**Assessing group work**

Small group work has many advantages in terms of student learning, and assessment is a great motivator for learning, but assessing group work is not always straightforward. Here are some questions we need to think about when assessing group tasks, and some links to further guidance and case studies.

**What are we assessing in group work?**

When planning the assessment of group tasks it is important to think about what we are trying to assess. Is it just the end product that we are concerned about? Or do we also want to assess the process involved? If one of the purposes of group working is to develop a set of skills around organisation, co-operation and joint responsibility then we are unlikely to be able to assess those outcomes adequately just by looking at a final product such as a presentation, lab report or other piece of writing. When planning a group assessed task it is important to decide whether we are assessing product and / or process as this will determine how we assess.

**How can we assess group work**?

If we are only concerned with assessing the product of group work, then this can be assessed in much the same way as individual tasks (though there will be issues around fairness as discussed below). But if we want to assess the process as well as the product we will need some way of getting 'inside' the group as they work towards their goal. Often this is done by including an element of self and/or peer assessment, alternatively, we could require groups to report on their progress at various stages, perhaps by keeping a log of activity or notes from meetings. The UK Centre for Law Education (ULCLE) looks at the who, what and how of group assessment in [*How Can Group Work be Assessed*](http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/resources/teaching-and-learning-practices/groups/eight/)*.* The Assessment Standards Knowledge Exchange ([ASKE](http://www.brookes.ac.uk/aske/)) has published [The assessment of group work: lessons from the literature](http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocsld/group_work/brookes_groupwork_gibbs_dec09.pdf) which offers 'evidence-based guidance on a range of practical decisions'.

**Is it fair?**

One of the big concerns, for faculty and students is whether assessment of group activities can fairly reward the contribution and learning of individuals. If we only assess the product of group work it can be difficult to know who has contributed what. In a group presentation, for example, one student may do most of the talking, but quieter members of the team may have contributed a lot of research and understanding. This is where group, peer and self assessment can contribute to the fairness of the final grade.

**What about multi-cultural groups?**

There are often particular concerns around the fairness of setting and assessing work for multi-cultural groups. This [extract from *Teaching International Students: improving learning for all*](http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/showcase/carroll_diversity) edited by Jude Carroll and Janette Ryan (2005) offers suggestions to make group work more effective where students are working in culturally diverse groups and where the result is assessed.

**Supporting students doing group work**.

If students are new to this type of assessment they will need guidance and support to make the most of it. There are excellent resources on many sorts of assessments on the [Study Success at Sussex (S3)](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/s3) website and in the case of group assessment, the [LearnHigher CETL](http://www.learnhigher.ac.uk/) (Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching) has produced a helpful resource [Making group-work work](http://www.learnhigher.ac.uk/working-with-others/group-work-working-with-others/making-group-work-work/). It follows a group of students through a project and over ten episodes it highlights the challenges of working as part of a student group.

**Interesting links on Assessing Group Work from other Universities**

[Assessing Group Work](http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/assessinglearning/03/group.html) from the Centre for Studying Higher Education in Australia, including:

* [three good reasons for group learning](http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/assessinglearning/03/group.html#3good)
* [common issues and concerns](http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/assessinglearning/03/group.html#commonIssues)
* [designing group activities that work](http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/assessinglearning/03/group.html#DesigningGroup)
* [weighing-up the options](http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/assessinglearning/03/group.html#weighingup)
* [getting started](http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/assessinglearning/03/group.html#gettingStarted)