Course Groups

*Group work improves critical thinking, problem solving, adaptability, and communication.*

By increasing students’ interactivity with each other in task-oriented ways, they construct, rather than acquire, knowledge.

The groups tool allows instructors to create groups of students within a course. These course groups have their own areas in Blackboard Learn to collaborate on course work. These spaces are equipped with tools to assist in the collaborative process.

Your course groups may only meet in their group areas to discuss course content or trade files. But, you might also create assignments that you want students to collaborate on. Students can access all their group assignments on their group homepages.

Groups in Action

Student Experience

Research\(^1\) has shown students can benefit from group work in several ways:

- Students retain information longer than with other teaching methods.
• Perspectives from group members offer another opportunity to learn new material.
• Students have a positive feeling about the course material.
• Students who establish good relationships with their peers have a more positive learning experience.
• Successful group work leads to students feeling better about themselves.
• Students increase their social and communication skills.
• Students increase their critical thinking skills.

Access Student Topics

You can access topics in the student section of Blackboard Help and view groups as a student does. The student point of view can influence your decisions for group settings and what you include in your instructions.

To see the student view and a list of some of the questions students have, see Groups.

Note: When you access the folder listed, you are viewing information in the student section of Blackboard Help. When you are finished, select the instructor role in the drop-down list at the top of the page to return to viewing instructor topics.
Groups Page

No matter how large...organize, manage, and monitor your virtual groups easily.

On the Groups page, you can access All Groups, Groups Sets, and All Users. You can also perform the following tasks:

- Import and export groups and group memberships.
- Sort columns, perform bulk actions for deleting groups, and create Grade Center smart views for one or more groups.
- Optionally, manage tool availability for all groups.

View and Bulk Options

The ability to see the columns for the groups tools is controlled by the View Options drop-down list, so you may not see all of these columns when you first access the groups tool.

After you create groups, you have the option to make tools available or unavailable. Click the check mark in a tool’s column to make it unavailable—an X appears. Click the X in a tool’s column to make it available—a check mark appears.

With the Bulk Actions drop-down list on the action bar, you can select groups for deletion or create smart views in the Grade Center for each group. A smart view is a focused look at the Grade Center. It shows only the columns...
that match a set of criteria, and the view is saved for continued use. When the Grade Center includes a great number of students and columns, you can use smart views to quickly find data. To learn more, see Smart Views.

All Users Page

On the All Users page, you can view which groups students belong to, search for users, add multiple users to a group, and delete users from groups.
Group Tools

On the group homepage, students can access the tools you added for them. Only you and the group members can access tools enabled for a group, with the exception of the group blog and group wiki tools. Group blogs and wikis appear to all course members when the tools are accessed on the course Tools page.

The following list describes the available group tools:

- **Group Blog**: Users within a group can add entries and comments to the group blog to share ideas. You can grade group blogs, but after you enable grading for a group blog, you cannot change that setting. When you add a grade for a group blog, the grade is automatically given to all the members of the group.

- **Collaboration Tools**: Users within a group can create and attend real-time chat or virtual classroom sessions.

- **Group Discussion Board**: Users within a group can communicate as a group, as well as create and manage their own forums. The group discussion board is available only to group members, not to the entire course. Unlike other graded group activities, when you set a group discussion board to graded, each member is graded independently of other group members.
• **Email**: The group email tool allows for efficient communication. The recipient list is automatically populated with group members, so you can quickly select all or some of them. Emails are sent to members’ external email addresses.

• **File Exchange**: You and group members can use this tool to upload documents to the group area, and delete files, regardless of who added them. Files appear in the order they were uploaded. Uploaded images appear in a new browser window. This tool is only available to groups.

• **Group Journal**: Users within a group can share their thoughts with each other and communicate with you. Journal entries made in the group journal are visible to all group members and you. You can grade group journals, but after you enable grading for a group journal, you cannot change that setting. When you add a grade for a group journal, the grade is automatically given to all the members of the group.

