



AVLN D2L Class

Managing Group Projects Online

Introduction

Background Information

To get started, browse the following background information.

- [Expectations for Online Courses](#)
- [Meet Your Facilitator\(s\)](#)
- [Tips for Using the Discussion Area](#)
- [Using the Pager](#)

Why include collaborative learning in your online or hybrid course?

The reasons quoted below are found in the highly recommended book *Collaborating Online: Learning Together in Community* by Rena M. Palloff and Keith Pratt (2005).

- In an earlier study, Murphy, Drabier, and Epps (1998) noted that the use of asynchronous online collaboration increased learner interaction, satisfaction, and learning.
 - Murphy, K., Drabier, R., and Epps, M. "Interaction and Collaboration via Computer Conferencing." *Proceedings of the National Convention for Education Communication and Technology*, 1998. (ED 423 852)
- The business world has contributed much to our understanding on collaboration by an emphasis and research on virtual teaming. Duarte and Snyder (2001) explain the benefits as, "People who lead and work in virtual teams need to have special skills, including an understanding of human dynamics, knowledge of how to manage across functional areas and national cultures, and the ability to use communication technologies as their primary means of communicating and collaborating" (p. 4).
 - Duarte, D., and Snyder, N. T. *Mastering Virtual Teams: Strategies, Tools, and Techniques that Succeed* (2nd ed.) San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.

Collaboration Basics

From *Collaborating Online: Learning Together in Community* by Rena M. Palloff and Keith Pratt (2005), p. 18.

- Successful collaboration depends on the creation of a learning community. Consequently, attention needs to be paid to community-building from the start of an online course.
- Collaboration addresses multiple learning styles and issues of culture.
- Collaboration serves to reduce the isolation that can occur online.

- Virtual teamwork not only allows students to gain competence in working in groups online, it also provides them an opportunity to test out real-world practices they are likely to face in the work world.
- Online groups move through phases, including a normative phase, a problem-solving phase, disagreement or conflict, an action phase, and termination.
See also Working in Small Groups. <http://www.umuc.edu/mdfaonline/Presentations/Giles-groupwork.html>
- A strong sense of community can assist groups in moving through the phases of their development more effectively.

Desire2Learn Course Space

You will need your own D2L space to participate in this class. **You should first try to get a course space from your local institution.** However, if one is unavailable, you can get a "play" place on the ADEC Training site where we are participating in this class. Request a demo space from Janine Lim, janine@janinelim.com. Please give her 12 hours to make the space for you. You won't be able to teach in this space, but you can learn in it. Don't plan to build a whole course in this demo space, as you will have to redo it then on your institution's Desire2Learn server.

Discussion: Introductions

★ **In the Discussion area**, introduce yourself and share how you currently use group projects in your classes. Share some of your strategies for interdependence or assessment. What works for you? What challenges/frustrates you with group work? Share your personal web page or your work web page. Attach a small digital picture of yourself if possible (300ish pixels wide and less than 50K) or put it in your [Profile in Classlist](#).



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Types of Activities for Online Groups

- Small group assignments
- Research assignments asking students to find information and present it back to their peers
- Case studies
 - [Science Cases](#)
 - [Economics Cases](#)
 - [Higher Education and Leadership](#)
 - [Various Content Areas](#)
 - See also [Merlot](#) and the [World Lecture Hall](#).
- Simulations
- Shared facilitation
- Homework forums
- Asynchronous discussion of reading and discussion questions
- Papers and projects posted to the course site for mutual feedback
- Dyads to share and report results of Internet searches
- Dyads to address a specific content related problem
- [Jigsaw](#) activities
- [Blogs](#)
- Virtual Teams
- Debates
- [WebQuests](#)

Instructor Responsibilities

The instructor is responsible for creating the container or environment for collaborative activities. Only with strong instructor involvement will group projects and collaborative activities be successful.

Set the guidelines and expectations. The following guidelines are suggested by Palloff and Pratt (2005), p. 26.

- **Explain the importance of collaborative group work and make it a requirement** of the course -- not an option. Although some learners tend to prefer to work alone, allowing them to do so reduces the likelihood of a meaningful learning experience.
- **Form groups that are heterogeneous** with respect to gender, age, ethnicity, learning styles, abilities, and experiences. Groups of two to four learners are best. Instructors and designers should

consider the purpose of the group and the cooperative structures that will be used as they determine the number of teams.

