Grading Group Projects
Grading for Fairness, Accountability, and Engagement

Purpose: Group projects help build collaboration and communication skills, but grading them can bring unique challenges. How do you ensure grades are fair, reflect both group and individual effort, and encourage meaningful participation? Understanding common pitfalls and selecting the right grading model can make group assessment more effective and equitable.

What are the Grading Challenges?

While group projects are an excellent pedagogical strategy, instructors face several common challenges in grading them:

1. **Uneven Participation:** Some students may contribute significantly more than others, making it difficult to assign fair grades.

2. **Grade Anxiety:** Students often worry that their final mark will depend too heavily on classmates' efforts.

3. **Accountability:** Without clear expectations or structures, it can be hard to track who did what.

4. **Interpersonal Conflicts:** Conflict or lack of communication may diminish the group's effectiveness and skew results.

Models for Grading

Following are some of the major models for grading group projects, along with their strengths and weaknesses. Depending on the project, the course objectives, and the role of the project in the course, you might choose different models:

1. **Group Grade for the Group Product**

   a. All members receive the same grade based on the final project.
   b. **Strength:** Simplifies grading and emphasizes collaboration.
   c. **Weakness:** Can be unfair when effort is uneven.

2. **Individual Grade for Individual Components**

    a. Each student is graded on their clearly defined section or task within the project.
    b. **Strength:** Offers accountability and recognizes individual effort.
    c. **Weakness:** Can undermine collaboration and create a "divide and conquer" mentality.

3. **Hybrid Model: Group + Individual Grades**

    a. A portion of the grade comes from the group's product; another portion is based on individual contribution or reflection.
    b. Example: "70% group project, 30% individual reflection or self-assessment."
    c. **Strength:** Balances collaboration with personal responsibility.
    d. **Weakness:** Slightly more complex to grade.

        The following are different approaches to the "Individual grades" part of Model 3:

        i. **Peer Assessment: S**tudents evaluate each other's contributions using a rubric or guided survey; scores inform individual grades. Some instructors ask students to take themselves out of the equation and then distribute 100 points among all other members of their group.

            1. **Strength:** Encourages accountability and self-awareness.
            2. **Weakness:** Peer reviews can be biased or inconsistent without clear guidelines.

4. **Self-Assessment:** Students assess their contributions and learning, sometimes paired with instructor evaluation.

    a. **Strength:** Fosters reflection.
    b. **Weakness:** May result in inflated scores if not monitored.

5. **Process-Oriented Grading:** Part of the grade rewards effective use of group processes: communication, meeting deadlines, and solving conflicts (often tracked through logs or journals).

   a. **Strength:** Values teamwork and project management, not just outcomes.
   b. **Weakness:** Requires extensive documentation and clear grading criteria

Instructor Planning Guide

1. **Learning Goals and Project Purpose**
   Define what students should learn and demonstrate through the project.

2. **Grading Model Selection**
   Choose a grading model that fits your course goals and promotes fairness.

3. **Rubrics and Criteria**
   Create and share rubrics that clarify expectations for both group and individual work.

4. **Accountability and Transparency**
   Use tools like peer/self-assessments to track individual contributions.

5. **Reflection and Process Evaluation**
   Include reflections or logs to assess teamwork and collaboration.

6. **Student Preparation and Communication**
   Explain grading methods, roles, and expectations at the start of the project.

7. **Feedback Strategy**
   Plan regular check-ins and feedback to guide progress and address issues.

8. **Canvas Setup**
   Enter assignments and grade weights correctly in Canvas for accurate tracking.

9. **Accessibility**
   Ensure group work and grading processes are accessible to all students.

Instructor Checklist

☐ I have defined clear learning goals for the group project.

☐ I have selected a grading model that balances fairness and collaboration.

☐ I have created rubrics for both group and individual components and shared them in advance.

☐ I have planned for peer and/or self-assessments to ensure accountability.

☐ I have built in checkpoints (e.g., progress reports or group meetings) during the project timeline.

☐ I have included opportunities for reflection and/or contribution logs.

☐ I have communicated expectations, roles, and grading methods to students clearly.

☐ I have planned for timely feedback to support group progress.

☐ I have entered project components and grade weights correctly in Canvas.

☐ I have reviewed Harvard DCE policies on grading, deadlines, and grade confidentiality.

Resource: [Groupwork Sample Grading Handout](#) (Claire Howell, Faculty Focus)