• **Group Tasks**: Users within a group can define and separate the workload into tasks, while distributing the list to the entire group. Each task has a status and a due date to help keep members on track. Group members can view the group assigned tasks in the group tasks tool or in the course tasks tool. You and other course members will not see tasks for groups they are not enrolled in when viewing the course tasks tool.

• **Group Wiki**: Use group wikis to create a collaborative space for group members to view, contribute, and edit content. By default, all course members can read group wikis, but only members of the group can make a comment on their group wiki page. You can change the default setting to allow only group members to view a group wiki. You can grade group wikis, but after you enable grading for a group wiki, you cannot change that setting. When you add a grade for a group wiki, the grade is automatically given to all the members of the group.
Create Groups

You can create formal groups of students to collaborate on work, and create these groups one at a time or in sets. You can manually select group members or allow students to self-enroll. Each group has its homepage with links to tools to help students collaborate. Only you and group members can access the group tools.

You have two group creation options:

• Create a single group
• Create a group set

About Group Enrollment Methods

Manual Enroll allows you to assign each student in your course to a group. Manual enrollment is available for both single groups and group sets.

Random Enroll is available for group sets only. It automatically distributes membership into groups based on a designated number of students per group or the designated number of groups. Random distribution applies only to students who are currently enrolled in your course. You can enroll additional students manually.

Self-Enroll allows students to add themselves to a group using a sign-up sheet. Self-enrollment is an option available for both single groups and group sets.

**Note:** Students cannot unenroll themselves from groups.

To learn more about which enrollment method might work best for your objectives, see **Best Practice: Group Membership.**

Access Groups

On the **Control Panel**, expand the **Users and Groups** section and click **Groups**.

-OR-

In a new course, click the default **Groups** link on the course menu.

-OR-
Access groups using the default Tools link on the course menu. On the Tools page, click Groups.

To learn about the ways you can add groups to your course, see Best Practice: Presenting Groups.

How to Create a Single Group

1. Access the Groups listing page and point to Create on the action bar.
2. For Single Group, click Self-Enroll or Manual Enroll.
3. On the Create Group page, type a name and optional description. Make the group visible to students.
4. Select the check boxes for the course tools you want to make available to the group.
5. Click the Grade option and type Points possible for Blogs, Journals, and Wikis, if you want to grade student submissions.
6. Select the check box for Allow Personalization to allow students to add personal modules to the group homepage. Only the group member who added the modules can view them.
7. Optionally, select the check box to create a smart view for this group.
8. For self-enroll Sign-up Options, type a name and provide instructions. You might tell students that they cannot unenroll themselves from groups. Type the Maximum Number of Members. Select any other options you want to include.

-OR-

For the manual enroll Membership section, search for and select students from the Add Users pop-up window.

Your selected group members appear in the bottom area with a number showing the total count. Click the Show List function, represented by a full square, to open the Add Users area to view your selections. To remove a user, click the X.
9. Click Submit.

The newly created group appears on the Groups listing page.

How to Create a Group Set

1. Access the Groups listing page and point to Create on the action bar.
2. For Group Set, click Self-Enroll, Manual Enroll, or Random Enroll.

Follow the same steps for creating a single group. Then, depending on the enrollment option you choose, use the following information:

- For self-enroll Sign-up options, type a name and instructions. You might tell students that they cannot unenroll themselves from groups. Type the Maximum Number of Members. Select any other options you want to include.

-OR-

- For random enroll Membership section, type the Number of Students per Group to create or the Number of Groups. Select an option to Determine how to enroll any remaining members in the groups.

-OR-

- For the manual enroll Group Set Options section, type the Number of Groups to create. On the next page, click Add Users for each group to make your selections.

Your selected group members appear in the bottom area with a number showing the total count. Click the Show List function, represented by a full square, to open the Add Users area to view your selections. When you open the area, the square icon collapses. To remove a user, click the X.
Create Group Links

You can add links to groups in your course so that students can access their groups more easily.

