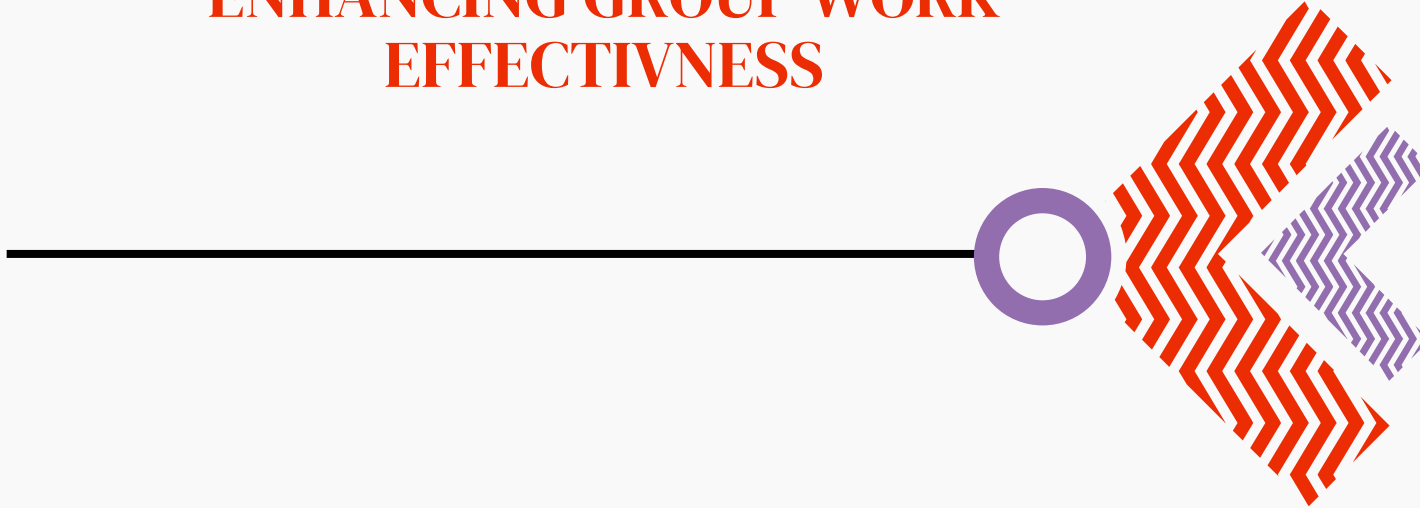




# Faculty Toolkit for Student Group Work

PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR  
ENHANCING GROUP WORK  
EFFECTIVENESS



# Table of Contents

03	<a href="#"><u>Introduction</u></a>
04	<a href="#"><u>Student Recommendations</u></a>
06	<a href="#"><u>Best Practices in Student Group Work</u></a>
07	<a href="#"><u>Small Groups: What the Research Says</u></a>
08	<a href="#"><u>Tools for Faculty:</u></a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#"><u>Faculty Check-In Meeting Sheet</u></a></li></ul>
09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#"><u>Responsibility Chart</u></a></li></ul>
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#"><u>Team Contract</u></a></li></ul>
12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#"><u>Group Work Necessity Checklist</u></a></li></ul>
13	<a href="#"><u>Student Groupwork Training:</u></a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#"><u>Introduction to Effective Group Work</u></a></li></ul>
14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#"><u>Assigning Roles and Responsibilities</u></a></li></ul>
15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#"><u>Building Essential Skills</u></a></li></ul>
16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#"><u>Monitoring and Reflecting on Group Work</u></a></li></ul>
17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#"><u>Group Work Reflection Worksheet</u></a></li></ul>



# Introduction

This toolkit is designed to help Seneca Polytechnic faculty enhance the effectiveness of student group work. Based on findings from a 2024 Seneca Polytechnic research study that examined student group work effectiveness, 12 focus groups were conducted to gather perceptions from faculty, students, and chairs. The insights gathered have informed the following practical recommendations and tools, which are designed to be easily implemented in the classroom to improve student engagement and learning outcomes.

# Student Recommendations

## **BETTER COORDINATION AMONG PROFESSORS REGARDING DEADLINES TO AVOID BURNOUT**

Students have expressed the need for better coordination between professors to ensure that multiple deadlines are not clustered together, which can lead to increased stress and burnout. A well-distributed schedule allows students to manage their time more effectively and maintain a balance between academic responsibilities and personal well-being.

## **STRUCTURED AND DIVERSE GROUP FORMATIONS**

Implementing structured group formation processes can help create diverse groups that promote cultural learning and a variety of perspectives. By mixing students with different backgrounds and experiences, group dynamics can be enriched, leading to a more comprehensive learning experience.

