

## Forming Groups for Online Work

Below are three ways to form groups for online active learning. Instructors should choose the group membership method based on the type or purpose of the activity.

Grouping type	Uses	Methods
Random	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides opportunities for students to work with a variety of other students</li> <li>Is quick, efficient, and fair</li> <li>Is ideal for informal discussion groups and short assignments (Barkley et al., 2014)</li> </ul>	<p>Use simple and transparent techniques, such as grouping by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>alphabetical order of first or last names,</li> <li>counting off by the number of groups you want to form, or</li> <li>using the LMS function to create randomized small groups.</li> </ul>
Instructor-determined	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allows for strategic grouping of students based on similarities or differences in characteristics such as content knowledge, skills, demographics, or availability</li> <li>Is ideal for assignments that are ongoing, for project groups, or controversial discussions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At the beginning of the course, ask students to fill in a survey that identifies their majors, career interests or experiences, digital skills, demographics, and work styles (including availability for group work). Use this information to group students according to similar interests or to enhance the diversity of a group (Barkley et al., 2014). (See suggested survey questions on next page.)</li> <li>To create groups with diverging opinions about a controversial topic, ask them to reply to a question using a Likert scale to determine their opinion and group them accordingly.</li> </ul>
Student-selected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides opportunities for students to have greater agency in learning experience</li> <li>Is ideal after students have had the chance to work or participate in discussions with two to three different students or groups of students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use the LMS or a Google Doc to create a sign-up sheet for a preset number of groups with a maximum number of spots.</li> <li>Create sign-up sheets based on a particular topic or task so that students can choose their group based on their interest in the topic.</li> <li>Remind students of the learning benefits they reap from working with students who are different from themselves.</li> </ul>

### Sample Email

Hello Class!

In this course, you and your classmates will be working on a group project that is expected to take a few weeks to complete. I know group projects can be challenging in an online course. However, the skills you gain from working on a long-term project with a team in a virtual environment are skills that employers in all industries are looking for in their employees. This experience will give you concrete examples of how you gained both skills and knowledge in teamwork to share during interviews for internships and jobs.

In an effort to set your teams up for success, I need everyone to complete the contact information form that can be reached by following the link below. It should take 2 to 3 minutes to complete. This form asks you to share your preferred contact information and your preferred work schedule and routine. Once all students have completed the form and all the groups are assigned, I will send each student the contact information of everyone in their group. It will then be up to each of you to initiate contact with each other. Please let me know if you have any questions and be sure to complete the form by Monday evening.

### Sample Questions

1. What is your name?
2. What is your preferred method of contact? Check all that apply.
  - a. Email
  - b. Phone
  - c. Text
  - d. Social media (e.g., Twitter or WhatsApp)
3. If email is a preferred method of contact, what email address do you check frequently?
4. If phone or text is a preferred method of contact, what phone number do you use?
5. If social media is a preferred method of contact, which apps do you use frequently?
6. Would you be willing to be a group leader?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
7. How would you describe your overall schedule?
  - a. My schedule is a pretty balanced. I'm involved with a few activities, but I'm usually flexible.
  - b. My schedule is pretty hectic. I'm involved with a number of activities, and I have limited time.
  - c. My schedule is pretty open. I'm not involved in much, and I'm available most of the time.
8. How often are you on campus?
  - a. I live on campus.
  - b. I come to campus regularly.
  - c. I do not spend any time on campus.
9. What is your preference for group meetings and collaboration?
  - a. I do not have a preference and can meet in person or work together online.
  - b. I prefer and/or am available to meet in person.
  - c. I prefer to conduct meetings through technology/online.
10. What times of day are you most available for group collaboration? Check all that apply.
  - a. Morning (8:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.)
  - b. Afternoon (12:00–4:00 p.m.)
  - c. Early Evening (4:00–7:00 p.m.)
  - d. Evening (7:00–10:00 p.m.)
11. What days of the week are you most available for group collaboration? Check all that apply.
  - a. Sunday
  - b. Monday
  - c. Tuesday
  - d. Wednesday
  - e. Thursday
  - f. Friday
  - g. Saturday
12. Is there anything else I should know about your preferred learning style when creating small groups?

### Sources

Barkley, E. F., Major, C. H., & Cross, K. P. (2014). *Collaborative learning techniques: A handbook for college faculty*. John Wiley & Sons