

# Guidelines for Facilitating Meaningful Groupwork

Whether it happens in a classroom, Zoom breakout rooms, outside of class, or asynchronously online, group work is one of the ways to ensure all students have rich opportunities to learn through communicating. Strategic planning and guidance will help students engage deeply and negotiate the challenges of collaboration.

## **Craft groups aligned with your activity- or assignment-specific priorities.**

- Groupings can be impromptu and student-selected (“find three other people you’re sitting near to work with for the next ten minutes”).
- If regular work toward sustained, longitudinal group projects is an important part of your course, have students regularly sit with group members.
- Students left to create their own groups will do so based on existing affinities. Depending on your learning goals for an activity or assignment, you might prioritize crafting demographically heterogeneous groups, matching those with less developed disciplinary skills with classmates whose skills are more developed, or bringing together students of matching skill levels.
- Avoid isolating more vulnerable students by ensuring recurring groups do not, for example, feature one student of color and three white students.
- On Zoom, consider establishing pre-set, recurring breakout rooms.

## **Assign clear prompts with specific deliverables.**

- Provide specific questions to discuss or tasks to complete, with an order in which to accomplish them.
- Concretize and quantify the work you want groups to produce (e.g. identify three different examples of X; come up with two arguments in favor and two against Y; be ready to summarize and synthesize the group members’ reactions to Z).

## **Assign rotating group-work roles.**

- Near the semester’s start, discuss the various roles central to productive group work (such as facilitator, recorder, reporter, synthesizer).
- In non-recurring group contexts, assign roles randomly (i.e. “in today’s groups, the facilitator is the person whose first name comes first in the alphabet; the reporter will be the person whose birthday comes second in the calendar year...”).
- In recurring groups, students might choose roles based on skills, or rotate role assignments each week.

# Guidelines for Facilitating Meaningful Groupwork

## **Hold groups accountable for sharing out.**

- Let students know how share-out will work. Will every group share something? Will you call on groups randomly? Invite open comments? Collect a deliverable from every group via a Blackboard link?
- Elicit responses from specific groups to establish participation from a broad set of students
  - In person, it's easy to call on impromptu groups established for a single activity (e.g. "I'd like to start by hearing from the groups in the far right corner today").
  - Online, recurring in-class groups can be named and called upon (e.g. "Let's hear from Purple group first today.")

## **Establish time markers and provide support.**

- Tell students how much time they'll have to complete a group task.
- If possible, rove the room to answer questions, check for understanding, and keep groups engaged.
- Online, where it's harder to monitor and support groups' progress, keep group tasks shorter and reconvene more frequently.

## Guidelines for Facilitating Meaningful Groupwork

**Teaming at Baruch.** You should also look at this website developed by Mary (Molly) Kern (Department of Management) and Minna Logeman (Department of Communication Studies). They have resources for:

[Establishing a Team Mindset](#)

[Creating a Team Charter](#)

[Analyzing Team Members' Communication Styles](#)

[Assessing and Responding to Psychological Safety](#)

[Conducting an After Action Review](#)

### **In their words:**

Our hope is to help your team to work together and solve problems that matter, to innovate, and to develop every team member's skills and thinking to meet the demands of modern, collaborative, and diverse organizations.

Teaming, by its nature, is a learning process, because no two processes will ever unfold in the same way. We learn through iterative cycles of communication, collaboration, and reflection. Each cycle is informed by the former, and as team members engage in these cycles they are best able to integrate their unique knowledge to create synergy – where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.