

Why Group Work?

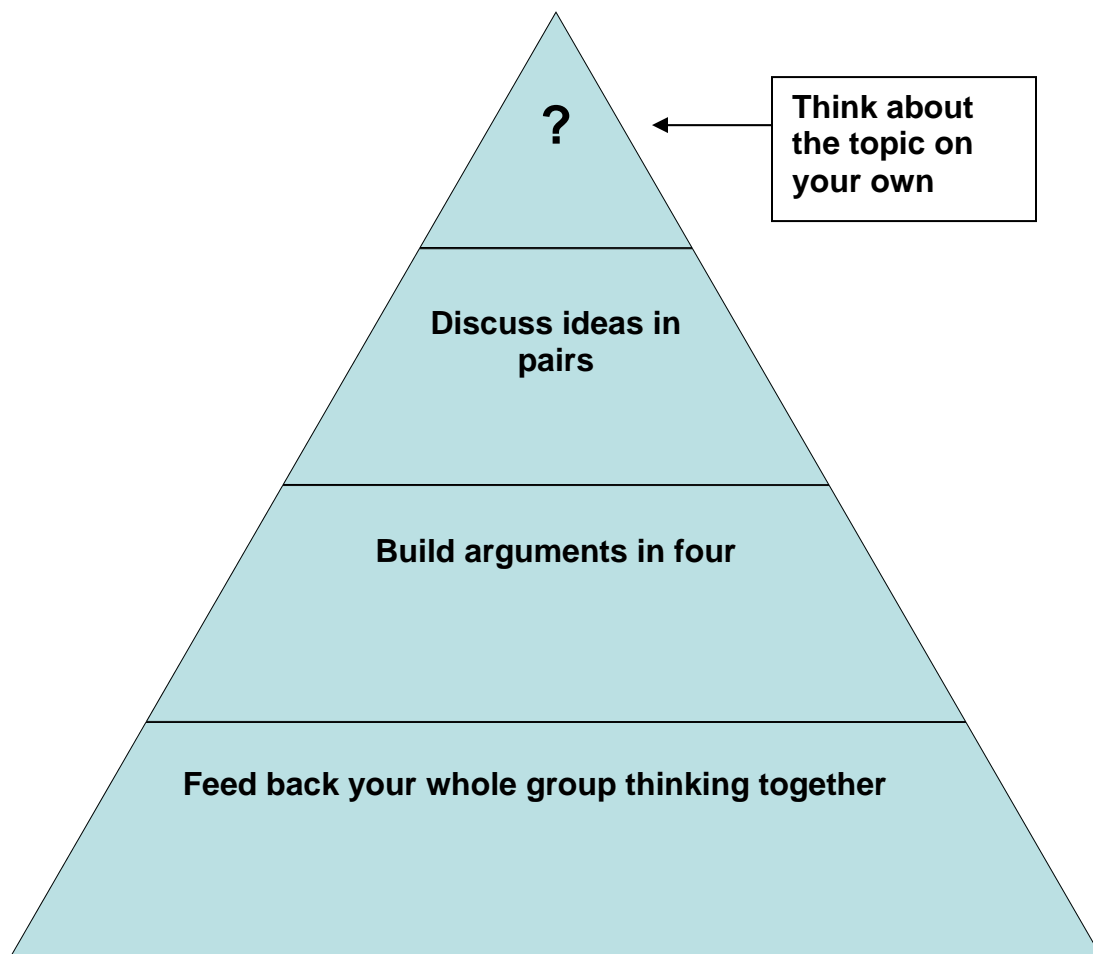


- Because we are inter-dependent beings and should recognise and build on that;
- Group work offers support to learners – tasks are easier when they are shared;
- It prepares students for work – if you cannot work with other people, you are unlikely to be able to keep a job;
- It helps learners get to know each other when under normal circumstances perhaps they would not have the opportunity;
- You can build your own study groups to share the reading of assignments, discuss assignment questions or even proof reading of work.
- Group work is typically designed to reduce the workload whilst increasing the amount of active and interactive learning that takes place – take advantage of this!

Group Work – the pyramid discussion



When asked to start a group project a good place to start is:



Group Processes

There is a theory as to the processes that groups go through and the roles group members adopt. Groups typically pass through distinct phases:

Forming – this is where the group comes together and takes shape. This forming period is a time of high anxiety as people work out:

- ❖ who is in the group – and what they are like
- ❖ what the assignment is – what it involves
- ❖ what the ‘rules’ are – about behaviour, about the task, about assessment
- ❖ what they will have to do to get the job done – and who will be doing all the work.

Storming – is where conflict arises as people sort out all the confusions highlighted above. This is where people seek to assert their authorities, and get challenged. Typically this is a black and white phase - everything seems all good or all bad; compromise is not seen. At this stage people are reacting emotionally against everything as they challenge:

- ❖ each other
- ❖ the value of the task
- ❖ the feasibility of the task (you cannot be serious!)

Norming – as the name suggest, is where the group begins to settle down. Here that sense of inter-dependence develops as:

- ❖ plans are made
- ❖ standards are laid down
- ❖ co-operation begins
- ❖ people are able to communicate their feelings more positively

Performing – is where the group gets on and does what it was asked to do. It is now that the task can be undertaken and completed – and success can be experienced! Here it is useful if:

- ❖ roles are accepted and understood
- ❖ deadlines are set and kept to
- ❖ communication is facilitated by good inter-personal skills

Mourning – the fifth stage, mourning, is suppose to follow successful and intense group experience. As you work hard to complete an assignment with people, you develop links and bonds. Typically you enjoy the sense of mutual support and commitment. The feeling of inter-dependence is very satisfying. When it all ends there can be a sense of loss.

(Burns & Sinfield, 2003 p.149 - 169)

How to succeed in group work:

- ✓ analyse the question – all of it
- ✓ have the overview and fit the task to the unit's learning outcomes
- ✓ use creative concept mapping and note taking strategies
- ✓ have an action plan – work out who is doing what, why, where and when!
- ✓ follow the action plan – undertake targeted research and active reading
- ✓ review your findings
- ✓ plan the outline – of the report / presentation / seminar etc.
- ✓ prepare the first draft
- ✓ leave a time lag
- ✓ review, revise and edit – agree on a final draft
- ✓ proof read – or rehearse if it involves a presentation
- ✓ hand work in on or before the deadline
- ✓ review your progress.

(Burns & Sinfield, 2003 p.169)