Assessing Group Work: Guidelines for Teachers

## Strategies and guidance for assessing group work

There are many benefits in providing opportunities for students to work cooperatively in groups, including:

* more effective individual and collective learning
* greater student engagement
* improved interpersonal skills.

The purpose of this document is to highlight the importance of assessment design and to provide advice on different assessment methods which can be used to maximise the benefits of group work. In addition, the benefits and possible problems associated with assessing group work are identified and discussed.

### Assessment design

**Products and processes**

* most often the final outcome (product) and the ways in which the group works (process) are assessed
* the proportion of marks or grades associated with assessing process should be determined by the learning outcome
* what is meant by process and how it will be assessed should be made clear to students to ensure it has value

**Learning outcomes**

* the learning outcomes will determine what is to be assessed
* the chosen method or methods of assessment must accurately reflect the learning objective for the task

Assessment design considerations

**Assessment criteria**

* these provide clear guidelines to students about expected group behaviours
* the learning outcome should be reflected in the assessment criteria
* the criteria can be developed for the product and process individually or in combination
* students may be more engaged if they are involved in the development of the assessment criteria

**Mark distribution**

* how marks or grades are allocated to individuals and/or the group is an important factor in the success of the group work
* who allocates the marks or grades will also determine the success of the activity

### Types of Assessment

What follows is a brief outline of some methods for assessing group work and allocating grades or marks. These suggestions can be used in conjunction with the learning outcome and assessment criteria to select an appropriate method of assessment for your group work.

It may be useful to ask yourself these questions first:

* What is being assessed – product, process, both?
* What are the assessment criteria –which group work behaviours are to be assessed?
* Who will assess and determine the grades – students, teacher, combination?
* How will the grades/marks be allocated – individually or group?

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| Benefits | Problems |
| Shared group mark |
| * can encourage group collaboration as all students receive the same mark for the product and process
* easy to mark
* teacher can monitor progress against the assessment criteria using diaries, observation, checklists
 | * individual student participation not acknowledged
* some students may not contribute as much as others – “freeloading”
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| Average group mark |
| * can encourage collaboration
* provides a dual focus – individual task and overall group award
 | * students who are more able or work harder may feel this method is unfair
* students who have made little contribution to group work processes may benefit from this method
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| Individual mark |
| * this allows for easy assessment of individual work (either from an individual task or report based on the group work)
* it is more likely to ensure individual effort and motivation
* students may see this as a fairer method
* individual marks can be awarded for both the product and the process
 | * can be problematic to find individual tasks that have equity in terms of difficulty and size
* there is less likely to be group collaboration
* writing an individual report may result in increased student sharing and plagiarism
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| Combined individual and group mark |
| * students may see this as fairer than a group mark on its own
* maintains a dual focus on group goals and individual participation
 | * can be difficult to consistently apply the individual adjustment to the group mark
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### Adapted from CHSE (2002)

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| Benefits | Problems |
| Teacher and self-assessment |
| students gain familiarity with the assessment criteriapromotes a sense of ownership for studentsself-assessment allows students to reflect on their contribution to group work. | the information from self- assessment may not be reliable and has to be moderatedself-assessment results may have little impact upon the grade or mark given by the teacher |
| **Teacher and peer assessment** |
| student assessment can counteract any feeling of unfairness created by the teacher awarding a group markteacher can choose the level of attribution given to the student assessmentpeer assessment helps develop decision-making and judgement skills | peer assessment may not be carried out objectively amongst friendship groupspeer assessment of the product will need moderation to ensure reliabilitysome students may lack the skills for negotiating, and may be uncomfortable with mark distribution amongst the group |

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| **Benefits** | **Problems** |
| **Peer Assessment (marking each other’s work)** |
| increased familiarity with the assessment criteriaencourages students involvement as they know their work will be marked by a peerfeedback from peers and also teacher (through moderation) | moderation may be time consumingstudents may be influenced by friendships and not apply the assessment criteria truthfully |
| **Peer Assessment (distribution of marks)** |
| students may see this as a fairer method than group allocation by the teachereasy to implementdevelops negotiation and communication skills | has the potential to cause conflictfriendship groups may not allocate marks objectivelysome students may be uncomfortable negotiating marks |
| **Self- Assessment**  |
| increased familiarity with the assessment criteriadevelops self-confidence and judgementmoderation will add validity to the marks or grades awarded. | confident students may award themselves higher grades than their work merits and vice versa for less confident studentsmoderation may be time consuming |

### adapted from CHSE (2002)

As illustrated in this document, there are advantages and disadvantages associated with each of these assessment methods. The nature of the group work and the final product in addition to your personal knowledge of your students should inform the method you choose.

## References

### CSHE (Centre for the Study of Higher Education), (2002). *Assessing group work* <http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/assessinglearning/03/group.html> , accessed 1 October 2014

### Gibbs, G (2009), *The assessment of group work: lessons from the literature* <http://www.brookes.ac.uk/aske/documents/Brookes%20groupwork%20Gibbs%20Dec%2009.pdf>

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