

Getting Started with Cooperative Learning

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Cooperative Learning: Advice for Starting Out

- Start early and small. Build on what works (Don't wait until the middle of the semester/term to start)
- Keep the groups small -- 2 or 3 members
- YOU choose the groups - random selection (counting off) is quick and easy
- Tell students what you're doing and why (inform students before starting)
- Do something cooperative regularly, build habits of cooperation
- Keep it short; 5 to 10 minutes and gradually expand time
- Emphasize important group behaviors - listening, staying on task, participating, checking for understanding, asking for and giving rationale (consider assigning roles)
- No formal, outside of class, group projects until students are working well together
- Monitor the groups: listen, ask questions, clarify; intervene (stop the group) only when absolutely necessary
- Be patient, be positive, and problem-solve
- Work with a colleague
- DON'T give group grades

Rule: No student's grade should be lower because of cooperative learning. Evaluation for learning should be individual until you and the students are ready for group grades. Explore alternatives to giving group grades for group work.

When Faculty Have Problems, I Check For:

- Group size of 2 or 3; Members close together
- Positive Interdependence structured in multiple ways – learning goal, roles, shared resources; Individual Accountability clear (See Key Elements of Cooperative Learning Handout for ways to structure interdependence and accountability)
- Criterion-referenced evaluation system; No group grade until fair
- Lessons short: 5 - 20 minutes
- Vigorous monitoring to promote academic and teamwork success
- Teamwork skills emphasized
- Processing carefully and regularly done
- Regular meetings with colleagues

Johnson, David W., Johnson, Roger T., and Smith, Karl A. 2006. *Active learning: Cooperation in the college classroom, 3rd Ed.* Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company, 2006. [Interaction Book Company, 5028 Halifax Ave. S , Edina, MN 55424 Telephone 612-831-9500].