

TOP FIVE TIPS FOR WORKING WITH SMALL CLASSROOM GROUPS

1. Ask yourself, "What do students want to get out of group work?" Many students think they're only learning when they're engaging with the professor, so it's important that their time be structured around accomplishing specific tasks and not free-form "coffee house" style conversations.
2. Groups working on short-term and long-term projects together can learn much from each other in demonstrating good habits of inquiry when dealing with well-chosen materials that lead them to accomplish specific tasks. Consider "scaffolding" individual students' at-home work up to amalgamating perspectives in small groups, then moving to reporting out among the whole class.
3. Another thing that students want out of group work is a scheme of accountability that ensures that those who work hard are appropriately rewarded, targeting and revising habits of "free-riding" in other students. One response to this is to include a peer-grading component into students' final grades. Peer graders should always be anonymous and their evaluations tempered by the professor's observation of the groups at work.
4. Group work can also benefit from the work individual students do outside class by being given one of a number of rotating "roles" (symbolist, popular culture connector, devil's advocate), then reporting out and synthesizing findings in class.
5. For a large-scale pedagogical transformation that re-orientes the majority of class work over the entire quarter into highly structured small group ("team") work, see *Team-Based Learning: A Transformative Use of Small Groups in College Teaching* by Larry K. Michaelsen, et al. (Stylus Publishing, 2004)

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