How to Add a Groups Link to the Course Menu

Each new course has a default groups link on the course menu. If you deleted it, you can add it again. You can also customize the name of the link.

1. Point to the plus sign above the course menu. The Add Menu Item drop-down list appears.

2. Click Tool Link.

3. Type a Name for the link.

4. From the Type drop-down list, click Groups.

5. Select the Available to Users check box.

6. Click Submit.

The new tool link appears last in the course menu list. Press and drag the arrows icon to move the link into a new position. Access the link's contextual menu. You can rename, delete, or hide the link from students.

How to Add a Group Link in a Course Area

You can manually add links to individual groups and sign-up sheets in course areas, such as content areas and folders.
You can set up a content area to include all the content and tools your students need for the week. After reading the weekly lecture, and viewing the slide presentation, students can also access the groups tool to complete the group assignment. Students do not need to navigate anywhere else in your course to complete all the required activities for the week.

When you add a link to a specific group in a content area, all students will see the link. However, if a student is not a member of the group, he or she will not be able to access the group homepage.

Use the following steps to add a group link in a course area:

1. Access the course area where you want to add a group link, for example, the Week 2 content area.
2. On the action bar, point to Tools and click Groups.

3. On the Create Link: Group page, select the type of link: groups page, to a group, or to a group set. If linking to a group or group set, select it from the list.
4. Click Next.
5. On the next Create Link: Group page, complete the Link Information to specify how it will appear in the content area. Select the options you need.
6. Click Submit.
Remove Students From a Group

Sometimes you need to remove members from a course group. Only course instructors and administrators can remove group members. Students cannot remove themselves from a group or other students from student-created groups.

How to Remove a Student From a Course Group

1. On the Groups page, access the group's contextual menu and click Edit Group.
2. On the Edit Group page, click the X in a member's row to remove the user from the group. Click Remove All Users to delete all members from a group.
3. Click Submit.

The group member is now removed from the group. To verify that a user has been removed, go to the group homepage to check the list of members.
Edit Groups

On the Groups listing page, you can create groups as well as edit and manage them. Each group's contextual menu provides quick access to the group homepage and group email. You can also access the options to edit group properties, delete groups, and create smart views. A smart view is a focused look at the Grade Center. It shows only the columns that match a set of criteria, and the view is saved for continued use. When the Grade Center includes a great number of students and columns, you can use smart views to quickly find data. To learn more, see Smart Views.

Editing a group allows you to add or remove members as well as change its name, availability, and tools.

You can allow students to create their own self-enroll groups. On the Groups page, click Group Settings on the action bar and make your selections.

Delete a Group

You can delete a group you no longer need. If grade columns exist in the Grade Center for the group such as for gradable group blogs, journals, or wikis, you can retain the columns. On the Delete Confirmation page, do not select the check boxes for any columns that you need to preserve.
Delete Confirmation

1. Delete Grade Column

Warning: The following tools are listed in the Grade Center. To delete the Grade Center column and all grades for the tool, select the check box below for the tool. This action cannot be undone. To prevent grades for a Group Tool from being deleted when the Group is deleted, leave the check box blank.

Group Status:

- Tool
- WHS
- Blogs
Send Email to a Course Group

The group email tool allows for efficient communication. The recipient list is populated automatically with group members so that you can quickly select all or some of them. Emails are sent to members’ external email addresses.

If groups prefer to keep communication within their course, they can use course messages, the Blackboard Learn internal mail tool. Because course messages is not available as a group tool, students need to select recipients from the list of all course members. Course messages keeps a record of all messages sent.

Send an Email Message Within a Course Group

1. On the Groups listing page, access a group's contextual menu and click Email Group.
2. On the next page, select the recipients from the Available to Select box and click the right-pointing arrow to move them to the Selected box.
3. Type a Subject and Message.
4. Click Attach a file to browse for file from your computer. You can attach multiple files. After you add one file, the option to attach another file appears.
5. Click Submit.

