

Resources for teaching group work

Short version

These resources are designed to be used for group work that comprises approximately 30-40% of the course requirements. The activities take a total of three hours of class time over the period of the group assignment.

Two of the activities are optional but for optimum outcomes, it is recommended that you use all the activities. Two assessment tasks are included; you can choose between an individual reflection on group collaboration or a peer-assessment task.

Curriculum Services

Study and Learning Centre



# Contents

## Learning Activities

Learning Activity 1 Planning the assignment (1.5 hrs)

\*Learning activity 2 Problem solving (30 mins)

Learning activity 3.1 Teaching the reflection assessment (30 mins) **OR**

3.2 Teaching the peer assessment (30 mins)

\*Learning activity 4 Identifying employability skills (30 mins)

## Assessment Task

Individual task: Reflection on group collaboration **OR**

Peer Assessment: Assessing peers’ contribution to the group

\*Optional: depends on time period allocated to group task

Learning activity 1: Planning the assignment

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| --- | --- |
| Description | First group meeting: groups decide on processes and plan their approach to the assignment |
| Task type | Tutorial activity |
| Timing | 1 hr 30 mins |
| Level |  |
| Class size |  |
| Resources required | Students will need to have   * a copy of the group assessment task or be able to access it on their laptops in class * a copy of the Group Charter (Appendix) |
| Learning outcomes | At the end of this activity, students should be able to:   1. identify the roles and responsibilities of each group member 2. outline the agreed procedures for addressing problems and conflicts arising in the group 3. produce a timeline for the group project with deadlines and allocated tasks. |
| Method / Instructions | 1. Give an overview of the activity: discuss the learning outcomes (5 mins). 2. Refer students to an online or hard copy of the group assessment task (report, case-study etc). Discuss the requirements of the task. Ask for questions (10 mins). 3. Assign students to groups through random selection (give students a number or colour and instruct them to form groups consisting of that colour or number or through self-selection (5 mins). 4. Go through the Group Work Tutorial from the Learning Lab: highlighting meetings, conflict and giving feedback. Show them the example of an agenda (RMIT Learning Lab/Assessment tasks/Group work) (5 mins). 5. Instruct students to introduce themselves and share their experiences (positive and negative) of working in a group, and exchange contact details (10 mins). 6. Students discuss  * roles and responsibilities within the group and allocate people to roles * anticipated problems (e.g. non-attendance at meetings, failure to produce work) and the solutions the group will apply in order to solve those problems  1. Students fill in the Group Charter. Each student should have a copy of their Group Charter.(30 mins) 2. Students discuss the group assignment and agree on an approach. They allocate tasks to each group member, a deadline for those tasks to be completed, and dates for future meetings. Students fill in the timeline on the Group Charter. (15 mins) 3. Review activity with whole group. Invite questions. Check learning outcomes: were they achieved? Invite comments. (10 mins) |
| Rationale | This activity supports the pedagogy relating to the significance of the group process for the development of professional communication, collaborative and organisational skills, and problem solving – all essential employability skills. As many students do not already have the skills to form a functional group, it also provides the opportunity to consolidate group identity and cohesion. This occurs through the creation of processes and procedures, the identifying of roles and responsibilities, and through providing a basic structure for further development of the group. |
| Potential issues | Students may be unfamiliar with group work. The introductory activity of sharing personal stories of their experience of group work should facilitate group cohesion and support the development of a group identity. As with any group, some members may not participate. This is something that should be explicitly addressed through the discussion of problems the group may encounter. |
| Handouts/ resources for student | Provide on Blackboard a link to the Group Work tutorial on the RMIT Learning Lab. (RMIT Learning Lab/Assessment tasks/Group work. |

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Appendix: Group Charter

Group members sign here after completing this document.

I agree to the following description of our group roles, behaviours and tasks:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Print name** | **Signature** |
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## 1. Roles and responsibilities

See ‘Group Work’ on the RMIT Learning Lab/Assessment tasks for a description of possible roles within the group. A group member may have more than one role with identified responsibilities.

Roles: Leader; Note-taker; Reflector (identifies problems in the group); Time-keeper; Other. Each group member should have at least one designated role.

