

Managing Collaborative Small Group Activities

Getting collaborative small group activities to work successfully in the classroom takes careful planning. Teachers grow with practice in this instructional skill. It is generally best to begin with a simpler format, and progress to more complex formats after enjoying success in the simpler ones.

There are several important structural dimensions to small group activities to consider:

- Size of group
- How students will be assigned to groups
- Degree of structure in the activity
- Length of time for the activity
- How students will be held accountable for their participation in group activity

In general, when teachers have little experience with this strategy or are confronted with difficult to manage groups, the best strategy is to start with **small** groups (**pairs**) doing **highly structured** activities for a **short duration** of time. Then one can gradually increase group size and length of time while giving less defined structure for the activity.

Issues to consider in structuring the activity include:

- Instructing students in particular group member roles/responsibilities (see sample “Group Roles Cards”)
- Efficient distribution of materials required for the task
- Explicitness of directions
- Sequencing of the task
- Degree of student choice permitted
- How students will demonstrate their learning

Depending on the ability and experience of group members, the specific group task will need different degrees of structure. But careful teacher planning is required for all degrees of structure in group activity.

There are different accountability structures that help keep all students on task during group work. See examples on attached sheet.

Teacher planning for group work should also include a system for how the teacher will gauge how well groups are functioning during the activity and support and/or redirect dysfunctional groups.

Planning for teacher-directed whole class summarization of learning from small group activities at conclusion of class session is also critical for student learning.

Adapted from “Managing Collaborative Groups: A Scaffold for Decision Making,” retrieved from https://www.miravia.com/pdf/Managing_Collaborative_Groups.pdf

Student Small Group Accountability Tool

As a group, decide how well you accomplished the following group goals:

	Not at all	Somewhat	Fairly well	Very well
We all contributed to the work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We stayed on task.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We listened to each other.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We met the learning goals of the task.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We enjoyed the process of learning together.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Add other categories as needed.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Something we could do better next time is

Recorder

- ~ Keeps a record of the group's ideas, strategies and solutions.
- ~ Creates transparencies, chart paper or other visuals needed with support from the group members.

Lead Presenter

- ~ Takes the lead on the group's presentation or report out to whole class.
- ~ Responsible to share the group's findings or solutions.

Recorder

- ~ Please repeat what you said.
- ~ Here is what I have so far. What do you think?
- ~ This is complicated, how should I record our steps?

Lead Presenter

- ~ Let's review what the recorder has written.
- ~ What visuals can we add?
- ~ What suggestions do you have about how we can report to the class?

Manager Time/Materials

- ~ Distributes and returns all necessary team supplies.
- ~ Manages time allowed for each part of a task.
- ~ Reports broken or missing materials.

Manager Time/Materials

- ~ Here are the materials we'll need.
- ~ We are making good use of our time.
- ~ We haven't looked at step 3 yet.
- ~ Now that we are finished, I'll return the materials.

Leader

- ~ Guides the team toward the goal.
- ~ Checks for understanding of all team members.
- ~ Facilitates all members being on task.

Leader

- ~ Who can you explain what we are doing in your own words?
- ~ What is another way to think about this ?
- ~ What is your opinion about the point _____ just made?

Small Group Activity Ideas and Resources Available on Website

To access the website:

<http://new.every1graduates.org/resources/teacher-resources/>

You can also navigate to the webpages by visiting www.every1graduates.org, hover over “Resources” and then click on “Teacher Resources.”

The following can be found under “Small Group Activities that Engage Students” on the website:

Editable template for Six Hats/Glasses Thinking Activity

Group writing activity (English, History/Government)

Science article discussion activity

Political cartoon analysis activity

Silent Discussion Instructions

Save the Last Word for Me Activity Instructions

Small Group Discussion Activity 4 A’s Text Protocol