**Note:** For Windows, to select multiple users in a row, press the Shift key and click the first and last names. To select users out of sequence, press the Ctrl key and click each name needed. For Mac systems, press the Command key instead of the Ctrl key. You can also select all course members with the Select All function.

A copy of the message is sent to the sender. A receipt page appears after the message is sent listing all recipients. The receipt page does not confirm that users received the message. It only confirms that the message was sent.
Create Group Assignments

You want to select group assignments that create interdependence.

Positive interdependence can help produce meaningful relationships, greater productivity, and growth.

To be sure students do collaborate and interact, you can use the groups tool and group assignments to foster an interactive online environment. A good rule of thumb to use before adding group activities is to only assign group work for projects that an individual student cannot do as well independently, and finish in the set amount of time.

You can create a group assignment and release it to one or more groups within your course. Each group submits one collaborative assignment and all members receive the same grade. You can create a single assignment and assign it to all groups, or create several unique assignments and assign them to individual groups. Only you and the members in a group have access to the assignment.

The overall grade for an assignment can appear to users as a numeric value, letter grade, percentage, text, or as complete/incomplete. You can choose the primary display for the group assignment column created automatically in the Grade Center.

Best Practice

Whenever possible, give students opportunities to get to know each other or work in groups in a non-graded, icebreaker type of activity. The more comfortable your students are with each other in your course as a whole, the more likely they will succeed when working in smaller groups with a focused agenda. Simple group exercises not only help students feel more comfortable, but also can help them begin to trust one another and communicate more freely in the online environment.
Before You Begin

• A course group must exist prior to creating group assignments for it.
• Students who are enrolled in more than one group receiving the same assignment will be able to submit more than one attempt for this assignment. You may need to provide these students with an overall grade for the assignment.
• Students who are not enrolled at the time that a group assignment has been submitted do not have access to that submission. These students can see only that the submission occurred.
• Students who you remove from a group cannot see the group assignments. They can access their submissions from My Grades.
• If you edit the assignment between creation and the due date, the entire group may lose any work already in progress.
• If you delete a group from the assignment after they have begun the work and prior to submission, they will lose access to the assignment and lose their work.

How to Create a Group Assignment

1. On the action bar, point to Assessments and click Assignment.
2. On the Create Assignment page, provide the instructions and files.
3. Optionally, select a Due Date.
4. In the Grading section, type the Points Possible, associate a rubric if needed, and select:
   a. Group Submission: In the Items to Select box, select the group or groups. Click the right-pointing arrow to move the selection into the Selected Items box. For Windows, to select multiple groups in a row, press and hold the Shift key and click each group. To select groups out of sequence, press the Ctrl key and click each group. For Macs, press the Command key instead of the Ctrl key. You can also select all groups with the Select All function.

   ![Items to Select and Selected Items](image)

   b. Optionally, make selections for anonymous and delegated grading, and Grade Center information. To learn more, see Assignment Grade Settings. On the Upload Assignment page, students are informed if their group assignment is set to be graded anonymously. They are asked not to include any identifying information with their group submissions.
5. Make the assignment available.
6. Select the Display After and Display Until check boxes to enable the date and time selections. Display restrictions do not affect availability, only when the assignment appears.
7. Click **Submit**.

In the following example, the group assignment appears in the **Assignments** content area where it was created and on the group homepage. The following image shows the instructor view.

![Assignments Image](image)

### About Multiple Attempts

You can allow more than one attempt on a group assignment. The group can receive feedback and a grade for each submission.

When you create the group assignment, you can select which score to use in the Grade Center calculations, such as last graded attempt or the average.
Grade Group Assignments

When you create a group assignment, a grade column is created automatically in the Grade Center. An assignment that has been submitted, but not graded, is indicated with an exclamation mark—the needs grading icon.

