# Assessment methods and criteria for group projects

*This article looks at different ways that group projects are often assessed and summarises (and offers some details on) the main criteria which tutors typically use.*

## How do tutors typically assess groupwork?

Groupwork is often assessed on courses and it can be assessed in very different ways. Among the most important differences are:

- the emphasis on the final product, as opposed to the group process.
- the ways that the group process and individual contributions are evaluated by tutors.
- the different types of presentations you might be asked to deliver and the different audiences for these presentations.
- The amount of self and/or peer assessment.

Before you set out on any group project, you need to think about the assessment tasks and the criteria which tutors will use. Your group should make sure that you all understand:

- What you are required to produce for submission.
- How these products will be marked.

Tutors will usually publish details of the assessment criteria on the unit/module on the institution's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) or in the module handbook. These vary between tutors/modules but common criteria for assessing group processes include:

- How well the group understood/achieved the assignment brief.
- The effectiveness of group communication.
- How organised the group was during the project.
- The fairness of work distribution/contribution.
- How successfully (or not) the group resolved any problems or issues.
- The quality of the self-reflection about how the group performed

Tutors may expect not only a shared piece of work from the group but also individual submissions from each student. It is also quite common for students to be asked to complete peer-assessments (when you are asked to mark the performance of other students).

## Assessments can have different components

The table below gives 4 typical examples of how group work can be assessed (the percentages show how much each component contributes to the final module mark).

You should always make sure that you know this breakdown before you start any group project – it will help you to decide how to allocate your time across the project.

| | Components |
|---|---|
| 1 | Presentation (60%) + Individual report (40%) |
| 2 | Poster (50%) + Individual Reflective Report (40%) + Peer Marking sheet (10%) |
| 3 | Product (40%) + Group Evidence Portfolio (45%) + Self-mark sheet (15%) |
| 4 | Group report (50%) + Individual Portfolio of work (45%) + Peer Rating Sheet (5%) |

# The importance of learning outcomes and assessment criteria

Every assessment helps to demonstrate what you have learned (the expected learning outcomes for the module). The assessment criteria are specific statements that breakdown what you need to demonstrate to show you have achieved that learning.

It is really important at the start to look at the assessment criteria for your group assignment. Make a note of what you need to do. If there are any that you do not fully understand then you should discuss these with your tutor as soon as possible.

The following tables give you examples of the language which tutors often use to distinguish between different levels of performance.

One thing you can discuss with other group members is the description of 'outstanding performance' and what that means in terms of your specific project.

For example, Table 1 below suggests ways that you might think about the characteristics of 'outstanding performance' from Table 2 in terms of your own project. You can do this with the specific criteria which you received from your tutors.

Table 2 offers a very comprehensive list of criteria.

Table 3 offers a more cut-down version which might be easier to discuss.

## *Table 1*

| Characteristic | You might need to discuss: |
|---|---|
| 'highly detailed plan' | How detailed is your plan? |
| | How far will it satisfy your tutors' expectations? |
| | Do you know the level of detail which your tutors are expecting? |
| | Did your plan account for any unexpected evenets? |
| 'SMART targets' | Do your targets satisfy the SMART criteria we discuss in the book? |
| | How far did you meet them? |
| 'risk assessment' | Are there any risks in your project (e.g. access to resources) which you should have anticipated? |

| | How have you handled/managed these? |
| --- | --- |
| 'progress monitoring throughout' | What process have you used to monitor your progress? Is this clearly explained in your report or presentation? |

