

Suitable learning and teaching methods and activities for group work

There are many teaching methods that are perfect for group work. The choice is entirely yours and you should be guided by the content, assessments and the desired outcomes. Your students will also affect your choice, for example in early classes students may be tentative to engage in more intimate or critical problem based activities.

The table below provides some information on a variety of teaching methods that are suitable for small group work because they adopt a student-centred approach. There is no reason why these activities cannot be use in the online context.

Activities for small group work

activity	description	example
Ice-breakers Team building	See Section 1	See handout 'Activities and resources for group work'
Introductory rounds	Go round room and have students introduce themselves	Name, course, reason why doing this unit of study
Pre-class quiz	Prepare a brief quiz in order to assess prior learning, skills and abilities	Ask 10 questions related to the unit of study (share with partner/group, maybe collect?)
Rounds	Go round group using unit of study content or outcomes to stimulate discussion (can add an item to pass on or use a pen and write up response)	How do you best learn? Share a high and a low from your last practicum?
Choose an item	As for rounds but provide several items related to the content for students to talk about. Alternatively use unrelated items in order to encourage conceptual thinking	A poem, bone, organ, piece of equipment, book, can of food Use de Bono's cards to form concepts between items
Brainstorming	Provide a cue, concept, question or idea in order to generate a list of responses, options and suggestions.	Brainstorm 'masculinity'
Mind, concept or topic maps	Start with a brainstorm but broaden the map by seeking links between concepts or expanding them.	Read the book Princess Smarty Pants and develop a mind map of the issues the book explores
SWOT analysis	Use a grid with the headings STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES and THREATS to generate (brainstorm or map) ideas about a topic, question or issue. Used to identify and address aspects of the issue	Conduct a SWOT analysis of the issues facing your group in your upcoming project
Buzz group	Students join small groups to discuss ideas, comments,	What are five things you got from today's lecture?

	responses or issues. This can be extended into analysis, providing feedback or PBL. This can be done individually, then in pairs, then pairs could join (called 'snow-balling' or 'pyramiding'). Avoid too many joins as it gets repetitive (layer questions)	List three behaviour management strategies Use the image, quote to discuss your views on ...
Cross overs	Organisational method where groups work together then one member from each splits to form another group so that students report findings to smaller groups rather than class	Three groups ABCD brainstorm causes of global warming (or 3 different topics) then all As, Bs, Cs, Ds join to report back
Post its	Use Post-it notes or pens to post a response on board or big charts around the room (students write their own response then move on)	Four charts around the room write a comment on each
Jigsaw method	A student works individually on one part of a task/activity then works with others to combine various parts and complete the task	Examine an issue from a variety of theoretical perspectives
Cut-ups and jigsaw puzzles	Prepare a set of cut-up statements, concepts, definitions, ideas etc in an envelope. Distribute to groups and provide instructions	Mix n match the definition with the word Put the jigsaw together then complete the task written there
Fish-bowling	One group works at a task while another group observes (eg observe a PBL task, a role-play, a performance) and then comments, responds	Group A develops a role-play between a student and a teacher while Group B observes (evaluates, comments) Group A performs a sporting skill while Group B observes (evaluates, provide instructional feedback)
Role-play	Provide a situation or individual for a small group to act out. There are pros and cons of role-playing, be wary of the content and what students are asked to do. There are many different forms of role-playing. Can be done online by allocating roles to play to groups or individuals within groups	Role-play a situation where you have had to return an item to a shop or make a complaint Role-play a conversation between a doctor-patient, father-son, waiter-diner Online ideas - allocate a role to a group (eg principal, beginning teacher, established teacher, parent, student) and ask for groups to post discussions on an issue (eg bullying, teacher support, resourcing/funding) Use a novel/book to allocate roles to group members. Have members interact online with each other in their role

Debate	Prosecutor vs defendant, critic vs defender, affirmative vs negative. Debate an issue online with a partner or as a team	Set up a debate topic for pairs to work at asynchronously. Allow time for reflection and posting. Specify time or number of postings. Both students review the postings, and are given opportunity to expand, make a final comment, determine a 'winner', or even cross the floor
Simulations and games	Provide a 'real' world opportunity for rehearsal in the safety of a group	Simulate a bus crash and respond with the appropriate first aid Simulate a work related incident/moment
Student-led seminars	Small groups of students (or pairs) are provided with the opportunity to led class (usually tutorials). Also called co-operative learning it aims to develop collaborative skills between students and increase student involvement, and decrease teacher talk time. Can be used as a form of assessment as well	Pair (or all) students prepare a short presentation on readings (random choice) Encourage non-presenters through questioning, debates, quiz, stories Small groups work on questions, readings or presentations then report back Set up support or study groups
Adaptation	Modify, adapt and use any or all of the learning and teaching activities above in the online context	Online introductory games/activities Online pre-class quiz Post-it online
A writing game	A student passes a message to another student who builds upon it, and then passes it on to another student. Like a collage a story emerges	Student 1 passes student 2 a description of a person. Student 2 adds a context, and passes to student 3 who adds an event. All three students concur on the writing Students pass on pages in a group novel
Problem Based Learning (PBL)	Is variously defined, but essentially involves students working on problems or 'scenarios' using an enquiry or question based approach to learning. Students are offered a scenario and then proceed to examine or 'deal' with it via critical thinking and analysis skills. An excellent method in vocational degrees. Exley & Dennick (2004: 80) describe a useful seven step PBL process:	Scenario 1- Education Marjorie, a 10 year-old Aboriginal child has just joined your class. She has recently been diagnosed with a learning difficulty, and is partially deaf in one ear (from glue-ear as a child). She appears thin and has some kind of minor skin infection. She has a younger brother who is 7. Her father works in the local mine, and her mother is at home with her two younger brothers (aged 18 months & 3). Scenario – Social work

	<p>“Step 1: Clarify terms and concepts Step 2: Define the problems Step 3: Analyse the problems – question, explain, hypothesize Step 4: Make a systematic list of the analysis Step 5: Formulate learning outcomes Step 6: Independent learning focussed on learning outcomes Step 7: Synthesize and present new information”</p>	<p>Rashid, a 40 year-old accountant is a heavy alcohol user, and has a history of violence. Police have been called to his premises where he has seriously assaulted his partner (for the fifth time in 4 years). She has severe head injuries. Tommy 15 (her son), and Jani 3 (their daughter), are in the lounge with police (both children have spent time in foster care; Tommy has recently been suspended from school) until a social worker arrives.</p>
--	--	---

(modified from Bender, 2003; Exley & Dennick, 2004; Salmon, 2005)

Extra reading and resources

Bender, T. (2003). Discussion-based online teaching to enhance student learning: theory, practice and assessment. Virginia: Stylus.

Bingham, R. & Daniels, J. (1998). Developing student support groups: a tutor's guide. England: Gower.

Exley, K. & Dennick, R. (2004). Small group teaching: tutorials, seminars and beyond. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Lynch, M.M. (2004). Learning online: a guide to success in the virtual classroom. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Salmon, G. (2005). E-tivities ▶ the key to active online learning. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Society for the Advancement of Games and Simulations in Education and Training (SAGSET) available at <http://www.ms.ic.ac.uk/sagset> Accessed

Waterhouse, S.A. (2005). The power of elearning: the essential guide for teaching in the digital age. Boston: Pearson Education Inc.

Williams, R.B. (1993). More than 50 ways to build team concensus. Arlington Heights: IRI/Skylight Training and Publishing.