



Group work

For many teachers, facilitating online group work is daunting and challenging. However, many of the planning decisions we make in a normal classroom setting also apply to the online environment. When your students are learning remotely, there are some additional factors to consider.

Keep group sizes small

Keeping groups small helps students to manage the amount of information they receive from their peers. If students are overwhelmed with comments or material, they can start to feel that tasks are not achievable.

Before your students begin any group activities, it will help to set expectations by discussing with them how remote group work may be different to working together in class. For example, if they are relying on written forms of communication, such as emails or forums, they may not get immediate responses and discussions will take longer than usual.

It also will be helpful for you and your learners to agree how to manage some aspects of group work. For example, how are they going to share ideas or early drafts of work? In order to establish the most effective procedure, encourage your students to work collaboratively before they start any assignment to agree how they are going to proceed.

Be clear about the output

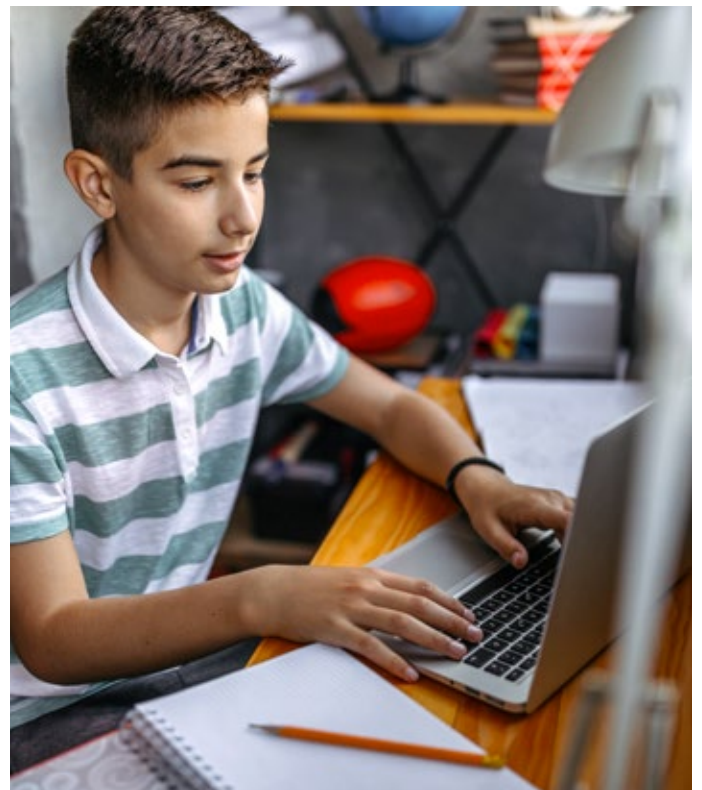
Explain the task clearly and make sure students have the chance to ask clarifying questions. This is very important – if team members all start attempting the task in different ways, it will be difficult to bring together later.

The first group tasks you set will probably need more explicit guidance and support. Create clear instructions about what is expected from each team member and what the outcome for them will look like. As they become more proficient at remote group working, your students can then begin to do this themselves.

Make time to check in regularly with the progress of your groups – make this more frequent at the beginning of each task – to ensure that they are going to be able to achieve the desired outcome.

Dealing with conflict

Help your students understand what to do if conflict emerges in their groups – where, when and how they can get support from you.



Provide guidance at the start of any group work to help them resolve conflict together. Encourage your students to set up ground rules for their group before working on the task. This can cover a range of things such as ways of working and how they intend to manage deadlines and peer feedback.

Be clear about the tools to be used

Highlight any tools the students can use that might support group work, such as discussion forums or collaborative editing and sharing of documents. Whatever software, web-based tools or apps you suggest – make sure all learners can access them.