You access the Grade Assignment page from the Needs Grading page or the Grade Center. To learn more, see the Needs Grading Page.

After accessing the Grade Assignment page by either method, the grading process is the same.

How to Access a Group Assignment From the Needs Grading Page

1. On the Needs Grading page, use the Filter drop-down lists to narrow the list of items to grade by Category, Item, User, and Date Submitted. For example, you can filter the list by Category and display only assignments and by User to select a specific group.

2. Click Go. The filtered items appear on the Needs Grading page. Click a column heading to sort the items.

3. Access the Grade Assignment page by clicking an item’s contextual menu and clicking Grade All Users.

   -OR-

4. Access the Grade Assignment page by clicking a group name in the User Attempt column.

4. The Grade Assignment page appears, and you can proceed with grading.

How to Access a Group Assignment From the Grade Center

In the Grade Center, group assignments that have been submitted, but not graded, are indicated with an exclamation mark—the needs grading icon. All group members’ cells display the exclamation mark, regardless of who submitted the group assignment.

If a group submits an incorrect file—and only one submission is allowed—you must clear that attempt so that the group can resubmit.
1. In the Grade Center, access the group assignment column’s contextual menu and click **Grade Attempts**.

   -OR-

   Locate any group member’s cell for the group assignment containing an exclamation mark. Point to the cell to access the contextual menu. Click the **Group Attempt**.

2. The **Grade Assignment** page appears, and you can proceed with grading.

### Inline Assignment Grading

On the **Grade Assignment** page, you can annotate directly within the browser on files uploaded and converted for display in the inline viewer. You can assign a group grade, provide feedback, and make notes for yourself.

Submitted files open within the grading screen. Supported document types that are viewable in the grading screen are Word (DOC, DOCX), PowerPoint (PPT, PPTX), Excel (XLS, XLSX), and PDF. Original formatting and embedded images are preserved. If a group has uploaded an unsupported file, you are prompted to download it.

**Note:** Assignment submissions created with the content editor are not compatible with inline grading. Submissions of this type show in the window, but annotation is not available.

To learn how to use the inline grading feature, see **Grade Assignments**.

### Anonymous Grading

If you enabled anonymous grading when you created the group assignment, group identifying information is hidden in the following ways:

**From the Grade Center:** After the group assignment due date has passed or all attempts have been submitted, access the group assignment’s column and click **Grade Attempts**. For columns where you enabled anonymous grading, all cells are grayed out so you don’t know which groups made submissions.
**From the Needs Grading page:** Filter the items that need grading to show only the group assignment you want to grade. In the **User Attempt** column, all identifying information is replaced with "Anonymous Group" and an attempt ID. From an group assignment's contextual menu, click **Grade All Users** to begin grading.

Both access options take you to the **Grade Assignment** page where you view submissions and grade inline as you normally do. As you navigate from group to group, group names are replaced with "Anonymous Group" on the action bar. You can also see how many gradable group items are in the queue.

To learn more, see [Anonymous Grading](#).

**Delegated Grading**

When grading group assignments, using grades and feedback from more than one grader helps to promote reliability and remove bias. You can also divide up grading responsibilities for large classes.

Delegated graders follow the same grading steps you do, however, the number of group assignment attempts that they see are based on the options you choose. For example, you might ask each grader to grade a random, subset of the group assignments -OR- have all grader grade all group submissions. Then, you can compare the grades and assign the final group grades.

To learn more, see [Delegated Grading](#).

**Change an Individual Member’s Group Grade**

You can assign an individual group member a different grade than the group by editing the member's grade. If you change a group member's grade and assign a new group grade, the new group grade will not affect the individual's new grade. Individual members only see one grade, not what each member earned. The individual's new grade will not appear to the other group members.