## Table 2

| Criteria | Outstanding (80-100%) | Excellent (70-79%) | Good (60-69%) | Fair (50-59%) | Pass (40-49%) | Fail (0-39%) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Project Planning (To what extent is the project well-planned) | Highly detailed plan with SMART targets, risk assessment and progress monitoring throughout. | Detailed plan with clear actions and deadlines, progress monitoring and risk assessment. | Clear plan that identifies key steps, tasks, progress monitoring and risk. Some areas could be further developed. | Plan with key steps and timed actions. Is under-developed in some areas. | Basic project plan with clear tasks and deadlines. Under-developed in many areas. | Little or no evidence of planning. Tasks and deadlines lacking in detail/not clear. |
| Research (How well researched is the work) | Wide range of relevant academic resources used to develop innovative understandings. | Wide range of relevant academic sources used to effectively to inform the project. | Reasonable range of relevant academic sources used well to inform the project. | Range of academic sources, with reasonable attempt to inform the project. | Academic sources used though not all are relevant or used effectively to inform the project. | References are absent or not academic. Academic sources not used to inform the project. |
| Organisation (How effectively did the group work collaboratively) | Very detailed regular, structured meetings and highly defined team actions. Group outputs named/stored highly efficiently. | Detailed regular meetings, with thorough record of actions. Group outputs stored logically & accessibly | Evidence of regular meetings with recorded actions and responsibilities. Group outputs are stored in transparent and accessible way. | Evidence of regular meetings with recorded actions. Some could be more detailed. Group outputs are shared but naming/storing may be inconsistent. | Evidence of meetings but may be inadequately recorded and/or irregular. Recorded actions are basic. Group outputs are not shared/stored consistently/logically. | Little/no evidence of meetings or clear actions & working practices. Group outputs are not named/shared logically/accessibly or consistently. |
| Communication | Group communic | Group communic | Group communicati | Group communicat | Group communicati | There is little/no |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Was group communication efficient and successful) | ation highly effective with contributions consistently leading to professional and productive conversation. | ation effective most of the time with contributions usually resulting in professional and productive conversation. | on often effective, with contributions frequently resulting in professional and productive conversation. | ion occasionally effective, with contributions resulting in some productive conversations but some are unfocussed or unprofessional. | on occasionally effective with conversations leading to progress but many points are off-topic and/or inappropriate. | evidence of effective group communication. Conversations are insufficiently relevant and may be inappropriate in tone/not inclusive. |
| Evaluation (Did the group reflect to improve performance) | Comprehensive evaluation of group performance throughout project with effective action to improve where required. Exceptional self-awareness, demonstrating insightful learning. | Detailed & accurate evaluation of group performance throughout project, with effective action to improve where required. Highly self-aware and able to identify learning outcomes. | Accurate evaluation of group performance at key points with action to improve where required. Accurate self-awareness of performance and key learning outcomes. | Evaluation during project attempted but could be more accurate/detailed. Action to improve performance fairly effective. Reflection on performance & learning could be more detailed. | Evaluation attempted at some point but limited in accuracy/scope. Action to improve performance had limited effect. Basic reflection on performance and learning. | Little/no attempt to evaluate group performance. Action to improve was ineffectual. No/poor quality reflection on performance and learning. |
| Synthesis (To what extent, did the group combine efforts for the final submission) | Individual contributions are combined in a logical and exceptionally complementary way to create a refined whole. | Individual contributions combined a highly complementary way to create an effective whole. | Individual contributions are combined in a complementary way to create a consistent whole. | Individual contributions are combined quite well. However, at least one element is insufficiently developed resulting in a less convincing whole. | Individual contributions are combined in an adequate way. However, some elements are insufficiently developed leading to an inconsistent whole. | Individual contributions are combined in a way that highlights the individual nature of each element leading to an unconvincin |

| | | | | | | g or ineffective whole. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Submission (What was the overall quality of the final submission) | The final product is of exceptional quality. | The final product is of an extremely high quality. | The final product is effective and of convincing quality. | The final product is of reasonable quality. There is some room for improvement. | The final product satisfies the brief but with considerable room for improvement. | There is an incomplete or ineffective final product of low quality. |

## Table 2

| Criteria | Project Planning (Is the project well-planned) | Research (How research-informed is the work?) | Organisation (How effectively did the group collaborate?) | Communication (Was group communication efficient and successful?) | Evaluation (Did the group reflect to improve performance?) | Synthasis (How well-combined is the final effort?) | Submission (What is quality of the final submission) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Outstanding (80-100%) | Highly detailed plan with SMART targets, risk assessment and progress monitoring throughout. | Wide range of relevant academic resources used to develop innovative understandings. | Very detailed regular, structured meetings and highly defined team actions. Group outputs named/stored highly efficiently. | Group communication highly effective with contributions consistently leading to professional and productive conversation. | Detailed evaluation of group performance throughout project with effective action to improve where required. Exceptional self-awareness and insightful reflection. | Individual contributions are combined in a logical and exceptionally complementary way to create a refined whole. | The final product is of exceptional quality. |
| Good (60-69%) | Clear plan that identifies key steps, tasks, progress monitoring and risk. Some areas could be further | Reasonable range of relevant academic sources used well to inform the project. | Evidence of regular meetings with recorded actions and responsibilities. Group outputs are stored in transparent and accessible way. | Group communication often effective, with contributions frequently resulting in professional and productive conversation. | Accurate evaluation of group performance at key points with action to improve where required. Accurate self-awareness of performance and key learning outcomes. | Individual contributions are combined in a complementary way to create a consistent whole. | The final product is effective and of convincing quality. |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | develop ed. | | | | | | |
| Fail (0-39%) | Little or no evidence of planning. Tasks and deadlines lacking in detail/not clear. | References are absent or not academic. Academic sources not used to inform the project. | Little/no evidence of meetings with clear actions/notes. Group outputs are not named/share d logically/acce ssibly or consistently. | There is little/no evidence of effective group communicatio n. Conversatio ns are insufficiently relevant and may be inappropriat e in tone/not inclusive. | Little/no attempt to evaluate group performance. Action to improve was ineffectual. No/poor quality reflection on performance and learning. | Work is combined in a way that highlights the individual nature of each element leading to an unconvincin g or ineffective whole. | There is an incomplet e or ineffectiv e final product of low quality. |