

Notes adapted from <http://www.action.ncca.ie/en/key-skills>

## How to make group work really work

### Some hints

- Assign the groups randomly and change the groups each time you assign a different group work task. Do not put friends together unless you have a good reason to do so.
- Start out with small groups (2 or 3) if you are not used to organising group work.
- The shorter the time available, the smaller the learning group should be.
- Assign each student a job or role but rotate them frequently. That way, everyone can contribute something to the group.
- Make your expectations clear so that students know what you want them to do and the time available to complete the task.
- When groups are at work your role is to observe and monitor groups working, provide clarification on the task and give positive feedback.

### Some useful roles when assigning groups

<p><b>Facilitator</b></p> <p>Your job is to make sure that the group stays on task and that everyone gets a chance to contribute their ideas. You should also summarise the key points which are emerging from the group and check that everyone is in agreement on the points that will be fed back.</p>	<p><b>Note Taker</b></p> <p>Your role is to listen carefully and note all the points made by the group. Remember that you can also contribute to the discussion.</p>
<p><b>Reporter</b></p> <p>Your job is to report back on behalf of the group to the full group. You will only have a minute to do this so you will not be able to report everything that has been discussed in your group. Just pick out 2 or 3 really important ideas.</p>	<p><b>Time-keeper</b></p> <p>Your job is to keep an eye on the clock and make sure that the group does not get bogged down in one question and not have enough time to complete their task. You may also need to let them know when they are straying away from the task.</p>

Other roles which might be useful are **Reader**, **Checker** (sometimes called Clarifier), **Observer**.

# Teaching methodologies to encourage flexible and critical thinking

## **Academic Controversy**

This method is very effective in exploring a topic where there are two points of view.  
e.g. Does Aid really help?

- Each student is allocated one of the points of view. They research their arguments to support that viewpoint.
- Students are arranged in pairs with opposing viewpoints, or put in groups of 4 with 2 students with each point of view. Each side presents their position.
- Students engage in discussion and argue their positions.
- Students swap positions and present each others' position as accurately and persuasively as they can to the group.

## **The Power of Persuasion**

- Class generates four possible answers to a HOT question and then students vote on their preferred answer. Students sit with their preferred answer groups.
- Each group has the task of persuading others from different answer groups to come over to their group.
- Give each group time to prepare their case.
- The teacher acts as chairperson.
- In the course of the lesson, students may change sides, or revert to original positions.
- Leave enough time at the end of the lesson to talk about the debate and the tactics used.
- For homework students could generate a paragraph beginning with *I was persuaded because....* or, *Answer A won because.....*

**Creating alternative answers** (Adapted from Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, *Advanced Cooperative Learning*, p. 13:20)

This methodology can be used to enable students to generate and extend ideas, and to look for alternative answers rather than just settling for the first answer that comes up. The aim of this activity is for students to work cooperatively to analyze a text while encouraging more flexible thinking.

*Materials needed:* Copy of a text with a set of questions and a set of role cards per group

Group size – 3 or 4 depending on roles used (The first 3 roles are essential)

1. Assign students to groups with roles as follows:

**Reader** – Reads the text aloud to the group

**Checker for understanding** – Reads the questions to make sure that all group members understands how to answer each question

**Recorder** – Records 3 or more good answers to each question and circles the one the group likes best. Makes sure that the group members agree with the one that is circled.

**Reporter** - Reports back on behalf of the group to the class

**Observer** – Listens carefully and watches to see how the group is working together.

2. Explain the task – each group is to read the text, create at least 3 good answers to each question and then agree the best one.
3. When the groups are finished they can compare answers with a nearby group or the teacher can take feedback from the Reporter or ask random students from each group to explain their group's answers.

### **Walking Debate**

Make 2 signs with AGREE and DISAGREE written on them and stick them on opposite walls. Invite the students to gather in the middle of the room. Read out a statement (which will stimulate debate) and ask students to move to the position they are happy with, which can range from strongly agree to strongly disagree, or if unsure then they will stand in the middle. Without talking to one another, ask students standing in different places to explain why they have chosen to stand in that position. Probe questions can help tease how their reasons and can also challenge them to rethink their position. Offer students the chance to adjust their position after some opinions have been given. Continue reading out more statements and each time ask students to position themselves along the spectrum of AGREE to DISAGREE. With practice, students can begin to see the shades of grey that exist in relation to all topics. They should also learn that it's okay to change your position after informed discussion.

### **Ranking Exercise**

Diamond ranking is a thinking tool that gets students to prioritise and make judgments. Then it helps them to analyse and evaluate the criteria that they have used for making their judgments. Take an issue and ask the participants to come up with a range of judgments. For example, the reasons why poverty exists in a world of plenty or the most effective ways that people can protect the environment or the most important human right. It's important that there is no single right answer but a range of possible responses. This works best if the students have cards on which to write their different responses. Then they must rank their responses in order of priority with the most important at the top and the least important at the bottom. This is also a good way of building skills in consensus decision making.

**Placemats** (Adapted from Barrie Bennett, *Beyond Monet*)

Place Mat is a form of collaborative learning that combines writing and dialogue to ensure accountability and involvement of all students. It involves groups of students working both alone and together around a single piece of paper to simultaneously come up with lots of alternative ideas.

**Materials:** Chart paper is preferable, but not necessary. Pens and Pencils.  
The paper is divided up into pieces based on the number of member in the group with a central square or circle. (See samples on next page)

**Process**

1. Carefully construct the assignment. This will depend on the learning goals. What are you aiming to do?
2. Assign students into small groups (3-4 works best)
3. Hand out the assignment with the place mat.
4. Students work alone first, using their section of the place mat to record their ideas.
5. Students share information with their group. Results are recorded in the centre of the page.
6. Sharing then takes place between groups.

Different ways of designing your placemats (large poster or flip chart paper works great.) Each X represents a student.

