may not be participating to enter the conversation. • Act as a cheerleader for the group, motivating and encouraging group members.
<p>Notetaker/Timekeeper</p> <p>Your responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute thoughtfully and respectfully by offering your opinion and listening to others. • Document brainstorming, tasks, meeting notes, etc. • Keep track of time during meetings to avoid spending excessive time on one topic. 	<p>Devil's Advocate</p> <p>Your responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute thoughtfully and respectfully by offering your opinion and listening to others. • Offer alternative views in a discussion. • Help the group identify critical information and consider all perspectives.

EXAMPLE 3

<p>Manager</p> <p>Your responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute thoughtfully and respectfully by offering your opinion and listening to others. • Help the group reach a consensus before anything is finalized or submitted. Keeps time and monitors noise level and participation. 	<p>Accountant</p> <p>Your responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute thoughtfully and respectfully by offering your opinion and listening to others. • Document and compute the answer to the problem(s). Listen to the discussion carefully and record important points. • Make sure work is clear before submitting.
<p>Spokesperson</p> <p>Your responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute thoughtfully and respectfully by offering your opinion and listening to others. • Verify the work is done completely and with attention to detail before sharing with the class/other groups. • Share work clearly and enthusiastically. 	<p>Reflector</p> <p>Your responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute thoughtfully and respectfully by offering your opinion and listening to others. • Acquire and clean up materials. • Identify vocabulary and concepts that are needed to complete the assignment.

EXAMPLE 4

<p>Lab Manager</p> <p>Your responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read directions to the group.• Ensure each member is ready for the next step before moving on.• Ask teacher for help when needed.• Assist with clean-up.	<p>Materials Manager</p> <p>Your responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check out all materials and equipment from teacher and organize at lab station.• Ensure proper use of materials and equipment with the Safety Director.• Assist with clean-up.• Properly return all materials and equipment to teacher.
<p>Safety Director</p> <p>Your responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep the group on task and keep track of time.• Ensure proper use of materials and equipment with the Materials Manager.• Report any accidents to teacher.• Assist with clean-up.	<p>Recorder</p> <p>Your responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Record all observations and data for the group.• Ensure all group members have the correct data.• Facilitate discussion of the conclusion.• Assist with clean-up.

GROUP WORK RULES

STRATEGY

Creating group work rules and norms clarify the expected behavior of students in the group and prevent unnecessary conflict. Clear expectations enable a positive classroom culture, so that every student has the space to contribute and share safely. With rules and norms, a group can communicate and function more effectively, learning successful collaboration skills through practice.

TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Modify the template “Developing Group Work Rules and Norms” on the next page as needed for your students. Then, share the blank tables with individuals or pairs of students. Ask them to brainstorm norms for respectful group behavior by imagining how they would like to experience each context. Once students have brainstormed, build lists as a whole class for each type of interaction. (Consider using a [Mural](#) or [graffiti board](#) for students to share their ideas).
- Discuss group work rules and norms prior to first instance of group work; revisit the rules and norms before each subsequent group activity.
- Create a shared document and/or keep the group work rules and norms posted so that students can easily reference the information.
- Provide students with a list of roles and brief definitions for each role (see the Group Work Role Cards strategy and template); creating and defining roles will help students understand rules and norms.
- Create a check-in sheet or Google form for students to self assess how they are following the rules and norms as they work/after they work.

<< TEMPLATE >>

DEVELOPING GROUP WORK RULES AND NORMS

Working in groups can be hard. You've probably experienced it: your group is diverse, and everyone has different skills and knowledge and ways of communicating...great, right? Yes! But, sometimes when people come together with such different backgrounds, it can be hard to get everyone in agreement on how to approach the work that needs to be done.

Answering the questions in this questionnaire thoughtfully and honestly will prepare you to create rules and norms for working in groups. Why? So that you can set clear expectations for behavior and prevent unnecessary conflict. Rules and norms will help you communicate and function more effectively!

Individual to Individual	Group to Individual	Individual to Group
How should one student treat another student?	How should the group treat each individual student in the group?	How should each individual member of the group treat the group?

THE DOS AND DON'TS OF GROUP WORK

Using your answers above, complete the table with phrases or sentences for what you should do and should not do when working in a group.

Do	Don't

EXAMPLE GROUP WORK RULES AND NORMS

Norms for Collaboration	Individual to Individual: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Be respectful in word choice and tone of voice● Share the “load” of work equally● Communicating means listening as well as talking● Be open to others ideas	Group to Individual: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Listen attentively as a group● Encourage others to listen fully and avoid interrupting● Share helpful ideas for moving the conversation forward or building on ideas● No ganging up on individuals	Individual to Group: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Do your fair share● Be prepared to contribute meaningfully● Listen to constructive criticism● Good listening is not just waiting for your turn to talk.
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GROUP WORK SENTENCE STARTERS

STRATEGY EXPLANATION

Many students are not accustomed to contributing to academic conversations or group discussions, or see classroom discussions as something foreign and uncomfortable, even as they happily participate in social discussions in informal settings.

Sentence starters provide scaffolding for students who are hesitant to contribute or just generally inexperienced with classroom discussions. The structure of a sentence starter sets students up to express their ideas without the added pressure of thinking about how to formulate a response. Additionally, the use of sentence starters enhances communication, by providing the language needed for meaningful dialogue, rather than surface-level agreement or disagreement.

TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

1. Use the template to get students thinking about respectful phrases they could use to agree, disagree, clarify, and build on ideas from others when working in a group.
2. From the template, collaborate with students to create a list of sentence starters that are either generic or specific to the group's task.
3. Create sentence starters ahead of time, but revisit them and add more/make changes as necessary.
4. Post the sentence starters in a shared virtual space and/or somewhere in the classroom (taped to the corners of their desks, etc.).

<< TEMPLATE >>

GROUP WORK SENTENCE STARTERS

What could you say when you agree?	
What could you say when you disagree?	
What could you say when you are building on an idea and/or adding a new example?	
What could you say when you need clarification?	

EXAMPLE GROUP WORK SENTENCE STARTERS

<p>What could you say when you agree?</p>	<p>I agree because... That's true. I also think that... That makes sense because... That's how I see it too, because... I agree with the point that...</p>
<p>What could you say when you disagree?</p>	<p>I disagree because... I don't think that's right since... That's not how I see it. I think... Actually, isn't it true that... Another way to look at it is...</p>
<p>What could you say when you are building on an idea and/or adding a new example?</p>	<p>Another example is... I'd like to add something... Yes, and it's also true that... I see what you're saying. That reminds me of.... If that is the case, then.....</p>
<p>What could you say when you need clarification?</p>	<p>You made a good point when you said... I see what you're saying. It's like.... I am confused about.... Can you explain that again or in another way? I'm not quite sure I understand... How does that relate to....</p>

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