## 2. Possible problems and solutions

Identify problems that may arise in your group and list solutions that the group agrees will be applied in order to solve those problems. In making this list, group members agree to work together on issues as they arise.

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| **Problem** | **Solution/s** |
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## 3. Timeline

See the RMIT Learning Lab / Assessment Tasks / Group work for an example of a timeline – but be creative. Make the timeline your own, listing what work is to be done, who is responsible for submitting each item, and the due date for that piece of work.

You can create your timeline in the space below or attach a document.

Use any appropriate software or draw on paper.

Learning activity 2: Problem solving

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| Description | Problem solving: groups identify achievements, and address problems in their group and decide on solutions |
| Task type | Tutorial session |
| Timing | At mid-point through the group project  30 mins |
| Level |  |
| Class size |  |
| Learning outcomes | At the end of this activity students should be able to:  1. identify the achievements of the group to date and outline the factors that have contributed to their progress  2. describe problems that have arisen in the group, the methods the group has used to address those problems, and evaluate the effectiveness of those methods |
| Method / Instructions | 1. In their groups, students discuss the achievements of the group up to this point in time (mid-way through the project) and the factors that contributed to this success.  2. Groups then discuss problems they have encountered and the solutions, if any, they devised to address them. Students then list problems and identify possible methods of solving those problems.  3. Conclude the activity by summing up the findings of the groups: what seems to be going well, what needs improvement, how conflict in groups can at times be creative and productive. Refer to the resources. |
| Rationale | One of the challenges of group work is that of resolving conflict and addressing problems as they arise in the group. According to Bruce Tuckman’s model of group dynamics, in the second stage of the group process - ‘storming’ - problems and conflicts often emerge. (See Tuckman, Bruce W & Jensen, Mary Ann C. ‘Stages of Small-Group Development Revisited’. *Group and Organization Studies*, 1977, Vol.2(4), p.419-26.).This learning activity aims to address those problems and provide the opportunity for the group to move forward to the ‘performing’ stage when the group has resolved issues and is working effectively on their project. This activity also develops negotiation skills as students navigate relationships within the team in pursuit of a productive outcome. Negotiation, along with team building, is a significant employability skill developed in group work  (Litchfield, A., Frawley, J & Nettleton, S., ‘Contextualising and integrating into the curriculum the learning and teaching of work-ready professional graduate attributes’. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 29:5, 519-534, DOI:10.1080/07294360.2010.502220 |
| Potential issues | Students may be reluctant to address the real issues facing the group and may take a superficial stance towards the task of identifying problems. A list of questions could be prepared to give to students at Step 3 to encourage them to go more deeply into the problems they have faced. |
| Handouts/ resources for students | To prepare the students for this activity, instruct students to access the conflict resolution section of the Learning Lab tutorial for students on ‘Group Work’ before the class. |

Learning activity 3.1: Teaching the reflection assessment task

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| Description | Teaching the Assessment Task: Reflection on Group Collaboration (Individual students are assessed) |
| Task type | Tutorial activity |
| Time | 30 minutes |
| Level |  |
| Class size |  |
| Learning outcomes | At the end of this activity, students should be able to:   1. complete the assessment task ‘Reflection on Group Collaboration’ in line with expectations 2. identify the relevance of this assessment task to the development of their employability skills. |
| Method / Instructions | 1. Introduce the assessment task, and the assessment rubric. Emphasise the links between the learning outcomes for this activity and for the assessment task (5 mins). 2. Groups discuss the task, paying particular attention to the requirements of the different four sections of the task (DIEP). The goal is for each student to understand clearly how to complete the task and to list any questions they cannot answer in their group (10 mins). 3. Instruct students to report their questions back to the whole group and brainstorm the task’s relevance to employability. Provide answers to their questions, and reiterate employability relevance (10 mins). 4. Conclude by briefly reviewing the task, the assessment rubric & the learning outcomes (5 mins). |
| Rationale | Many students do not know how to write reflectively about their learning. This activity is supported by the pedagogy relating to assessment for learning and to academic reflection. It offers students the opportunity to clarify their questions about the task, increasing their confidence in their ability to write a piece of reflective writing. It also relates the task to their future careers, making graduate attributes explicit in their course. |
| Potential issues | Time may be an issue if there is confusion regarding the task and more time may be needed to clarify the requirements. Arrangements may need to be made for further communication with students. |
| Handouts/ resources for students | 1. Upload the description of the assessment task with the assessment rubric on Blackboard in preparation for the class. 2. For a reference on group theory, refer students to Tuckman, Bruce W and Jensen, Mary Ann C, Stages of Small-Group Development Revisited, *Group & Organization Studies* (pre-1986); Dec 1977; 2, 4 3. If one is available, provide a model of reflective writing that meets the requirements of this task and is off a high standard. Such a model demonstrates the quality of work they should aim to produce and provides students with a challenge. |