## **REGULAR MONITORING AND CHECK-INS BY PROFESSORS TO ENSURE FAIR WORKLOAD DISTRIBUTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

Regular check-ins and monitoring by professors are crucial to ensure that all group members are contributing equally and that any issues are addressed promptly. This helps in maintaining accountability and prevents situations where some students may feel overburdened while others do not participate actively.

# Student Recommendations

## **ICE-BREAKER ACTIVITIES AND ENFORCED CAMERA USE IN ONLINE SETTINGS**

To foster better communication and interaction, especially in online settings, incorporating ice-breaker activities can help students get to know each other and build rapport. Enforcing the use of cameras during online meetings can also enhance engagement and make virtual group work more effective.

## **MORE IN-CLASS GROUP TIME AND A BALANCED MIX OF INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP ASSIGNMENTS**

Allocating more time for group work within class sessions can provide students with the opportunity to collaborate more effectively under the guidance of the professor. Additionally, balancing group assignments with individual tasks ensures that students develop both teamwork skills and individual competencies.

## **GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY FOR INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPROVED GROUP FORMATION PROCESSES**

Emphasizing the importance of individual accountability within group projects can help ensure that all members contribute their fair share. Clear guidelines and improved processes for group formation can prevent issues related to group dynamics and make the experience more equitable and productive for all participants.

# Best Practices in Student Group Work

## Be Strategic About Group Work

- Asses if group work is necessary to meet learning outcomes, especially if students have multiple group projects across their courses
- Consider reducing the frequency of group work if not essential

## Support Along the Way

- Implement milestone due dates
- Meet with groups in class at least once to check progress/provide support

## Strategic Weighing of Group Work

- Be thoughtful about how much group work counts towards the final grade to ensure it reflects the effort and learning outcomes

## Formative Assessments

- Use small in-class group assignments with the same groups as the final project to practice and monitor progress

## Keep Groups Small

- Opt for smaller paired or individual assignments
- Groups of 2-3 students can maximize benefits while reducing challenges

## Hybrid Group Formations

- Implement a combination of self-formed and faculty-formed groups to balance familiarity and diversity

## Training on Group Work

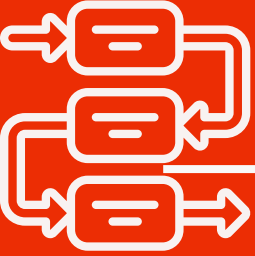
- Include brief training sessions (15 minutes) on effective group work strategies and skills

## Clarify Roles & Accountability

- Have students take ownership of specific parts of the assignment and label these parts clearly
- Allow flexibility in grading individual contributions

## Hands-On Support Over Tools

- Regular check-ins and support are more effective in reducing social loafing
- Student's do not take peer evaluations and contracts seriously; providing direct support will help keep things on track



# SMALL GROUPS: WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

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One study found that smaller groups are more effective in fostering positive interdependence, individual accountability, and face-to-face interaction, which are key components of successful cooperative learning.

***“Generally, as the group gets larger, members are less likely to see their contributions as important to the group’s success. Social loafing increases as the group size increases, while individual accountability decreases.”***

***Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2009). An Educational Psychology Success Story: Social Interdependence Theory and Cooperative Learning. Educational Researcher, 38(5), 365-379.***

Barkley, Cross & Major emphasize that groups should only be as large as necessary to achieve the task, as larger groups can lead to issues with coordination and social loafing.

***“In formal groups working on complex projects, smaller groups are more effective as they make coordinating logistics easier and reduce the opportunities for social loafing.”***

***Barkley, E. F., Cross, K. P., & Major, C. H. (2014). Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty. John Wiley & Sons.***

The study “Social loafing: A meta-analytic review and theoretical integration”, provides an extensive review of how larger groups can lead to decreased individual accountability and a higher likelihood of social loafing, highlighting the importance of maintaining smaller group sizes to mitigate these risks.

***“Social loafing is reduced when individuals work in smaller groups, where their contributions are seen as unique and essential.”***

***Karau, S. J., & Williams, K. D. (2020). Social loafing: A meta-analytic review and theoretical integration. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 119(2), 336-353.***

# TOOLS FOR FACULTY

Feel free to make any necessary adjustments and/or add specific rules/guidelines that are relevant to your course and teaching style.