- Allow time for ice-breaking and team-building activities, which allow learners to begin to form a sense of community.
- **Give clear instructions and guidelines** regarding not only the assignments, but also the method and tools of communication that will be used. Start simple to give students time to understand the structures and methods of communication.
- **Set reasonable goals** and **provide a place** for the group to interact. The tools available in Desire2Learn include asynchronous group discussion boards, live chat, the pager, and interactive white boards.
- **Supervise the group's progress** and be available to prompt or assist groups that are having difficulty. Your "presence" will help to ensure participation by all members. Be prepared to intervene and mediate conflicts of an interpersonal nature without taking sides. Suggest that the group explore alternatives and reach consensus.
- **Design evaluation criteria** to include peer evaluation. This rewards extraordinary team members while at the same time appropriately evaluates non-contributing members.
- Provide a place for the team to **share their work** and learning products with the larger learning community. Many projects can be posted on a Web site or added as an attachment to a discussion area.

Team Agreements

Doran (2001) notes the significance importance of "team charters" in promoting learner satisfaction with collaborative learning experiences. The team charter should include some basic components.

Doran, C. "The Effective Use of Learning Groups in Online Education." *New Horizons in Adult Education*, Summer 2001, 15(2), <http://www.nova.edu/~aed/horizons/volume15n2.html>. Retrieved June 6, 2005.

- *How will your group identify itself?*
- *Define the purpose of your group.*
- *Outline the deliverables of your group in bullets.*
- *Define the operating guidelines of your group. Include these (and other information if necessary)*
 - *How will the group communicate?*
 - *What day during the week will the discussion begin?*
 - *How quickly should group members be expected to respond to e-mails or discussion board postings?*
 - *What role or duties will each person in the group perform?*
 - *Who is responsible for posting group responses to the main discussion board?*
 - *How will the group handle a member who is not participating?*

- *Discuss any other topics that are unique to your group.*

Discussion: Challenges to Online Groups

★ **Question:** Based on your reading so far, what activities might you want to use in an online environment? What new ideas have you learned that you want to try? What do you think will be the benefit to student learning?

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Setting up Group Spaces in D2L

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Online Tutorials for Groups in D2L

The University of Wisconsin has a nice set of instructions for working with groups in Desire2Learn.

- Start with [Using Groups in Desire2Learn](#) for an overview.
- [Working With Groups](#) teaches you how to set up the group spaces. Try this in your own course space.
- You can also email just certain groups, release content to specific groups, and view your gradebook by groups. See [Working with Groups: Additional Options](#).
- See also Teaching with [Desire2Learn 7.4 Full Manual](#) (200+ pages in PDF format, 3M)

Classlist (Profile, homepage, public locker files)

There are several interesting options under Classlist that could be used with groups. Try these out inside our course here.

- As a participant, you want to know who is in the class with you! As you have time, edit your own [profile](#) and/or homepage. Click Classlist, click on the pictures to the left of your name to see what each one does. Make a simple homepage. Upload a picture. Share a file in your locker. (If you make it public it will show up here.)
- Then browse the Classlist and learn about your classmates. Notice also the green dot tells you if they are online in D2L right now. You could [page someone online](#) if you needed a fast answer!

Your groups could possibly use the locker to share files as well.

Also, if you didn't take the Class Discussions Online course, you may be interested in [Extra Discussion Details](#).

Assignment

Begin designing a group project for one your classes. Experiment with the options in Desire2Learn. Then on the next page, learn about assessment tools and report on your initial rough plans for your group projects.

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Assessment and Issues for Online Groups

Basic Principles of Assessment

"In order to assess student performance in collaborative activity effectively, the instructor needs to understand basic principles of student assessment." - Palloff and Pratt (2005) p. 41.

- Assessment must be embedded in and aligned with the design of the course.
- Assessment must be learner-centered, teacher-directed, mutually beneficial, formative, context-specific, ongoing, and firmly rooted in good practice.

Angelo, T., and Cross, K. P. *Classroom Assessment Techniques*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993.

Palloff and Pratt, in their 2003 book, *The Virtual Student: A Profile and Guide to Working with Online Learners*, list the following principles that should guide student assessment in an online course.

- Design learner-centered assessments that include self-reflection.
- Design and include grading rubrics to assess contributions to the discussion as for assignments assignments, projects, and the collaboration itself.
- Include collaborative assessments through publicly posting papers along with comments from student to student.
- Encourage students to develop skills in providing feedback by providing guidelines to good feedback and modeling what is expected.
- Use assessment techniques that fit the context and align with learning objectives.
- Design assessments that are clear, easy to understand, and likely to work in the online environment.
- Ask for and incorporate student input into how assessment should be conducted (pp. 101-102).