Learning activity 3.2: Teaching the peer assessment task

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| Description | Teach the peer assessment task (both peers and individual students are assessed) |
| Task type | Tutorial activity |
| Time | 30 minutes |
| Level |  |
| Class size |  |
| Learning outcomes | At the end of this activity, students should be able to:   1. demonstrate ability to assess peers’ contribution to the group and give constructive feedback 2. identify elements of group work that contribute to a productive and positive collaboration. |
| Method / Instructions | 1. Introduce the peer assessment form, making clear reference to the instructions (5 mins). 2. Link to the RMIT Learning Lab/Assessment Tasks/Group Work/Giving Feedback. Instruct students to link to it (2 mins). 3. Instruct students to read and discuss the ‘Giving Feedback’ section of the tutorial. Allow time for questions (15 mins). 4. Instruct students regarding submission of the evaluations (3 mins). 5. Conclude by briefly reviewing the task, the criteria & the learning outcomes (5 mins). |
| Rationale | This activity supports the pedagogy relating to using assessment for learning and to peer assessment. It offers students the opportunity to reflect on how individual contributions impact on the overall productivity of the group, developing understanding of group dynamics. It also allows them to clarify the task, and practise giving feedback, an important skill in group work. |
| Potential issues | Students may be unfamiliar with peer-assessment and may be resistant to the idea of evaluating the performance of other students. Discussion of the rationale and learning outcomes could help with this issue. |
| Handouts/ resources for students | Upload the peer assessment form and instructions on Blackboard in preparation for the class.  Provide on Blackboard a link to the Group Work tutorial section ‘Giving Feedback’ on the RMIT Learning Lab. |

Learning activity 4: Identifying employability skills

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| --- | --- |
| Description | Employability skills |
| Task type | Tutorial |
| Timing | 30 minutes |
| Level |  |
| Class size |  |
| Learning outcomes | At the end of this activity students will be able to:  1. critically evaluate the performance of their group in regard to the group process (not product)  2. identify the achievements of their group in terms of effective collaboration, conflict resolution and professional communication  3. demonstrate a metacognitive awareness of the skills they have learned through the group work process and the relevance of those skills to their employability. |
| Method / Instructions | 1. Present students with the learning outcomes for this activity, emphasising the relevance of group work for their professional development, and for drawing on when writing their resumes and attending job interviews (5 mins).  2. Each person in the group gives a critical review or summary of their experience of their project group’s process: the ability to communicate effectively and professionally, collaborate on tasks, and resolve conflict. The group discusses similarities and differences in their experiences (10mins).  3. Students make a list of the skills they have developed as a result of the group process. Finally, they discuss ways in which these skills could be useful in their professions (10 mins).  4. Sum up the students’ group process experience, congratulate them on their achievements, and encourage them to celebrate their successes with a group social event (5 mins). |
| Rationale | In this activity, students reflect on the value of their entire experience of the group work process and relate it to their future professions. The ‘review and reflect’ dimension provides a powerful metacognitive learning experience. They should now not only have developed their group skills but also be aware that they have these skills and can now consciously develop them further. This ‘adjourning’ stage of the group process is especially significant for promoting such learning. |
| Potential issues | Lack of in-depth student engagement in the discussion is always a potential issue. However, the presentation of the learning outcomes and the relevance of the activity should encourage students to engage. Further strategies to use can be found on the RMIT website on inclusive teaching practices  http://www1.rmit.edu.au/teaching/inclusive |
| Handouts/ resources for students | Phillip Garside, 2005, *The Secrets of Getting a Job*, Hyland House, Flemington, Victoria, Australia. |

Assessment Task: Reflection on Group Collaboration

Due:

Minimum x words. This assessment is worth x% of your total mark for this course.