## FACULTY CHECK-IN MEETING SHEET



Check-In Number	Date	Group Name	Group Members Present	Progress Summary	Challenges Faced	Action Items/Support Needed	Faculty Feedback
INITIAL							
MID-PROJECT							
FINAL							

*This sheet is designed for faculty to facilitate regular check-ins with student groups on projects worth over 20%. These meetings ensure all team members are on track, address issues promptly, and maintain effective communication and collaboration throughout the project.*



# TOOLS FOR FACULTY

Feel free to make any necessary adjustments and/or add specific rules/guidelines that are relevant to your course and teaching style.

## RESPONSIBILITY CHART



Task	Description	Assigned Member(s)	Due Date	Status (Not Started, In Progress, Completed)
TASK #1				
TASK #2				
TASK #3				
TASK #4				
TASK #5				
TASK #6				
TASK #7				

Team Member Name	Team Member Signature

*This chart should be reviewed and updated regularly during team meetings to ensure all tasks are on track and to reassign responsibilities as needed.*

# TOOLS FOR FACULTY

Feel free to make any necessary adjustments and/or add specific rules/guidelines that are relevant to your course and teaching style.

## TEAM CONTRACT



Team Name:

Date:

### PARTICIPATION: WE AGREE TO

- ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN ALL GROUP ACTIVITIES, CONTRIBUTE EQUALLY TO THE WORKLOAD, AND RESPECT EACH OTHER'S IDEAS AND CONTRIBUTIONS.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### COMMUNICATION: WE AGREE TO

- COMMUNICATE OPENLY AND FREQUENTLY, RESPOND TO MESSAGES WITHIN 24 HOURS, AND TO USE AGREED UPON PLATFORMS FOR COMMUNICATION (E.G. EMAIL, ZOOM, WHATSAPP, ETC.)

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### MEETINGS: WE AGREE TO

- ATTEND ALL SCHEDULED MEETINGS, BE PUNCTUAL AND PREPARED FOR EACH MEETING, AND SET AGENDAS AND DOCUMENT MEETING MINUTES.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### CONDUCT: WE AGREE TO

- MAINTAIN A POSITIVE AND RESPECTFUL ATTITUDE, SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER, AND ADDRESS ISSUES PROMPTLY AND CONSTRUCTIVELY.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

*These are the terms of group conduct and cooperation that we agree on as a team. This contract is agreed upon by all team members and will be referred to throughout the project to ensure effective collaboration and successful completion.*

# TOOLS FOR FACULTY

Feel free to make any necessary adjustments and/or add specific rules/guidelines that are relevant to your course and teaching style.

## TEAM CONTRACT



Team Name:

Date:

### CONFLICT: WE AGREE TO

- ADDRESS CONFLICT PROMPTLY AND RESPECTFULLY, SEEK TO UNDERSTAND DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES, AND TO ESCALATE UNRESOLVED CONFLICTS TO PROFESSOR.

• \_\_\_\_\_

• \_\_\_\_\_

### DEADLINES: WE AGREE TO

- SET REALISTIC DEADLINES FOR TASKS, COMPLETE TASKS ON OR BEFORE DEADLINE, AND INFORM THE TEAM IN ADVANCE IF UNABLE TO MEET A DEADLINE.

• \_\_\_\_\_

• \_\_\_\_\_

Team Member Name	Team Member Signature

*These are the terms of group conduct and cooperation that we agree on as a team. This contract is agreed upon by all team members and will be referred to throughout the project to ensure effective collaboration and successful completion.*

# TOOLS FOR FACULTY

Feel free to make any necessary adjustments and/or add specific rules/guidelines that are relevant to your course and teaching style.



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## GROUP WORK NECESSITY CHECKLIST

### SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS FOR FACULTY:

1. Are students getting group work in other courses?
2. Will the pros of group work outweigh the cons for this particular assignment?
3. What specific outcomes do I want to achieve with group work versus pairs or individual assignments, and why?
4. Can I achieve the same group work outcomes with an in-class assignment or another format?
5. Is the group work essential for meeting the learning outcomes, or can it be achieved through other means?

*This tool helps faculty decide if group work is the best approach for a particular assignment by asking key questions to assess its necessity and effectiveness.*



# Introduction to Effective Group Work

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## Objective:

Understand the importance of teamwork and the benefits of working in groups.

### ACTIVITY: GROUP NORMS DISCUSSION

**BREAK STUDENTS INTO SMALL GROUPS.**

**ASK EACH GROUP TO DISCUSS AND LIST 3-5 NORMS THEY BELIEVE ARE ESSENTIAL FOR SUCCESSFUL GROUP WORK (E.G., RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION, ACTIVE PARTICIPATION).**

**SHARE AND COMPILE A MASTER LIST OF NORMS AS A CLASS.**

### Norms Essential for Successful Group Work

1

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2

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3

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4

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5

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## Assigning Roles & Responsibilities

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### Objective:

Learn how to distribute tasks and responsibilities within a group.

