# Enhancing Authentic Engagement in Group Assignments

## Using learner data to offer practical strategies for improving student engagement.

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# Acknowledgment of Country

I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we are meeting, the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation, and pay my respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.

# Presentation Agenda

1. Nature of collaborative group work in higher education
2. Overview of study procedure
3. Common barriers and facilitators to collaborative group work
4. Strategies to support collaborative group work
5. Speed interviewing for group formation
6. Team charters for goal setting and accountability
7. Reflective collaborative statements for process-orientated assessment

## Anecdotally… before implementation

* Before implementation of speed interviewing, team charters, and collaborative statements:
* Students had a negative attitude towards group work
* Students felt burdened by group work
* Many reports of ‘free riding’ or ‘social loafing’
* Observation/admitting to the ‘sucker effect’ (reduced personal efforts)
* Reports of dissatisfaction with collective grades
* Reports of group conflict after grade release
* Requests for separate marking

## Nature of Collaborative Group Work

* Collaborative group work has been an established pedagogical practice since the 1970s (Slavin, 1991)
* Group tasks support students in developing essential collaboration and communication skills (Rundle, 2014)
* Collaborative group work mirrors authentic workplace dynamics, helping students transition into professional environments where teamwork is expected (Aaron et al., 2012)
* Collaborative group work presents persistent challenges and is often associated with negative attitudes (Song et al., 2025)
* Collaborative group work results in mixed learning outcomes (Joo, 2017)

## Research Questions For a Phenomenological Approach

1. How do university students enrolled in special and inclusive education units, perceive and articulate their experiences of group work in the unit?
2. What are the key facilitators and barriers identified by university students as they engage with collaborative group work activities while enrolled in special and inclusive education units?

## Procedure

## Collaborative Statements Table

## Common Barriers

What do you think are the common barriers to successful collaborative group work?

<https://tinyurl.com/788s3nyr>

## Findings: Common Barriers

Deductive content analysis revealed the following subthemes:

* Time constraints and scheduling conflicts
* Communication challenges and misunderstandings
* Workload distribution and contribution
* Conflict
* Task ambiguity and complexity
* Team member absence

## Findings: Common Facilitators

Deductive content analysis revealed the following subthemes:

* Open communication
* Planning and organisation
* Positive group dynamics
* Leveraging individual strengths and expertise
* Review and feedback processes
* Team charters or agreed work practices

## Strategies to Support Collaborative Group Work

**Speed interviewing** for group formation

**Team charters** for goal setting and accountability

**Reflective collaborative statements** for process-orientated assessment

## Speed Interviewing (Sublett et al., 2022)

* Based on the speed-dating method
* Codesign element
* 2-weeks before, students are prepared to discuss:
* What they can offer to a team & their goals
* What they are looking for in team members
* Facilitation materials are provided (e.g., recording forms, name tags)
* Release of results asap
* Teaching@Sydney article: <https://tinyurl.com/yfkec53h>
* Guide and materials: <https://tinyurl.com/5n7wymn8>

## Speed Interviewing & UDL

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Characteristic**  | **Link to UDL Guidelines**  | **Consideration**  |
| Learner agency over grouping  | Welcoming interests and identities | Optimization choice and autonomy (7.1)  |
| Preparation and sharing of expectations and goals  | Emotional capacity | Recognize expectations, beliefs, and motivations (9.1) |
| Interpretations of own/others strengths and weaknesses  | Emotional capacity | Develop awareness of self and others (9.2) |

## Team Charters

## What are Team Charters?

* Team charters provide a foundation for shared expectations (i.e., collaboration and communication norms) (Barron, 2000)
* Team charters are a tool for accountability and motivation by describing roles and responsibilities (Mathieu & Rapp, 2009)
* Team charters provide support for a structured collaboration through explicit process descriptions (e.g., decision making, conflict resolution) (Hunsaker et al., 2011)
* Team charters are most effective with instructor involvement (Aaron et al., 2014)

## Shared Team Charter Resources

* [Sydney's Student Charter 202](https://www.sydney.edu.au/policies/showdoc.aspx?recnum=PDOC2011/215&RendNum=0)0
* [Teaching@Sydney article](https://educational-innovation.sydney.edu.au/teaching%40sydney/supporting-online-group-work/) on supporting online group work
* Orientation and tips in this 5-[minute video from UBC](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIp_kFR5_jc)
* University of Otago [Developing a team charter](https://www.otago.ac.nz/buildrespect/step-1-team-discussions-your-team-charter.html)
* [Group work tips from Sydney](https://www.sydney.edu.au/students/group-work.html)
* More detailed guidance on group work from [UTS](https://www.uts.edu.au/current-students/support/helps/self-help-resources/types-assignments/group-work) and [WSU](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/studysmart/home/assessment_guides/group_work)
* Sydney's [Group work: Collaborative Learning resource](https://canvas.sydney.edu.au/enroll/648PJG) on Canvas (enrolment required)

## Team Charters & UDL

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Characteristic**  | **Link to UDL Guidelines**  | **Consideration**  |
| Recording shared goals  | Sustaining effort and persistence  | Clarifying the meaning and purpose of goals (8.1)  |
| Provision of resources  | Sustaining effort and persistence  | Optimize challenge and support (8.2)  |
| Encouraging shared goals, commitments, responsibilities  | Sustaining effort and persistence  | Foster collaboration, interdependence, and collective learning (8.3) |
| Describing processes for dealing with challenges and conflicts  | Strategy development  | Anticipate and plan for challenges (6.2)  |

## Reflective Collaborative Statements

* Your statement can be written individually or as a group
* Your statement doesn’t need to be long
* Your statement might reflect on the following questions:
	+ How successful was your group’s collaboration?
	+ Was this a positive experience for each group member?
	+ What did your group do well?
		- What contributed to your group’s success?
	+ What challenges did your group face?
		- How did you overcome these challenges?
		- Why didn’t you overcome these challenges?
	+ What supports were required to support your collaboration?
		- Did you have access to these supports?
	+ How did you develop and maintain collaboration and communication?
	+ Anything else you wish for the marker to know about the collaboration

## Exemplar quotes (Undergrad Mandatory S&IE Unit)

"[Our collaboration] has been highly rewarding, providing us with valuable insights into effective teamwork and collaborative planning that will undoubtedly benefit our practice as future teachers.”

"...we always ended up with a better idea than what we individually offered, and helpful discussions to help us understand the concepts more thoroughly.”

"Overall, our group’s collaboration over the course of this task allowed us as pre-service teachers to consider how we might implement similar opportunities for communication in our future classrooms."

## Collaborative Statements & UDL

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| **Characteristic**  | **Link to UDL Guidelines**  | **Consideration**  |
| Option for individual and/or collective reflection  | Emotional capacity  | Promote individual and collective reflection (9.3)  |
| Encouraging personal reflection that is shared with others  | Perception  | Represent a diversity of perspectives (1.3)  |

## Anecdotally… after implementation

Before implementation:

* Students had a negative attitude towards group work
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* Many reports of ‘free riding’ or ‘social loafing’
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* Reports of dissatisfaction with collective grades
* Reports of group conflict after grade release
* Requests for separate marking

After implementation:

* Neutral attitude towards group work
* Few reports of ‘free riding’ or ‘social loafing’ (during collaboration)
* No reports of group conflict
* No requests for separate marking
* No reports of dissatisfaction with collective grades

## References

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