



# Guidance on Summative Assessment in Groupwork

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# Guidance on Summative Assessment in Groupwork

## Scope

This guidance relates only to summative assessment involving groupwork. It does not apply to groupwork formative assessment.

## Associated Senate Regulation

SR4.6 Where a summatively assessed task requires a student to engage in groupwork, the summative assessment shall be of each individual student's achievement of the defined learning outcomes. Guidance on the design and implementation of summative assessment in groupwork is provided by the University.

## Principle

The fundamental principle involved here derives from the fact that an academic award is awarded to (and similarly a progression decision made for) an individual student, not a group, recognising the achievement of the intended learning outcomes by that student, not by a group. The principle can be stated as follows.

**In order to ensure fairness to each and all students, each summative assessment must assess the individual student's, not a group's, achievement of the associated intended learning outcomes, which must therefore be defined for an individual student, not a group.**

This principle requires extra care to be taken in the design and definition of learning outcomes, assessment criteria, assessment tasks and assessment methods when the summative assessment is based on work undertaken in a group.

## Defining Individual Learning Outcomes

The guiding rule here is that all intended learning outcomes (whether they relate to the module/block or to one assessment element) should be written such that an individual student can clearly be assessed against them by the assessment tasks and methods employed. It is important to recognise that learning outcomes are not the same as outputs – this is particularly important in groupwork where the output (e.g., artefact, report, presentation, performance, etc) is often going to represent the work of the group as a whole.

## Designing Groupwork Tasks

In some cases of groupwork, individual students can be assigned specific roles and tasks within the group (the “division of labour” model) and can be directly and individually assessed against the performance of these roles/tasks (and thus the “output” can be directly attributed to an individual student).

In other cases, however, this is not practicable or desirable, and here care should be taken to be explicit about how an individual student is to be assessed within a group task (see following sections).

## Defining Groupwork Assessment Criteria

Assessment criteria are the features/properties of the result of the assessment task that will be taken into account in determining a student’s overall mark/grade for the task and of course should therefore represent a more detailed and concrete restatement of the intended learning outcomes. It is essential that assessment task specifications contain a very clear statement (for students, moderators and external examiners) of the assessment criteria to be used.

Again the detailed assessment criteria should relate to the assessment of an individual student in the group, not to the performance or output of the group as a whole. It is important that assessment criteria are clearly specified such that an individual student can readily see that they (i.e., their own individual work) can be individually assessed against the criteria. Assessment criteria that, explicitly or implicitly, relate to the performance or output of the group as a whole are extremely unhelpful in providing clarity to students and other stakeholders concerning the fairness of the assessment and the adherence to the above Senate regulation, and should be avoided.

## Example/Typical Assessment Tasks and Methods

Assessment tasks and methods can be classified into 3 main categories as described below. In practice a combination of methods will often be optimal for assessing learning outcomes.

- **Assessment based on post-output individual evaluation/reflection**

Here the assessment task itself can be undertaken by each student individually after all group work has finished. There is, on the surface, no constraint on the groupwork; however, it is possible or indeed likely that a poorly functioning group negatively impacts on the richness of the material available to a student on which they can reflect or evaluate. Thus even here care should be taken to ensure a level playing field, perhaps by careful choice of assessment criteria. The mode of assessment might be, for example, an individual report, essay, presentation, poster, etc., as most appropriate to the learning outcomes/assessment criteria.

- **Assessment based on process**

In a ‘real-world’ group working situation it is likely that a single record of the process would be maintained either by one individual or collaboratively by the group. However in the university context, if the process record is to be used for summative assessment, it is essential that each student be required to maintain their own process record. This will allow each student to independently demonstrate their own individual perspective, understandings, observations and analysis of (and contributions to) the group process and thereby allow individual assessment of each student’s achievement of learning outcomes against the assessment criteria. The requirement that each student maintains a record is also advantageous as it ensures

that every student gains the experience and develops relevant skills. Of course process records may take many forms (often a combination/portfolio): design/development log, production diary, research evidence, meeting records, consultation/feedback, etc.

- **Assessment based on group output**

**Direct use of the output** (e.g., report, artefact, performance, etc.) to assess the intended learning outcomes is often used in individual (non-groupwork) assessments.

For a group-produced output this assessment methodology is only feasible in the “division of labour” form of groupwork (in both activity and reporting). Here roles and responsibilities within the group are clearly partitioned such that each individual student is uniquely responsible for a particular aspect or part of the group output and can thus be directly assessed in that aspect or part of the group output. It should be noted that this methodology can be problematic in ensuring that every student has equal opportunity to demonstrate all of the intended learning outcomes.

In a group-produced output without “division of labour”, direct assessment of the output would result in an assessment of the group, not of the individuals in the group. However the group output can be used indirectly as (partial) evidence in a more complex assessment process (see *below Indirect use of the group-produced output*)

**Indirect use of the group-produced output** is possible but a more complex assessment process is required. The essential feature here is that although the assessment process begins with an assessment of the group output (e.g., report, artefact, performance, etc.) there is then a process of individual modulation of the group grade/mark to arrive at the summative grade/mark for each student. This modulation must be carried out carefully and robustly to ensure that not only the volume and quality of each student’s contribution to the group output is recognised in their final grade/mark, but that each student’s achievement of the intended learning outcomes is properly assessed against defined assessment criteria. Thus the modulation process, including the involvement of the group itself in that process, should be clearly specified in the task specification.

## Checklist for evaluating module/block specifications and assessment task specifications containing/based on group working

### Learning Outcomes

- ✓ Are the learning outcomes clearly demonstrable by an individual student?
- × Do the learning outcomes refer to the capabilities/attributes of a group?

### Assessment Descriptions (Module/Block)

- × Do the assessment descriptions refer to Groupwork or to a group output (e.g., group presentation)?
- ✓ Do the assessment descriptions refer to e.g., “in a group” or “in a group context”
- ✓ Do the assessment descriptions refer to “individual assessment”?
- × Do the assessment descriptions refer to “group assessment”?

### Assessment Criteria

- ✓ Are the assessment criteria measurable for an individual student?
- ✓ Do the assessment criteria clearly support individual student learning outcomes?
- × Do the assessment criteria refer to group performance or output?

### Assessment Methods

- ✓ Do the assessment methods clearly assess individual students rather than the group?
- ✓ If a mark/grade is initially, in the assessment process, allocated to a group output, is there then a transparent and robust method of modulating each individual student’s mark/grade according to their individual achievement against the (individual student) assessment criteria and the (individual student) intended learning outcomes?

### Student Perception

- ✓ Is it clear to students that they are 100% individually assessed against the defined learning outcomes/assessment criteria?
- ✓ Is it clear to students how they are 100% individually assessed against the defined learning outcomes/assessment criteria?

If your ticks and crosses do not match the above, think again...!