

# Facilitating Remote Group Work

This guide will describe some of the ways that students can collaborate on group projects remotely. It is intended for use by both instructors and teaching assistants and can be used in conjunction with other [remote teaching resources](#) provided on the Office of Distance Learning website and the [Facilitating Classes Remotely](#) guide provided by Digital Learning.

## Why should students do remote group work?

[Engagement](#) is critical to online learning. Students should interact with course content, with the instructor, and with each other. One way to ensure that students are interacting with their peers is by assigning group work.

Group work is common in face-to-face classes, but what does group work look like online? It could be a small, low-stakes interaction, like an activity in a videoconference session. Or, it could be an high-stakes group project that students work on for more than a week in anticipation of a final paper, project, or presentation. It all depends on your learning objectives and course topic.

In a situation where face-to-face classes are cancelled, remote group work can also help students stay connected with classmates. These social connections are critical to establishing collaborative relationships and feeling connected to an academic community.

Plus, collaboration skills are real-world skills, valued in the workplace. More jobs than ever can be done remotely or require collaboration with colleagues around the globe. This is a chance for your students to gain experience collaborating remotely, as they may in a future job.

## How can students do remote group work?

There isn't enough space on this tip sheet to describe all of the ways that students may work together remotely!

Each of these factors (and others) will inform your decision making about remote group work.

### Length

How long will the student collaboration be? Short (less than one week), medium (a few weeks) or long (the whole term)?

### Type

Do you want student groups to work synchronously (on a call or videoconference, or in a shared document) or asynchronously (via email or in a discussion board)?

### Goal

What will you ask student groups to do? Is there a deliverable that student groups should produce? Or is the goal for students to analyze and discuss a topic, as in a seminar?

## Choice

Do you want to determine how student groups collaborate by assigning tasks or roles? Or let student groups decide how they prefer to collaborate?

## Logistics

Do you want student groups to develop communication charters to establish norms and expectations for remote collaboration? Should student groups develop contingency plans in the event that they, or their classmates, are affected by an emergency?

## How can you use University resources to facilitate remote group work?

### Canvas

Canvas can create student discussion groups for collaboration. [What are Groups?](#) You can [manually](#) or [automatically](#) create student groups.

Alternatively, you can create discussions and name the students who should participate in each one. [How do I create a discussion?](#)

### Zoom

Students can [schedule Zoom meetings](#) to collaborate remotely by videoconference; they could also deliver presentations to the class by [sharing their screen](#). As an instructor or teaching assistant, you can also use the [Breakout Rooms feature](#) of Zoom to have students collaborate in small groups.

Alternately, students could share phone numbers with each other and text or speak on the phone in real time.

### G Suite and Box

Students can use their [@u.northwestern.edu Google accounts](#) to collaborate using Drive, Docs, Slides, Sheets, and more.

Students can also use [OneDrive](#), in combination with Microsoft Online, to collaborate on shared documents, slides, and spreadsheets.

Alternately, students could email documents to each other.

## Where can I learn more?

### [Facilitating Online Group Work Webinar](#)

This webinar provided evidence-based reasons for including group work in courses, tips for deciding on group size and composition, and learning technologies to assist students in collaboration.

### [5 Ways to Group Adult Students for Teamwork Online](#)

This blog post suggests different ways to group students into teams, from random groups and topic opt-in groups to skill-level groups and multi-role groups.

### [MSGH Group Projects: Webinar](#)

In this webinar, Global Health instructors shared examples of online group projects.

### [Ready, Set, Collaborate!](#)

This blog post shares an example of a group presentation assignment in a financial accounting course.