This page will help you support students as they build their groups, establish group dynamics and face their first few challenges as groups.

Use ice breakers

Team building activities (ice breakers) help students acquaint themselves with the members of their group. They can deliver insights into some of the principles and processes involved in working with a group.

For shorter group activities you might use the following ice-breaking exercise.

**Student exercise 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ice breaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This ice-breaker helps you to get to know your group members and provides a basis for the discussion of your group task.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Select one person in your group (e.g. the person to your left). Ask your partner the following questions:

   - What is your name?
   - What is one personal fact that you would like to share with the group (e.g. hobbies or interests, family)
   - What has been your experience of working in groups before?

2. Everyone in the group takes turns to introduce their pair to the group by repeating their responses to the above questions.

For longer group projects where students will be working together for the duration of a course, you might consider giving students a more involved team building activity such as this straw building one:

**Student exercise 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Straw building</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Challenge

Design the world’s tallest straw structure. Your group will be given a number of drinking straws and one roll of masking tape. Your challenge is to work as a group to design and construct, in the time permitted, the tallest structure possible using the tape and straws.

Just to make it a little more challenging, your creation must be free standing (i.e. not taped to the floor, ceiling or piece of furniture).

Your group will have 10 minutes to plan and create a structure. Following the activity, each group will explain the features of their construction—please choose a spokesperson for your group.

Follow-up exercises

Think about how your group interacted while completing the challenge, then answer the following questions:

- What did your group do immediately after receiving the challenge?
- Did your group organise the task? If so, how?
- Describe the specific roles (e.g. tape cutter, builder etc.) that each team member took and how these roles were decided.
- Which aspects of the construction project did your team complete most successfully?
- Which aspects might your group change next time?


Help students understand what makes a good group

Another way to help students establish their groups is to ask them to consider the factors that might contribute to an unsuccessful group, and conversely, what they can do to form a successful team. The following exercise helps students identify group behaviours and processes that might lead to a breakdown in the effectiveness of a group, and others that help create a successful group.

Student exercise 3

How to wreck a group
Stage 1

Brainstorm the question: “How we could wreck our group and make sure we fail and have a horrible time?”

Examples of answers include: forget to arrange meetings, not know how to contact each other, not consider who is going to do what.

Stage 2

Go through the ideas on the brainstormed list, asking: “If that's how we would fail, how can we make sure we succeed?”

For example, to address the items above, we could: at each meeting, agree on a time and place for our next meeting; right now, exchange names, addresses, phone numbers and emergency contact methods; keep a written record of who has been allocated what task and make sure everyone has a copy; etc.)

Stage 3

Make a new list of actions you can take to make your group succeed.