In the grading sidebar, click the pencil icon to change the group grade for a member. Type a new grade and click the check mark icon to save it. This grade becomes an override grade.
The group grade and the individual group member's edited grade also appear in the Grade Center. Grayed out cells appear in the group assignment column for course members who are not part of the group.

Revert a Member’s Edited Grade

You can revert a member's edited grade to the original group grade, which all group members received.

In the grading sidebar, click the pencil icon for the user with the edited grade. Click the left-pointing arrow to change the grade to the original group grade. The override icon is removed. The change also appears in the Grade Center.

Add and Delete Group Members

If you add a member to a group after you assign a grade for a group assignment, the new member does not receive a grade, as they were not part of the process. Even if you update the group grade, the new member does not receive a grade. You can assign a grade for the new member from the member's Grade Details page, but there is no submission available to view when grading.

If you remove a member of a group and you have assigned a grade for a group assignment, any grading updates are applied to that group member's cell. To remove a score for a member removed from a group, click Delete User Attempt on the member's Grade Details page. You are asked if you are sure you want to delete the attempt. The group assignment grade is deleted from the member's cell in the Grade Center.
Import and Export Groups

You can export a CSV (comma-separated value) file containing your existing groups and group members, reorganize offline as needed, and then import them.

On the main Groups page, use the import and export functions on the action bar to add new users and groups. However, you cannot remove users or groups. During these processes, you cannot add new users to your course.

On the Import Groups page, you can also select the group tools you want each group to have access to. Previous tool availability settings are overwritten.

On the Export Groups and Members page, make a selection for what you want to export:

- Groups only
- Group members only
- Groups and group members
Group Codes

Group codes are unique identifiers used strictly for import purposes. You may reveal a column in the interface to see the group codes, but you cannot edit group codes while in your course.

Group codes also appear in downloaded CSV files. You can edit the group codes in the CSV file when importing existing users to a group to ensure the users are added to the correct group. Group codes are necessary to provide a way to identify each group in case they have the same name.

When viewing all groups, use the View Options drop-down list to show and hide the Group Code column.
Best Practices: Groups

Learn about the different ways you can deliver groups in your course and how to use the tool to your advantage.

In this section...

• Best Practice: Group Collaboration
• Best Practice: Presenting Groups
• Best Practice: Group Membership
• Best Practice: Group Assessment
Best Practice: Group Collaboration

As the saying goes: "Two heads are better than one."

Collaborative learning offers many benefits over traditional instruction. As studies show, when students work as a team, they develop positive attitudes, solve problems more effectively, and experience a greater sense of accomplishment.

Ideally, all learning includes active student participation and interaction among students. Instructors who have not introduced group activities into their teaching arsenals have valid reasons for being hesitant. Some do not want to transfer control from their teacher-centered methods of instruction to their students. Others have heard stories from their colleagues that the experience was not worthwhile.

Though you may find the move away from a teacher-controlled environment is a dramatic change, the benefits of collaborative learning far outweigh any obstacles that you must deal with when implementing group activities.

Benefits of Collaboration

Research shows that students can benefit from group work in several ways:¹

- Students retain information longer than with other teaching methods.
- Perspectives from group members offer another opportunity to learn new material.
- Students have a positive feeling about the course material.
- Students who establish good relationships with their peers have a more positive learning experience.
- Successful group work leads to students feeling better about themselves.
- Students increase their social and communication skills.
- Students increase their critical thinking skills.
Challenges of Collaboration

Many students dread group work. Some motivated students report that their slower group members drag them down. Less confident students complain about being ignored or not taken seriously in group sessions. Groups may break down completely when some teammates are not contributing their fair shares.

Some students prefer only an individual effort and have no desire to help others or ask for help. They object to the responsibility that comes with collaborative learning.

Some students feel that they spend too much time on group projects and would rather be working through more course material and gaining more useful knowledge.

Some students will not approve of sharing one group grade.

