

Effective Small Groups

Groups will be as good as the task you design.

- ◆ Make certain the task is appropriate for group activity.
- ◆ Give each group a copy of written instructions.
- ◆ Go over the instructions and answer questions before beginning the task.
- ◆ If the task is complex or covers new ground, model the task before letting groups work on their own.
- ◆ Provide questions or prompts to stimulate discussion and increase productivity.
- ◆ Be explicit about the outcome/product you expect from the groups. If you want consensus, tell them. If you want a range of ideas, make that clear.
- ◆ Give the groups clear timelines and remind them of the time available for each step. Keep to the timeline to encourage the groups to keep on task.

Groups will be as good as you assist them in being.

- ◆ Distribute roles among the group members. You may assign them or have them draw roles out of an envelope. If groups stay together over time, have them try different roles. (see handout)
- ◆ Move around the room and listen to each group talk. Carry a notebook or a clipboard for noting comments about the task or group activity.
- ◆ Answer questions for the group, but **DO NOT DO THE TASK**. If appropriate, you may join a group for a few minutes. (Appropriate only when the group invites you or when the group has been together some time **and** when the group won't be silenced by your presence.)
- ◆ If you notice that several groups are experiencing similar difficulties, you may want to interrupt groups to clarify or provide guidance. In general, it is best to not interrupt the whole class but to give advice to individual groups.
- ◆ If groups stay together during the term, consider giving them each a group folder which you can use to keep track of roles, attendance, homework, etc. (see handout)
- ◆ Give incentives for participation in group work.