#### ACTIVITY: ROLE ASSIGNMENT EXERCISE

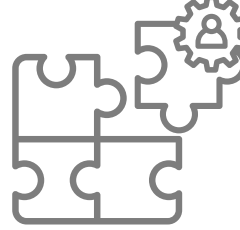
INTRODUCE COMMON GROUP ROLES (E.G., LEADER, EDITOR, COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER, TIMEKEEPER, RESEARCHER).

EACH STUDENT SELECTS A ROLE THEY FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH.

IN THEIR GROUPS, STUDENTS DISCUSS THEIR ROLES AND HOW THEY WILL CONTRIBUTE TO THE PROJECT.

GROUPS PRESENT THEIR ROLE DISTRIBUTION AND JUSTIFY THEIR CHOICES.





## Objective:

Develop key collaboration skills such as communication, problem-solving, and conflict resolution.

### ACTIVITY: SCENARIO-BASED ROLE PLAY

PROVIDE SCENARIOS THAT INVOLVE COMMON GROUP CHALLENGES (E.G., ONE MEMBER NOT CONTRIBUTING).

GROUPS ROLE-PLAY HOW THEY WOULD ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES USING THE NORMS AND ROLES THEY'VE ESTABLISHED.

DEBRIEF WITH THE CLASS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DIFFERENT STRATEGIES USED.

### SAMPLE SCENARIOS

#### SCENARIO 1: THE FREE-RIDER

ONE GROUP MEMBER CONSISTENTLY FAILS TO CONTRIBUTE TO MEETINGS OR TASKS, YET EXPECTS TO SHARE EQUALLY IN THE PROJECT'S GRADE. THE GROUP MUST ADDRESS THE ISSUE WITHOUT CAUSING CONFLICT OR RESENTMENT.

#### SCENARIO 2: DOMINANT LEADER

A GROUP LEADER MAKES ALL DECISIONS WITHOUT CONSULTING OTHERS, STIFLING COLLABORATION AND CREATIVITY. THE GROUP MUST FIND A WAY TO ENSURE ALL VOICES ARE HEARD WHILE MAINTAINING PRODUCTIVITY.

#### SCENARIO 3: CONFLICT OVER ROLES

TWO GROUP MEMBERS WANT THE SAME ROLE, LEADING TO TENSION AND AN IMPASSE. THE GROUP MUST NAVIGATE THE DISAGREEMENT AND ALLOCATE ROLES IN A WAY THAT SATISFIES EVERYONE AND KEEPS THE PROJECT MOVING FORWARD.



### Objective:

Reflect on group performance and identify areas for improvement.

#### ACTIVITY: GROUP REFLECTION SESSION

AT THE END OF THE PROJECT, HAVE GROUPS MEET TO DISCUSS WHAT WORKED WELL AND WHAT DIDN'T.

USE A REFLECTION WORKSHEET WHERE EACH MEMBER WRITES ONE STRENGTH AND ONE AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT FOR THE GROUP.

THIS WORKSHEET ENCOURAGES INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION AND GROUP DISCUSSION, HELPING STUDENTS IDENTIFY STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT, BOTH INDIVIDUALLY AND AS A GROUP.

AFTER COMPLETING THE INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION, ENSURE THAT EACH GROUP DISCUSSES THE KEY POINTS COLLECTIVELY AND TAKES NOTES ON THE MAIN OUTCOMES OF THE DISCUSSION.

GROUPS SHARE THEIR REFLECTIONS, AND THE CLASS DISCUSSES GENERAL TRENDS AND TAKEAWAYS FOR FUTURE PROJECTS.







## Group Reflection Worksheet

**Instructions:** Each member of the group should individually reflect on their group's performance. For each question, write down your thoughts and then discuss them as a group.

### GROUP STRENGTHS

Reflect on one strength that your group exhibited during the project. This could be related to collaboration, communication, problem-solving, or any other aspect of the group's work.

**My Group's Strength:**

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### AREA FOR IMPROVEMENT

Identify one area where your group could improve. Consider aspects like time management, role distribution, or conflict resolution.

**Area for Improvement:**

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### PERSONAL CONTRIBUTION

Reflect on your personal contribution to the group. What did you do well, and what could you improve for future group work.

**My Contribution:**

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### ACTION PLAN

Based on the reflection, write down one action you or the group could take to address the area for improvement in future projects.

**Action Plan:**

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