**Group-Work Evaluations**

**Estimated Levels of Time and Energy Required for:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>MEDIUM</th>
<th>LOW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty to prepare to use this CAT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Students to respond to the assessment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Faculty to analyze the data collected</td>
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**DESCRIPTION**

Group-Work Evaluation forms are simple questionnaires used to collect feedback on students' reactions to cooperative learning (where students work in structured groups toward an agreed-upon learning goal) and study groups.

**PURPOSE**

As more and more faculty experiment with cooperative and collaborative learning techniques, there is more need for and interest in assessing group work. Group-Work Evaluations can help students and teachers see what is going well and what is not going well in learning groups, so that potentially destructive conflicts in groups can be discovered and defused. At the same time, this CAT can be used by faculty and students to gain insights into the group process.

**RELATED TEACHING GOALS**

- Develop appropriate study skills, strategies, and habits (TGI Goal 16)
- Develop ability to work productively with others (TGI Goal 36)
- Develop (self-) management skills (TGI Goal 37)
- Develop leadership skills (TGI Goal 38)
- Develop respect for others (TGI Goal 47)
- Cultivate an active commitment to honesty (TGI Goal 50)

**SUGGESTIONS FOR USE**

Group-Work Evaluations are most helpful in classes where students regularly work in small groups, such as courses taught by the case method. The assessments can be done whenever the groups meet, and whether they meet in class or out. As is the case with many other CATs this technique should be introduced soon after the groups begin working together, since it provides feedback that can inform their development and improve their effectiveness.

**EXAMPLES**

*From English Composition (English)*

Early in the term, this composition instructor organized her twenty-five students into five groups of five each. Students were to remain in these
groups for half the term and then would be reassigned. The instructor used the groups in class for prewriting and revising exercises, and encouraged students to meet and study together outside of class time. For several years, she had noticed that some groups worked well and others were a disaster, but she could not account for the differences and did not know how to prevent the disasters. In an attempt to improve her understanding of the group dynamic, she decided to use the Group-Work Evaluation technique.

At the next class meeting, she handed out a questionnaire (see Exhibit 9.2) and asked students to respond only after their half-hour group-work sessions had ended. Each student was asked to write his or her group’s number—1 through V—on the sheets, but not to write names.

**Exhibit 9.2. Sample Group-Work Evaluation Form.**

1. Overall, how effectively did your group work together on this assignment?
   - Poorly
   - Adequately
   - Well
   - Extremely well

2. Out of the five group members, how many participated actively most of the time?
   - None
   - One
   - Two
   - Three
   - Four
   - All five

3. Out of the five group members, how many were fully prepared for the activity?
   - None
   - One
   - Two
   - Three
   - Four
   - All five

4. Give one specific example of something you learned from the group that you probably wouldn’t have learned working alone.

5. Give one specific example of something the other group members learned from you that they probably wouldn’t have learned otherwise.

6. Suggest one change the group could make to improve its performance.

She sorted the responses into their respective groups and then quickly read and tallied each group’s responses. Not too surprisingly, the groups that rated their effectiveness highest also indicated a higher level of participation and preparation. The members of the more effective groups were also more likely to give complete answers to questions 4, 5, and 6. In the less effective groups, however, several individuals had thoughtful suggestions for improving performance.

At the next class meeting, the composition instructor shared a summary of the responses and let the students draw their own conclusions—which were not very different from hers. She then shared the suggestions and asked the groups to come up with a few simple, practical guidelines for more effective functioning.

**STEP-BY-STEP PROCEDURE**

1. Decide what you want to know about the group work and what you most want students to notice about it, and compose a few questions to get at that information.

2. Choose the most important questions, no more than four or five, and create a simple Group-Work Evaluation Form for collecting feedback.
3. Before handing out the forms, explain the purpose of the assessment and the process to students. If you want to analyze responses by groups, make sure that the students somehow indicate the groups they belong to, without giving away their individual identities.

**TURNING THE DATA YOU COLLECT INTO USEFUL INFORMATION**

If possible, tally the fixed-response answers and summarize the comments within working groups first; then aggregate the results across groups. Scrutinize the feedback for indications that some groups are working particularly well or poorly. Responses from these "outlier" groups may provide clues on how to improve performance in all the groups.

**IDEAS FOR ADAPTING AND EXTENDING THIS CAT**

Ask the groups themselves to come up with questions they would like to assess through the Group-Work Evaluation process.

Have groups suggest solutions to the concerns raised through the assessment.

**PROS**

Conflicts are virtually inevitable in small groups. This CAT provides a simple means for detecting conflicts early, before they permanently damage the group dynamic.

At the same time, this process can allow the instructor and the students to find out early what is working well, how, and why—and to profit from that information.

From the instructor's summary of the feedback, students in all groups learn that there are some common advantages and disadvantages to group work.

**CONS**

Giving students a chance to express concerns with group work may raise expectations that you or they can quickly resolve them.

Some students simply dislike working in groups and may use this assessment exercise as an opportunity to sabotage the process.

Some students will almost surely resent the focus on "process" that this CAT requires, preferring to expend their efforts solely on the creation of "products" or "outcomes."

**CAVEATS**

The social dynamic of small groups often works against candor when things are not going well. Make it clear that you expect and want honest answers, and find a way to ensure that neither you nor other students can identify individual respondents.