

## Benefits of using group work in an online course

Research studies show that there are several benefits to having students work in groups, even online.

- Students learn better when they have opportunities for collaboration (Millis, n.d.).
- Students tend to learn more material better and retain the information longer than when the same information is taught in different methods (St. Philip's College, 2005).
- Group members not only learn from their own individual efforts, but they also learn from the perspectives of the other members (Betz, 2005).

## Types of Group Assignments

Assignment	Description
<b>Panel discussion</b>	A panel/group of students is given a set of questions from which they prepare a group response.
<b>Case study</b>	A group of students is given a narrative description of a problematic situation and then asked to identify or solve the problem.
<b>Action maze</b>	A group of students is given a description of an incident that requires analysis and action. The students are then given a list of two to four alternative actions. As the students make decisions about what actions to take, they are directed further in the action maze to find out the consequences of their decisions and, perhaps, what the next set of alternative actions is. This activity is effective for teaching troubleshooting.
<b>In-basket exercise</b>	This is a variation of the case study. A group of students is provided with an "in-basket" of documents or correspondence, such as reports, memos, emails, etc., some of which are important to the case and some of which are extraneous. The group is asked to identify or solve the problem. This activity is effective for practicing decision-making and priority setting.
<b>Role playing</b>	A group of students is asked to take on the parts of characters in a representation of a real situation. It is similar to a case study, but with added character descriptions. This activity is effective for practicing managerial skills. It can be conducted either through synchronous tools (i.e. chat), e-mail lists, or the discussion forums.
<b>Simulation</b>	A group of students works on an artificial representation of real conditions that may be either computerized or in print form.
<b>Critical incident technique</b>	A group of students is given a very brief narrative of a problem or situation to which they must respond. They need to develop a team response to the situation, usually within a short amount of time, such as a week.
<b>Students as teachers</b>	A group of students develops the presentation of a course topic for the rest of the class and poses one or more questions for class discussion.
<b>Formal debate</b>	Students are divided into teams to present opposing viewpoints. Some may act as respondents or judges. This can be accomplished asynchronously through discussion forums or e-mail lists.
<b>Writing groups</b>	Students present drafts of written assignments to one another for critique and then revise their drafts based on other student comments. Student groups for this activity should not be too large or students can be overwhelmed by the amount of materials to read. Students may also be reluctant about giving negative feedback to one another. This may be overcome by giving a grade for the quality of comments a student gives on other students' papers.
<b>Group projects</b>	Student teams work on projects, such as writing research papers, creating PowerPoint presentations to be posted to the class, etc.

• • •