

How Do I Assign Students to Groups?

Presented by:

Ivan A. Shibley, Jr., Ph.D.





Presenter Bio:

Dr. Ivan A. Shibley, Jr. (Ike) is associate professor of chemistry at Penn State Berks, a small four-year college within the Penn State system. He received his B.S. in chemical engineering from the University of Pittsburgh and his Ph.D. in biochemistry from East Carolina University. Between undergraduate and graduate school he spent four years in the Navy where he taught nuclear physics and radiation safety. He now teaches introductory chemistry, general chemistry, organic chemistry, biochemistry, philosophy of science courses, first-year bioethics seminar, and senior science seminar. His research involves pedagogical approaches to improving science instruction at the college level. He has won both local and university-wide awards for his teaching including this year's Eisenhower Award presented to a tenured Penn State faculty member who exhibits excellent teaching as well as mentoring other teachers.

Ike became involved in blended learning as part of an 18-month project to completely redesign the general chemistry course at Berks. As part of a team of six professionals who invested over 1,000 man-hours in the redesign Ike helped provide the pedagogical and subject matter expertise to help guide the redesign. The course has now been delivered in a blended format for three years with an average GPA almost 25% higher than previous years. Ike has taught the three sections of the course and is currently co-authoring a manuscript about the results. Ike recently redesigned a nutrition course that was taught in a blended format that met only half the number of hours of a traditional course with comparable grades. He has presented his work on blended learning at numerous professional conferences and has become an advocate of blended learning.



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Ike Shibley

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Benefits of Groups

- Group work is more learner-centered
- The power relationship alters: teacher is no longer on center stage

2

Benefits of Groups

- Students enjoy learning from each other so motivation may be higher
- Activities for groups require 'activity'

3

Benefits of Groups

- Students can get immediate feedback
- The classroom is full of energy with questions and thinking

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Reasons to Change

1. Changing workplace
2. Changing student population
3. Changing teaching paradigm

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Types of Groups

1. Completely cooperative
2. Cooperative
3. Helping obligatory (collaborative)
4. Helping permitted
5. Peer mentoring

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Decision Points

- How many in each group?
- Heterogeneous/homogenous?
- Random/assigned?
- Outside of class work/only in-class work?

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Formal/Informal

- Formal: groups meet throughout the semester; usually assigned; teacher has roster of groups
- Informal: 'kickball strategy', groups form and reform throughout the semester

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Formal/Informal

- Do you want to grade individually or assign one grade to the entire group?
 - Individually: informal groups
 - Group grade: formal groups

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Group Composition

- Two: pair & share, interviews, editing
- Three/Four: editing, group project, solving problems
- \geq Five: brain-storming, role playing

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Decision Tree

- Can be used to help simplify goals for group work
- The clearer the goals you create, the more effective the group work

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Grading

- Informal groups: low-stakes grading such as pass/fail, low number of points (if any)
- Formal groups: clear rubric, means for students to assess group members

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Grading

- Individual or Group Grade?
 - Depends on goals
 - Accountability is essential

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Conclusion

- Well-supported research on benefits of using groups
- Ensure goals match assignments
- Make grading policy clear

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