

Assigning Group Member Roles

Assigning group member roles lends a more structured approach to group collaboration and often works well as it gives students a purpose for participating and ensures that various aspects of the task get addressed. This method also gives students practice in assuming group roles common in the work environment.

Facilitating the Group Activity

1. Begin by selecting either one topic for all groups to focus on or different topics so that each group works with a unique area of focus or scenario.
2. Then form groups of five or six students each, depending on your class size and the roles that are most appropriate for your assignment.
3. Within each group, assign each member to a specific role, such as the proponent, critic, illustrator, skeptic, or summarizer.
4. Provide students with instructions on how the work is to be accomplished. For example, be sure to include any recommendations for the number of times the group should meet and if you expect students to provide documentation of their meetings.
5. Develop a clear set of expectations or rubric outlining the project deliverables. Keep in mind that providing individual and group deliverables can be helpful to ensure accountability and encourage student ownership.
6. Debrief with students through a survey or individual deliverable at the end of the activity.

Common Group Member Roles

Example roles	Descriptions
Proponent	The proponent plays the role of someone who lists points of agreement with supporting evidence. This role can help group discussion stay on topic and connected to the assignment.
Critic	The critic plays the role of someone who lists points of disagreement with supporting evidence. This role can help the group expand its understanding of a topic and round out its ideas.
Illustrator	The illustrator plays the role of someone who identifies the most relevant and persuasive examples. This role can help the group strengthen its overall argument.
Skeptic	The skeptic plays the role of someone who prepares substantive, challenging questions. This role can help the group approach its understanding of the topic from different perspectives.
Summarizer	The summarizer plays the role of someone who recaps the key points and crafts a conclusion. This role can help the group stay organized and present its argument clearly.

Sources

Boettcher, J. V., & Conrad, R.-M. (2016). *The online teaching survival guide: Simple and practical pedagogical tips* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

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