Before Assigning Group Work

You do not want students to see group activities as busy work. If working in a group does not enhance your learning objectives and provide value, consider alternative teaching techniques. You should use group work only for projects that an individual student cannot do as well alone and finish in the intended amount of time.

Research shows that students work harder when others are relying on them. To encourage this interdependence, create group assignments that require the students to divide the work to meet the goal, question and challenge each other’s ideas, and share feedback and encouragement.

Before incorporating group work into your course, consider the following questions:

• Will the group work further my course objectives?
• What introductory material or group resource information can you provide to help students succeed?
• How will the groups be formed?
• Will students be involved in the planning of the groups?
• How will you assess students’ learning and maintain individual accountability? Will you require a group deliverable?
• How will you handle concerns and problems?

Best Practice: Presenting Groups

The way students access groups depends on how you set up your course. As shown in the following image, you can use three options for setting up groups to achieve different learning objectives.

Options for Presenting Groups to Students

Option A: My Groups

*What it looks like:*

Each student's groups appear by default in **My Groups**.

*How it works:*

After you create groups and add users, the groups are available to enrolled members in **My Groups** where users can expand each group name for quick access to its tools. Since **My Groups** is populated automatically when students are added to groups, this option is the easiest to implement. Click the arrow to expand the group homepage into the content frame.
Option B: Course menu link

*What it looks like:*

Adding a course menu link to the Groups listing page displays all groups a student is enrolled in and available sign-up sheets.

*How it works:*

Because My Groups does not list sign-up sheets, create a link to the Groups listing page, if you want to use self-enroll groups. Adding a link to the course menu is easy and convenient to use. Use the course menu’s Add Menu Item drop-down list and create a tool link or a course link. Then, select the Groups listing page in the pop-up course map.

Option C: Provide links in a course area

*What it looks like:*

A link to the Groups listing page, a group homepage, or a sign-up sheet appears in a content area, folder, learning module, or lesson plan in close proximity to related content.

*How it works:*

Create groups using the groups tool. Next, go to the course area where you want to add the group link. Point to Tools on the action bar to access the drop-down list and select Groups. Make your selection on the Create Link: Group page.
Best Practice: Group Membership

The number of students in your course and how well you know them can influence how you select members for group work and collaboration.

In general, include at least four members in each group. Four-member groups can accommodate an absence and the group can continue to move forward. This size does not permit any student to lurk without participating. Group members can distribute tasks evenly. Four members bring enough diversity, opinions, and learning styles for worthwhile brainstorming and solutions.

If you plan to assign group activities more than once, consider rotating groups throughout the term. However, allow a group to stay intact long enough to bond and be productive.

Group Enrollment Methods

You can create groups one at a time or in sets. You can manually select group members, have the system randomly select them as you create group sets, or allow students to self-enroll.

Manual Enroll

Manual enrollment allows you to assign each student in your course to a group. Manual enrollment is available for both single groups and group sets.

Consider...

With a bit of knowledge about your students, you can successfully assign members to groups to ensure heterogeneity or diversity. Groups containing assorted personality traits or mixed abilities can produce the best results. Students report preferring a group assignment made by an instructor to membership they choose for themselves.

You want to create groups that include individuals with varied strengths, knowledge, and even work habits. You also need to consider gender and cultural differences. Heterogeneous groups work especially well for generating new ideas and exploring a project from different points of view. The stronger members of a group will gain deeper knowledge of the subject as they help struggling teammates. The weaker students will not only acquire knowledge from the motivated students, but may also gain insight on how their group
members approach their learning. Hopefully, the results are students feeling good about themselves for helping others and students motivated by peer examples.

Random Enroll

Random enrollment is available only for group sets and automatically distributes membership into groups based on a designated number of students per group or the designated number of groups. Random distribution applies only to students who are currently enrolled in your course. You can enroll additional students manually. When naming a set of groups, the name of each group has a number added to it when they are first created. For example, a set of groups named "Research" results in groups named "Research 1," "Research 2," and "Research 3," depending on the number of groups in the set. After creation, you can edit the group names.