## Pre-reading

Study the assessment rubric for this task. It will tell you how your work will be marked, giving a detailed description of what is expected of you in each section and the marking criteria and scales.

## Learning Outcomes

As a result of completing this assessment task, you will be able to

1. Critically examine your own and your peers’ contributions to the group process with the aim of developing your collaborative skills and your understanding of group dynamics.
2. Demonstrate capacity for reflective writing that incorporates description, interpretation, evaluation and planning.
3. Relate your experience of group work to the requirements of your future profession.

## Instruction

This assessment task requires you to reflect on one particular thing you learned through the group work you participated in. You MUST focus on the group process/collaboration not on what you produced (the product, the report etc.).

To complete the task, follow these steps:

**1. Choose something to reflect on**

Consider what you learned from your collaboration with your group and carefully choose **one** aspect of your learning that has changed an attitude or your behaviour, or added to your skill set. Decide on something yourself or choose to reflect on what you learned from one of the following: your role in the group; your experience of problem solving; your experience of conflict. You may want to focus on a skill you acquired that you didn’t have before, or your learning of the value of an agenda or time management or organisational skills. Or you could choose to write about an aspect of communication that you improved through your work in the group. It is important to choose an authentic learning experience to focus on.

**2. Brainstorm**

Identify the significance of your new learning; ask yourself why it is important for you now and in the future. Locate references and other sources of information relating to group work that support/explain your insight.

**3. Plan an initial structure**

Your reflection should be divided into four parts:

* **Describe** something you learned from the group process. Write in the first person, e.g. ‘I noticed that…’. The lesson learned (a new insight, understanding) must relate to the development of your skills in collaboration and group work.
* **Interpret** your new insight’s connections with the group productivity and process.
* **Evaluate** the significance, relevance and value of the lesson learned.
* **Plan** how you will apply your new knowledge and insights in the future, in your profession and/or your life.

**4. Conduct your research**

Look for academic material that connects with your new learning. Start with general reading, using course material but search databases for further reading.

**5. Write and then edit your reflection**

**Course: (Insert title of course or code)**

**Rubric: Assessment Task: Reflection on group collaboration**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Reflection on group collaboration | 10%; 1500 words | |
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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Above expected standard work**  **Excellent** | **Expected standard work**  **Satisfactory** | **Below expected standard work**  **Unsatisfactory** |
| **Description** of something you learned from the group process. The lesson learned has to relate to the development of your group work skills**.** | Clearly describes the lesson learned and the situation and group context in which that learning occurred  Includes all necessary information required for understanding e.g. group purpose, tasks at hand, aspect of group process involved (e.g. communication, adaptability, time management and responsibility etc.) | Describes the lesson learned and the situation and group context in which that learning occurred  Includes sufficient information required for understanding e.g. group purpose, tasks at hand, aspect of group process involved (e.g. communication, adaptability, time management and responsibility etc.) | Does not adequately describe the lesson learned and the situation and group context in which that learning occurred  Lacks information required for understanding or contains irrelevant and/or misleading information. |
| **Interpretation**  How my (new) insights connect with the group productivity and process | Insightful interpretation of the matter described, including different aspects, happenings, possible meaning/s  Skilfully relates to qualities of a group that ensures its productivity, creativity and organisation, and to a theory of group dynamics | ☐ Adequate interpretation of the matter described, including different aspects, happenings, possible meaning/s  Adequately relates to qualities of a group that ensures its productivity, creativity and organisation, and to a theory of group dynamics | Does not attempt to interpret the matter described/ does not connect with the group process  Inadequate relationship of the matter described to qualities of a group that ensures its productivity, creativity and organisation, and lacks reference to a theory of group dynamics |
| **Evaluation**  What’s the value of learning this now? | Includes evaluative comments; relevance of critical aspects of the group process; outlines critical points of theory and/or understanding of group dynamics enhanced by new insight | Competent evaluation; outlines some points of the group process; outlines critical points of theory and/or understanding of group dynamics enhanced by new insight | Does not evaluate the learning/insight; fails to evaluate the gains in understanding brought about by the events described |
| **Plan**  How will I apply new knowledge and insights in the future? | Relevant and appropriate application of the learning to future planning in academic, professional, and/or personal spectrum, in both the short and long term | Realistic application of the learning to future planning, in academic, professional and/or personal spectrum, in either short or long term | Does not identify the application of learning  or  Identifies the application of learning in an unrealistic fashion |
| **Writing features**  General writing skills - grammar, spelling and readability | Accurate use of academic English language and structure to communicate ideas clearly.  Few/no errors. Accurate and appropriate use of vocabulary, grammar, punctuation and spelling | Appropriate use of academic English language and/or structure to communicate meaning and ideas  Appropriate vocabulary; accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation; errors rare and do not detract from meaning; | Inadequate use of academic English language and/or structure to communicate meaning; errors frequent and detract from meaning;  Vocabulary spelling, grammar and /or punctuation not adequate for undergraduate-level communication |
| **Comments:** | | | |

