

Cool Tools for Group Work

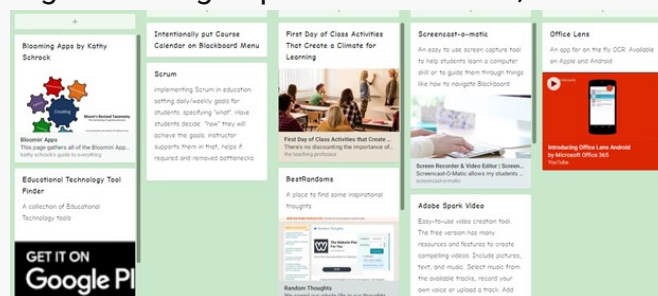
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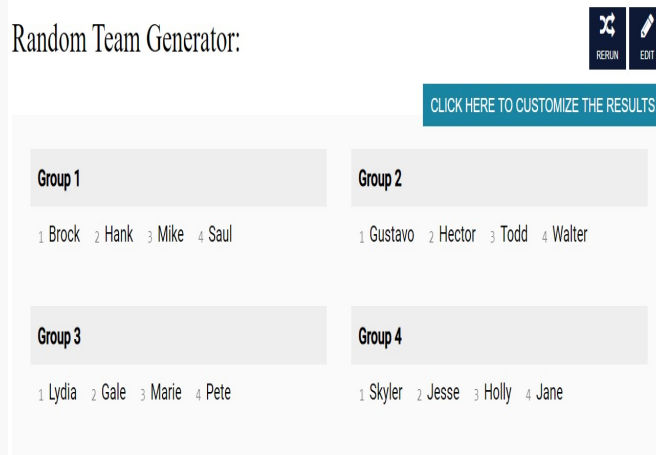
“Let’s get into groups!” Do you hear *groans* instead of students perceiving the collaborative activities as ways to consult with others, gain perspective that they may not have considered before, and benefit from the process? Lyons (2003) says that the term “active learning” is a term that embraces group work. Consider some of the words associated with group work: “learner-centered,” “hands-on learning,” “pedagogies of engagement,” “peer teaching,” “problem based,” and “project-based learning” (Davis, 2009). Perhaps there are some cool tools we can use to make group a little less volatile?

Roberson and Franchini (2014) remind us that if students don’t understand the intent of a group learning activity, the group work won’t be effective. As faculty, we know which outcomes are being assessed with a particular group assignment, but do students see how what they are being asked to do maps to the outcomes? Perhaps a way to have group members not only get the “Why do we have to do this!?”, and provide an opportunity for group members to get to know each other, is to ask them as a group to identify the outcome for the course they are personally most excited to learn and share it with new group. Then ask the groups to identify the outcome that the group project will help them to demonstrate competency in. Consider having the students share their ideas using a tool such as [Padlet](#). Students can continue to use this Padlet as their organization and sharing site going forward. If you are looking for other group icebreaker ideas, consult the [IceBreakers.sw site](#).



When we are using groups informally in the classroom, we need ways to create groups that

are quick and easy and don't result in some students feeling left out. Consider the use of a group generator like the [Random Team Generator](#). Armed with a file of student names to can copy and paste to the site, I can create randomly-generated groups in seconds!



Do you remember the song “The more we get together, together, together... the happier we’ll be”? Sometimes getting a group of students together outside of class time can be nearly impossible due to different responsibilities, schedules, locations, etc. Make sure students are aware of how they can collaborate off campus using tools like Blackboard Collaborate Ultra or Google Handouts to coordinate work on their assignments. Decide as a class what the collaboration tool will be and take an opportunity to have students participate in a brief meetup so that they feel confident in its use. You can even have students record their group’s meetings in both Collaborate Ultra or Google Hangouts. This can be handy if team members complain about one member who does not participate.

Marking group work can be another challenge! Explaining how the group work will be graded at the beginning of the project can be of benefit to students and faculty alike. Bacon (1990) explains that students do better when there is a standard that they are graded with. Knowing what parts of the group work is being assessed is critical information for students to know. If the process of being in a group is an important part of course outcomes, that too should be included in how the final product is graded. Both self and peer evaluations can help students understand how their work efforts are perceived by others.

New: the Learning Portal just released a new [Group Work module](#). It focuses on ways to make your group work run more smoothly, possibly something that you could link for your students as preparation for a group project.

References

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