

GRADING AND GROUP WORK

How do I assess individual learning when students work together?

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How Can I Assess and Grade Individual Students' Achievement?

Once you have decided on the learning outcomes you want students to achieve, build in to the group project appropriate individual assessment methods. The following sections describe several effective ways to assess and grade individual achievement of learning outcomes (aligned with curricular or state objectives, goals, or standards) during and after group projects.

Student Reflection on Learning

Asking students to write a reflection on what they learned is not just a good way to assess group process; it can also help you assess and grade individual students' achievement. However, student reflection on learning should differ from student reflection on group process in two ways. First, you should lend more focus to the reflection by providing a clear-cut prompt that cues students to describe specific insights or understandings they gained or particular skills they developed by doing the project. A general answer to the question "What did I learn?" that can be answered many ways (e.g., "I learned that the tides are very important") is not sufficient.

Second, students' responses need to be gradable—on a continuum such as *A* through *F* or Advanced through Below Basic, or on whichever other grading system you use. Like any gradable written project, the student reflection should result in an essay that can be graded with a rubric or other scoring scheme. There will be many ways for students to write a strong answer, but they may also write answers indicating that they did not develop much new knowledge or that they developed misunderstandings.

The key to getting students to demonstrate their understanding of specific content knowledge and skills they learned lies in how you write the reflection prompt. The prompt ought to ask students to make some sort of judgment about the learning—not just rattle off a list of facts.

Here is an example of a project using a reflection prompt.

Sample Project 1: Middle School U.S. History **The Battle of the Little Bighorn**

Learning goal: Student understands interaction between Native Americans and white society (e.g., the attitudes and policies of government officials, the U.S. Army, missionaries, and settlers toward Native Americans) (McREL Benchmarks for U.S. History, Standard 19, Level III) (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning [McREL], 2013a).

Group work: In this project, middle school students conduct research on the Battle of the Little Bighorn, including its causes and effects as well as the details of the event

itself. Each group receives a detailed directions sheet that includes research questions. The groups may use one of three formats to report their findings: they may create a “project fair” display on a trifold board (similar to a science fair project); make a series of presentation slides; or produce a written report. In addition to the report, each group is required to summarize its findings for the class in a five-minute oral presentation.

Example of a good reflection prompt: Describe the three most important things you learned about the Battle of the Little Bighorn and the place it holds in the history of the relationship between Native American cultures and the U.S. government. Then share which of those three things surprised you the most, and explain why.

Example of a poor reflection prompt: Summarize what you learned about the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

In this project, many teachers would attempt to assign one grade to the final group report. But no matter which form of presentation the group chose (display, presentation slides, or written report), the content knowledge would have been presented as a product from the group, and it would not be possible to separate the contributions of individual students. Even if that *were* possible, it is not reasonable to conclude that a student who did not personally create a certain portion of the report does not understand that information and its relationship to the other parts of the report. Therefore, a group grade for the final product would not

About the Author



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