Assessment Task: Peer Assessment

Due:

x%. (half will be the average mark from your peers; the other half will be for your engagement in the peer assessment)

## Learning Outcomes

As a result of completing this task as a group, students will be able to

1. identify the attributes, attitudes and behaviours that ensure group work is a positive and productive experience.

2. provide feedback to peers on their individual contributions to a group work experience.

## Background

Group work is an important component of this course. It develops your professional communication skills and your ability to collaborate with your peers. These are highly desirable employability skills.

This questionnaire is to be used by you to provide feedback to group members on their engagement with the group.

There are seven criteria. Each describes elements essential to a productive group. Using the 4-point scale provided, consider each category separately and rate group members.

This part of your assessment is worth x%. Half your marks will come from the mark you allocated your peers; the other half will be allocated for the quality of your rating and comments.

## Instructions: how to rate peers

1. Please think hard and honestly about each of the criteria and how you and each group member performed. It is not necessary that everyone get the highest score on each item. Different people will have different strengths and different contributions.

2. Write explanations and examples that support your ratings in the space beside each rating item.

**Your rating should be based on your individually considered perceptions and experiences. The feedback provided to group members should reflect your independent views based on your own experiences of the group. It does not require group discussion and should not reflect a collective group decision. The purpose is to provide an opportunity for your peers to learn where their strengths lie and where they could perhaps improve their communication and collaborative skills.**

3. Complete one form inserting each peer’s name, comments, and a mark for each criterion. Insert your own name.

4. Submit all forms.

**Rater’s Name:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Peer’s Name:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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| **Scoring** For each category, award each member of your team a score from 0-3 using this scale. At the end, total these marks | **3** – High level of contribution in this respect  **2** – About average for the group in this respect  **1** – Not as good as most of the group in this respect  **0** – No help at all to the group in this respect | |
| **Criteria** | **Comments, Examples, Explanations, etc.** | **Mark** |
| **Organisational skills** Attends meetings regularly and on time. |  |  |
| **Time Management & Responsibility** Accepts fair share of work and reliably completes it by the required time. |  |  |
| **Adaptability** Displays or tries to develop a wide range of skills in service of the project; readily accepts changed approach or constructive criticism. |  |  |
| **Creativity/Originality** Problem-solves when faced with impasses or challenges; originates new ideas, initiates team decisions. |  |  |
| **Communication Skills** Effective in discussions, good listener, capable presenter, proficient at diagramming, representing, and documenting work. |  |  |
| **Criteria** | **Comments, examples, explanations etc** | **Mark** |
| **General Team Skills** Positive attitude, encourages and motivates team, supports team decisions, helps team reach consensus, helps resolve conflicts in the group. |  |  |
| **Technical Skills** Ability to create and develop materials on own initiative, provide technical solutions to problems. |  |  |
|  | **Total marks** |  |
| **This section to be filled in by lecturer** | **Peer’s Name: Total mark out of 5%** |  |
| **Comments by lecturer** | | |
|  | **Rater’s Name: Total mark out of 5%** |  |

*(Adapted from Goldfinch, 1994; Lejk & Wyvill, 2001*