

Self and peer assessment – advantages and disadvantages

Group work can be more successful when students are involved in developing the assessment process. This may include establishing their own assessment criteria through consultation with teaching staff. Alternatively you can provide students with sample self and/or peer assessment criteria.

The main aims of self and peer assessment are to:

- increase student responsibility and autonomy
- strive for a more advanced and deeper understanding of the subject matter, skills and processes
- lift the role and status of the student from passive learner to active learner and assessor (this also encourages a deeper approach to learning)
- involve students in critical reflection
- develop in students a better understanding of their own subjectivity and judgement.

Peer assessment

Students individually assess each other's contribution using a predetermined list of criteria. Grading is based on a predetermined process, but most commonly it is an average of the marks awarded by members of the group.

Advantages:

- Agreed marking criteria means there can be little confusion about assignment outcomes and expectations.
- Encourages student involvement and responsibility.
- Encourages students to reflect on their role and contribution to the process of the group work.
- Focuses on the development of student's judgment skills.
- Students are involved in the process and are encouraged to take part ownership of this process.
- Provides more relevant feedback to students as it is generated by their peers.
- It is considered fair by some students, because each student is judged on their own contribution.
- When operating successfully can reduce a lecturer's marking load.
- Can help reduce the 'free rider' problem as students are aware that their contribution will be graded by their peers.

Disadvantages:

- Additional briefing time can increase a lecturer's workload.
- The process has a degree of risk with respect to reliability of grades as peer pressure to apply elevated grades or friendships may influence the assessment, though this can be reduced if students can submit their assessments independent of the group.
- Students will have a tendency to award everyone the same mark.
- Students feel ill equipped to undertake the assessment.
- Students may be reluctant to make judgements regarding their peers.
- At the other extreme students may be discriminated against if students 'gang up' against one group member.

Self assessment

This is similar to peer evaluation but students assess their own contribution as well as their peers using an established set of criteria.

Advantages:

- Encourages student involvement and responsibility.
- Encourages students to reflect on their role and contribution to the process of the group work.
- Allows students to see and reflect on their peers' assessment of their contribution.
- Focuses on the development of student's judgment skills.

Disadvantages:

- Potentially increases lecturer workload by needing to brief students on the process as well as on-going guidance on performing self evaluation.
- Self evaluation has a risk of being perceived as a process of presenting inflated grades and being unreliable.
- Students feel ill equipped to undertake the assessment.

Preparing students for self or peer assessment

Students may have little exposure to different forms of assessment and so may lack the necessary skills and judgements to effectively manage self and peer assessments. There may also be a perception amongst students that the academic is 'shirking' their responsibilities by having students undertaking peer assessments. In this situation students may be reminded of the Graduate Student Attributes. This also highlights the need to fully prepare and equip students for their own assessment and for the assessment of others.

It is helpful to introduce students to the concepts and elements of assessment against specified criteria in the first weeks of class when you explain the unit of study outline. This requires taking time at the outset of the group activity or unit of study to discuss what is required, and to provide guidance on how to judge their own and others' contributions. Students will need to be assisted to develop criteria that match the learning outcomes with regards to the output and process of the group work. If assessment criteria for each element are set up and clearly communicated, your role will also change to one of facilitator.