

Cooperative/Collaborative Learning

Skills Enhancement & Tutoring Center

Cooperative or collaborative learning is a team process where members support and rely on each other to achieve an agreed-upon goal. The classroom is an excellent place to develop team-building skills you will need later in life.

Cooperative/collaborative learning is interactive; as a team member, you:

- develop and share a common goal
- contribute your understanding of problems, questions, insights and solutions
- respond to and work to understand others' questions, insights and solutions.
Each member empowers the other to speak and contribute, and to consider their contributions
- are accountable to others, and they are accountable to you
- are dependent on others, and they depend on you

What makes for a good learning team?

- Team activities begin with training in and understanding of group processes. An instructor begins by facilitating discussion and suggesting alternatives but does not impose solutions on the team
- Three to five people; larger teams have difficulty keeping everyone involved
- Diverse skill levels, backgrounds, experience
 - Each individual brings strengths to a group
 - Each member of the group is responsible to not only contribute his/her strengths, but also to help others understand the source of their strengths
 - Any member who is at a disadvantage or not comfortable with the majority should be encouraged and proactively empowered to contribute
 - Learning is positively influenced with a diversity of perspectives and experience, increasing options for problem solving and expanding the range of details to consider
- Commitment of each member to a goal that is defined and understood by the group
 - Confidential peer ratings are a good way to assess who is and who is not contributing
 - Groups have the right to fire a non-cooperative or non-participating member if all remedies have failed.
(The person fired then has to find another group to accept him/her)
 - Individuals can quit if they believe they are doing most of the work with little assistance from the others
(This person can often easily find another group to welcome his/her contributions)

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- Shared operating principles and responsibilities defined and agreed to by each member. These include:
 1. Commitment to attend, prepare, and be on time for meetings
 2. Have discussions and disagreements focus on issues, avoiding personal criticism
 3. Take responsibility for a share of the tasks and carry them out on time. You may need to perform tasks that you have little experience, feel ill-prepared for, or even think others would do better. Accept the challenge, but be comfortable in stating that you may need help, training, a mentor, or have to resign and take on different task.

Process:

- Set up goals, define how often and with what means you will communicate, evaluate progress, make decisions, and resolve conflict
- Define resources, especially someone who can provide direction, supervision, counsel, and even arbitrate
- Schedule review of your progress and communication to discuss what is working and what is not working

Teams with problems should be invited or required to meet with the instructor to discuss possible solutions.

* "Cooperative learning" is often used in K-12 education, and "collaborative learning" in higher education

See also: "[Cooperative learning in technical courses](#): procedures, pitfalls, and payoffs", Richard M. Felder, North Carolina State University & Rebecca Brent, East Carolina University

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