"Each collaborative activity should contain a reflective component. At the very least, students should be asked to reflect on their participation in the activity and their contributions to the group." - Palloff and Pratt (2005) p. 43.

Guidelines for Feedback

Encourage students to give thoughtful feedback to each other. Include this type of language and direction in your syllabus or activity instructions to guide students toward giving meaningful feedback.

- Don't just make up feedback as you go along. Plan ahead.
 - Before you start to type, think first about what you want to say. Get your ideas straight in your head, and figure out how they all fit together.
 - Make some notes before typing a message online. This helps you figure out what you need to say.
 - Use short paragraphs. This forces you to express yourself with a minimum of words.
 - When you write something, make sure that people will understand you. After you type in a message--and before you send it--try reading it out loud. Sometimes sentences that seem to be okay when you're typing don't really work when you read them back.
 - Some people quote a huge message, then place a brief comment at the end, such as "I agree with this!" or "Me, too!" This can be annoying to the person who has to scroll all the way through the message, looking for the part that you wrote. It makes more sense for you to quote only a few important sentences that summarize the message adequately, and place your comment after that.
 - Simply saying that you agree with something doesn't add much to the conversation. Why not tell people why you agree? You can state some of the reasons why you feel the way you do. This way, you will look like a person who thinks carefully about things and considers all the facts.
 - You should always read what you have written before you send your message. Not only will this help you spot errors in spelling, phrasing, and grammar, but you may also notice that you don't sound as friendly as you would like. Make sure your message is worded professionally and not harshly to avoid insulting those who will read it or inadvertently "flaming" other members of the group."
- Conrad, R. M., and Donaldson, A. *Engaging the Online Learner: Activities and Resources for Creative Instruction*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004.

Additional Assessment Resources

- [Assessment of Online Participation](#)
- **What is a Rubric?** [Using Rubrics to Promote Thinking and Learning, Educational Leadership 2000](#) - by Heidi Goodrich Andrade
- **Sample Rubrics**
 - [Rubric](#) by Shirley Freed, Andrews University
 - [Rubric](#) by Marc S. Glassman, Memorial University of

Newfoundland

- [Online Discussion/Forum Rubric Assessment Tool](#) by Timothy Hatten, Rock Valley College, IL
- [Sample Rubric: EPost Discussion \[PDF\]](#) by the University of Washington
- **Tools for Creating Rubrics**
 - [Rubistar](#) (from the U.S. Department of Education - excellent rubric creator tool)
 - [Rubric Maker](#) (Lots of starting places here)
 - [Rubric Construction Set](#) (gives you HTML for a web page)
 - [Rubrics for Web Lessons](#) (walks through the process)

Discussion: Designing a Group Activity

★ **Question:** Based on your reading so far, pick one class you teach and think of a collaborative group activity that you might wish to support with an online environment. Describe the activity in detail. What new strategies will you need to include in the assignment? How will you adapt the activity for the online environment? What assessment strategies will you use?

Reply to your colleagues and give constructive feedback. Use these starter sentences to guide your feedback.

- *I particularly liked . . .*
- *You might want to look at these resources . . .*
- *Did you think about . . .*
- *I wondered about . . .*
- *I've been successful with similar activities when . . .*

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Additional Resources and Readings

Resources and Readings

- [Enhancing Experiences with Group Work](#) A resource kit for instructors to assist them manage and motivate student groups.
- [Instructional Creativity](#) and [Constructivist Elements](#) "Checklists" of ideas to consider
- [Motivation is important even on the web!](#) with suggestions on how to motivate online students
- [Elements of Instruction](#) with specifics for online instruction
- [Choosing learner activities for specific learning outcomes](#): A tool for constructivist computer assisted learning design.
- [Strategies for Learner-Centered Distance Teaching](#)
- [Strategies for Inclusive Teaching](#) by Claxton and Murrell includes ideas for inclusive teaching. Follow this link to Teaching for Inclusion. The one chapter you will want to read in its entirety is chapter two.
- [Diversity in the Classroom: Bridging Difference & Distance Through Computer-Mediated Communication](#) This article is short, but may give you ideas for your own course.

Additional Activities

- [Simulations](#)
- [Learning Activities](#)
- [Java Applets](#) - you can find lots more of these in [Merlot](#)
- [Group Projects](#), [Group Pages](#)
- [Quia](#) - Online activities, quizzes, games, and more.
- Explore [WebQuests](#)
- Explore [Web Inquiry Projects](#)
- University of Minnesota Digital Media Center: Teaching Strategies:
 - [Collaborative Learning](#)
 - [Games and Simulations](#)
 - [Experiential Learning](#)

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