Consider...

Random assignment to groups may work best for instructors who teach courses containing many students—without the opportunity to know them individually. Though random assignment is easy for an instructor as it requires no preparation, some students may view random assignment as their instructor not caring.

By assigning students to groups, you avoid the risk that students who select their own partners will spend too much time socializing and forming cliques. No students are excluded, disregarded, or chosen last. Also, some instructors feel one of the goals of group work is to collaborate with people you do not know, and random assignment increases this likelihood.

Self-Enroll

Self-enrollment allows students to add themselves to a group using a sign-up sheet. You can make sign-up sheets available to students on the groups listing page or by adding a link to a course area, such as a content area, learning module, lesson plan, or folder. When you create a group using sign-up sheets, you can make the group immediately available to use or available after all members have signed up. Self-enrollment is an option available for both single groups and group sets.

Consider...

When students self-select groups, they tend to do so based on previous relationships or characteristics: friends, teammates, organization membership, social groups on campus, ethnicity, or gender. Students who have few affiliations may find it difficult to become a member of groups composed of like individuals.

Homogeneous groups may not need to spend a great deal of time bonding. They may already have a high level of trust and agreement so these groups may fit your intended outcomes best.

You need to consider how to promote inclusiveness or use self-enrollment only for those courses where you have students with like abilities, interests, and affiliations. You can also use self-enroll groups for group formation based on interest, non-graded collaborations, extra credit, volunteer situations, or for study groups.
Best Practice: Group Assessment

Individual grades or one group grade shared by all members?

A group is a team. Whether you assign the membership for each group or students select their teammates, hopefully, most students will feel committed to accomplishing a common goal. Individual accountability is essential for a group to work effectively and produce worthwhile results. When each member of a group receives the same grade, personal accountability becomes an issue.

You may find it challenging to determine individual grades for a group project. Some instructors assign all members the same grade on their group assignment. This eliminates competition within the group and keeps the focus on collaborating. To lessen students' concern over sharing a grade, be sure the group grade is only a small percentage of their total grades.

Alternatively, you can use a variety of assignments to grade each student's contribution. You can ask for peer evaluations, and review each member's test scores, surveys, and reflective writing assignments.

Peer Assessment Advantages

You can use peer assessment to obtain feedback from group members, and students themselves can receive a wider range of feedback when you share those critiques. Peer assessment is a means of allowing students to participate in the evaluation process by commenting on and judging each group member's work. You can use the feedback to add a participation grade or bonus points to reward group members who performed to the outlined requirements.

If group members are aware of rating their peers in advance, students may feel a greater sense of involvement and responsibility. The team may produce a higher quality end product and learn more. You can use peer assessment as part of the collaborative process, and not just a survey submitted at the end when no opportunity for improvement is possible. You can ask for quick checks of how the collaborative process is working.

Ultimately, when you assign a grade for a group's achievement and the contributions of the individual members, consider the following questions:
• How has the group evaluated its success and each other?
• Does the group deliverable meet the assignment’s requirements?

Rubrics and Progress Reports

Provide rubrics, standards, and guidelines before students assess each other's work. Take the time to meet virtually with each team to discuss team roles, how you expect the team to work together, how often meetings need to take place, and how the peer assessment portion affects their final grades.

You can use a simple weekly progress report to help group members stay on track. Include three or four of the following questions:
• Were the week’s goals achieved?
• Was enough time spent on the group work?
• Did all members contribute equally?
• Did the members work well together?
• What else could you have contributed to help your team this week?
• What else could others have contributed to help your team this week?
• Who contributed the most or least this week?
• What is one aspect of the team dynamic that you would change?

Another way to assess how students feel about their groups is to ask: What are three positives and one negative about your group experience this week?

To learn more, see Grade Group Assignments and Rubrics.