**Organizing Group Work in the Secondary Classroom**

1. VERY IMPORTANT: Group work alternated with whole-class discussion works better than 50 minutes of straight group work, which is an invitation for off-task behavior. I recommend alternating 7-8 minutes of group talk with whole-group discussion. The following procedures tell how you can set up your classroom for the best results.
2. Prior to the first class, review your rolls and group students for maximum productivity. Ensure that you have a leader in each group--someone who will facilitate conversations organically without prompting but who will not monopolize or do all the work. As you become more familiar with your students, you can make adjustments in groups. I would recommend groups of 3-4.
3. It works best if students sit close to the people with whom they work in groups. Creating groups for a lengthy period of time like a nine-week period or a semester is more time-efficient. Students can simply turn their desks to face their groups and easily move desks back into the whole-class formation when group work is over. A classroom in rows with groupings of 4 works well.

     

     

1. You can assign students roles or let students determine them. They can also switch off roles each time, if needed. Group roles that I have found effective follow.
	1. Facilitator (F) leads the discussion and ensures that everyone is participating
	2. Note-taker (NT) records information collected by the group.
	3. Spokesperson (S) shares the findings of the group when the teacher calls on the group.
	4. Timekeeper/Runner (TR) keeps track of time and is the only member who may get up to get something that is needed like a resource book or other materials.
2. Write the group members’ names on a (4 X 6) index card in the center of the unlined side of the card with group roles abbreviated: F, NT, S, or TR. You can also make a group evaluation form like the one that is attached. You would use one form per group.
3. On the day of the lesson, review group rules with the class. Here are some that have worked for me.
	1. Stay on task.
	2. Respectfully participate in the discussion and encourage others to participate as well.
	3. Maintain a lower volume when speaking so that the room doesn’t become too noisy.
	4. Remain in the group. If you need to get up, raise your hand and ask.
4. Tell the students that the entire group will receive a grade for the work they do together. I repeatedly stress the importance of the group encouraging other members to participate. If I know some students are reluctant, I will purposely go to that group and solicit a response from the student. This part takes a little work on your part, but it is well worth the effort.
5. While students are working as a group, move about the room. If a group member breaks a rule, take the index card or evaluation form and make note of the deduction of the point(s) on the unlined side of the card. Be sure that when you deduct points for breaking rules that you do so without anger or attitude. Also, be sure to tell the students specifically why points are being deducted so that it is not a mystery. (As a side note, you can minimally count group participation, but I would definitely hold them accountable for the way they operate as a group.)
6. At the completion of the activity, put a question on the board that assesses a learning goal for that day. Each group works together to put together a response for the question. The students then write their group responses on the lined side of the index card. While students are working on the answer together, circulate the room to ensure that everyone is participating in the creation of the answer.
7. At the end of the period, provide 2-3 minutes for students to discuss the level of participation in the group. Have them make a note on the card or evaluation form about successes and struggles within the group. Finally, take up the index card. Give each group a composite score for their answer and their participation in the group. Since speaking and listening are addressed in the standards, it is a legitimate graded exercise. Use student feedback to make adjustments in the way you organize your group work in the future.
8. Groups are effective when alternated with whole-class discussion. In other words, pose the question for discussion, allow group discussion of the topic, and then solicit feedback from 2-3 groups in a whole-group discussion.
9. If you want more accountability for individual students, you can ask students to respond individually to the end-of-class question and grade. It will force students to participate and pay attention to the discussion in the group.