

Group Work over Zoom

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Elements of Group Work

1 | Genre

- Breakout rooms — can be assigned or unassigned
- Time limit — group meetings should be 15 minutes or less, can meet multiple times
- Clear objective, instructions, and roles

2 | Goals

- Learning through collaboration
 - Community building
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- Unit/course specific goals — what skills do you want students to practice in a group setting? What problem do you want students to solve together?

3 | Individual Responsibility

- What is the group responsible for?
- What are the individual students responsible for?

Benefits and Drawbacks

Group work can:

- foster a sense of community, even across screens.
 - Especially when used regularly, group work can mitigate the feeling of isolation caused by remote learning.
- build important interpersonal skills.
 - Students must negotiate their roles with one another, communicate expectations, and share information/progress.
- teach students how to engage with others in their field.
 - Students get a chance to communicate with one another using the language of their major.

Group work can't:

- be done totally independently.
 - You have to provide a lot of instruction upfront and check in more frequently than you might in a face-to-face class.
- be the only form of communication among students.
 - Create multiple spaces for students to communicate— on group work or otherwise. Combine breakout rooms with discussion boards and shared Google docs or Padlets.

Sample Group Work Assignment

From Stanford University Teaching Commons

Jigsaw

1. Identify a learning module that can be broken into parts (e.g., students need to read four different research papers about a similar topic).
2. Form small groups and have each group focus on one of the parts (e.g., each group reads one of the four papers). This can be completed asynchronously.
3. During class, allow the groups to discuss their part with the goal of being able to explain it to other classmates.
4. *Optional:* Reform the groups so that each new group has one member that focused on a different part. Each group member now explains their part to the new group.
5. *Optional:* Provide the new groups with a problem to solve that requires the integration of the different parts.

A group work assignment like this can be completed in class in 10-15 minutes before the class reconvenes and shares their content. If the reading is longer, say a chapter or an article, make sure students read their portions before class.

Works Cited

[Facilitate Group Work, Colorado University Center for Teaching & Learning](#)

[Small group activities for Zoom breakout rooms, Stanford University Teaching Commons](#)

[Scaffolding Student Understanding in Small-Group Work: Students' Uptake of Teacher Support in Subsequent Small-Group Interaction, Janneke van de Pol](#)

[Group work as an incentive for learning - students' experiences of group work, Eva Hammar Chiriac](#)

[Productive group work: how to engage students, build teamwork, and promote understanding, Nancy Frey](#)