

# Tips & Tools for Successful Group Projects

Group work is an essential part of many courses, as it provides students the opportunity to hone [valuable teamwork and leadership skills](#) they will need in their careers and beyond. Additionally, quality group work can increase student retention and self-esteem. While group work can involve various types of tasks, from short in-class activities to semester-long assignments, this guide focuses on best practices for more substantive group projects. While there is a lot to think about when it comes to group projects, we have selected our top 4 tips to foster successful student collaboration, along with a few particularly helpful tools!

## Tip 1: Use group projects to increase interaction

Naturally, students will interact with one another to complete their project, but group projects are a great way to build community in your course and increase interaction between you and your students in a meaningful way. Before the project begins, it is important to make sure that groups have a chance to build rapport with one another. This can be achieved through [ice breakers](#), in-class or synchronous group activities, or through asynchronous group discussions or activities. We also encourage instructors to either meet with each group or [require a progress report](#) at least once throughout the duration of the project for a brief check-in. Use these conversations as an opportunity to gauge progress, discuss any challenges students may be facing, and clear up any confusion or conflicts.

## Tip 2: Consider how you form groups

When splitting students into groups, research supports that 3-4 students is the ideal group size. Beyond that, there are various ways to split students into groups. Consider having students complete [a skills assessment](#), such as [rating their comfort with components of the group project](#), and create groups of students who complement one another. Some studies support that students generally view the option to create their own groups favorably, as well. Especially in the online environment, it may be advisable to have students form groups based on availability for team meetings. You might also consider surveying students at the beginning of class to see which approach they prefer.

### **Tip 3: Require a group contract**

[Group contracts](#) are a great way to increase each group's autonomy and provide a framework for structuring effective teamwork. A group contract should include space for students to divide roles and responsibilities clearly and establish deadlines. Students should also create a communication plan that shares their preferred method of communication (email, text, Teams, etc.) Each group's contract could include steps for conflict resolution, including how they will communicate with one another regarding conflicts and when they will escalate their concerns to you. Have students submit the group contract as the first part of their project, so that you are aware of the plans students have made and be informed should any unresolved conflicts arise. The [Eberly Center offers group contract templates](#).

### **Tip 4: Grade on group and individual work**

Group work can be particularly challenging to grade. To boost incentive to participate, [grade group work and individual work](#) for group projects. This type of grading can also help shift students' focus from the final product to the process of creating a collaborative product. The process of working together builds skills students will need for the future. While the group grade may seem clear, intentionality is required to capture individual elements of a shared responsibility. Consider asking students to submit a [written summary of their work](#) on the project along with an [individual reflection](#) as part of the final submission using some of these [sample reflection questions](#). You might even require students to evaluate their own work and their group project to inform your grading. [Contract grading](#) is another approach that is well suited for group projects.

### **Tools to Consider**

- [Microsoft Teams](#) offers file storage, chat, and meeting functionalities, making it an exceptional way to organize group work.
- [Padlet](#) would be useful for group projects that might require students to gather resources, videos, images, and more into a single curated list.
- [Perusall](#) and [Hypothes.is](#) allow for social annotation of readings and other sources.