COMMON STUDENT CONCERNS OR OBJECTIONS TO GROUP WORK

Some students are resistant to group work for the following reasons:

- The view that academics use group work as a method of reducing their teaching and marking load
- Inappropriate tasks are set for groups (short time frames, very broad or very specific tasks, disproportionate investments of time and effort as compared to individual tasks)
- Group tasks are usually very big and take a lot of time and planning
- The perception that the selection of group members is unfair or unequal
- Lack of confidence in working with others
- Unclear descriptions, aims, objectives or outcomes and confusion over the nature, validity or relevance of tasks and activities because of unclear expectations
- Perceptions that group work involves greater risks than individual work and concerns about equity of contribution (sometimes group tasks don’t reflect individual effort, ‘free riders’)
- Students may devalue group work processes (compared to other processes) and not consider it an effective method of learning, teaching or assessment
- Group work is sometimes an overused approach (it is frustrating for students to have to participate in multiple groups)
- Stressful or non-productive past experiences related to poor group functioning, dynamics, management or monitoring

Student comments

I would rather do the assessment on my own

Students will give a variety of reasons as to why they want to do this, ‘I work better on my own’, ‘I have been in groups before and it has always been a disaster’ and so on. This can be overcome by stating that in the workplace you will often be required to work within a group or team situation and that getting these skills at university can stand the student in good stead for firstly getting a job or if already employed will help develop/improve their negotiating, problem solving and communication skills, necessary for getting promoted to the next position.

I have to travel with work so I can’t be part of a group

Many students, especially part time students may need to travel during the term and so students need to consider this when forming groups. In this circumstance if time for group work is being allocated during the class time then presumably the student will be at class therefore this should not be a problem. If students need to meet outside of class then the student will need to discuss this with their group and an agreement on how this can be handled agreed to using technology such as teleconferences / phone link ups or email, splitting tasks etc.
I don’t know/like anyone in this class

Again the answer here is that when in the workplace you may not be given the discretion or opportunity to choose with whom you will work. Therefore undertaking group work at this stage can equip you with the skills of negotiating and working with a variety of different people with different perspectives.

You keep telling me that it will, but how can group work help me in my work or get a job?

Students may not believe that undertaking a group work will assist them in doing this, so be prepared to provide proof. There are many examples in the employment sections of newspapers where ‘ability to work in a team’ is a key criterion.

Those students who are already working and are in teams in the workplace, may feel that they have little to learn from group work at university. For these students having to work with a diversity of people can enhance the skills they have and give them the opportunity to learn about group work in an environment that is not their workplace and so is a ‘safe’ place to make mistakes and learn, in other words it won’t cost them their job.