

HOW TO GUIDE #11

#DryLabsRealScience

TOPIC: Make the most of group work

TAGS: Undergraduate practical skills, group work, enquiry, teams

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Group work is a powerful way to support students, and to foster peer support. The effort put in to developing effective group work pays dividends in student engagement, creating a sense of achievement, and supporting a deep approach to learning.

Technique	For example	Benefits
Problem based learning	Give students a scenario which they have to solve in a given timeframe.	Students generate research questions, and enhance their research and analytical skills.
Enquiry based learning	Students define their own topic of enquiry.	Students have autonomy to choose topics that are of interest to them, within parameters of the course or module.
Presentations	Students make a public presentation of their findings, via an oral presentation or poster.	Students develop their communication skills, and can be encouraged to deliver presentations to a variety of audiences, e.g. schools, general public, peers

CONSIDERATIONS

- Groups can be pre-assigned or can be self-assembling, but warn students of the complications of working with friends
- Preparation is everything. Spend ample time introducing students to what group work is, as well as the topic they will be working on
- Students should be responsible for agreeing their code of conduct – a set of rules that they abide by
- Make sure that roles are well-defined and are assigned to individual students
- Group work does not mean everyone has to do everything, but it does mean that group members do what they have agreed to do – play to everyone's strengths
- Depending on the length of time of the group activity, make sure that there are milestones and deliverables, to keep groups on track
- Make use of private groups in your VLE for group workspace, and encourage synchronous and asynchronous working – students don't have to be in the same room to collaborate
- Give students the opportunity to feed back and evaluate one another – they may not be experts on the topic, but they are experts on how the group functioned – consider making this part of a peer marking scheme, linking it to the code of conduct

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