

## Creating and Managing Group Work in Blackboard

Group work in the online classroom can be an excellent way to create community and provide the opportunity for students to apply new skills and concepts. It also helps students develop strategies that will benefit them in the workplace. Just like in a face-to-face course, however, student collaboration in an online environment requires careful assignment design, student preparation, and team management by the instructor. This guide presents strategies for successfully facilitating online group work as well as step-by-step instructions on how to use Blackboard's Group tool.

### Best Practices for Facilitating Online Group Assignments

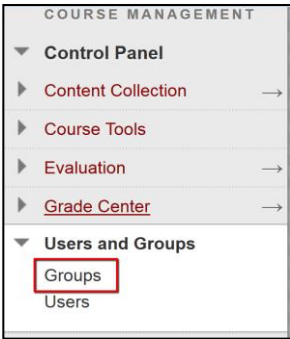
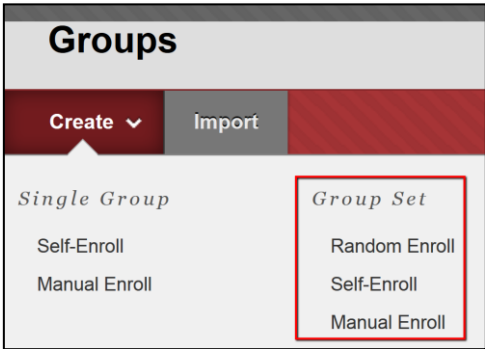
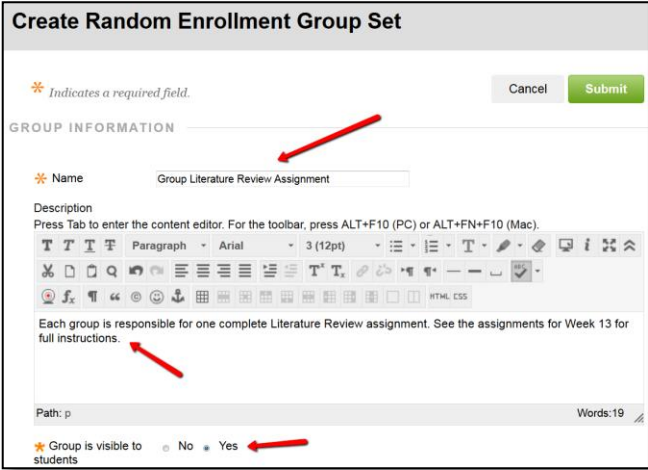
- **Announce groups early in the session:** In online environments, it often takes more time to coordinate group tasks and divide responsibilities among group members. Building in at least three weeks for groups to work on a small-scale assignment is reasonable.
- **Encourage group members to make contact early on:** create a group discussion board within Blackboard dedicated to each group, or a chat room – encourage members to connect, perhaps through an ice-breaker you design, before the assignment begins.
- **Limit group size:** The ideal group size online is three or four group members. When there are more than four participants, it is not uncommon for one or more group members to contribute less than others. Smaller group sizes make this phenomenon less likely to occur.
- **Provide a platform for accountability and peer evaluation:** It's important that group members be held accountable for the quality of their contributions, their levels of responsibility, and their professionalism in the group setting. Peer evaluations provide you with a way to factor those behind-closed-doors variables into each student's grade. It's a good idea to schedule peer evaluation several times over the course of a term in order to provide opportunities for adjustment and improvement.
- **Check in on groups periodically:** It's also a good idea for you to check in on groups to evaluate their progress and make sure that all members are contributing. If you see that a group member is not participating, you can send them gentle reminders to get them back on track. You should also consider what kinds of consequences, if any, will be in place for group members who don't participate.
- **Create opportunities for inter-group interaction:** To encourage students to learn from each other's work, build in opportunities for groups to interact with each other. There are a few good ways to implement inter-group interaction. For example, the whole class could work on a single large project, with each group producing one piece of the whole. At the end of the course, all of the students can see and experience the final product they all contributed to. Alternatively, each group can work on its own version of a smaller project, and then provide feedback and critiques to the other groups while seeing other groups' approaches and perspectives. Wikis are a great tool for implementing both methods.

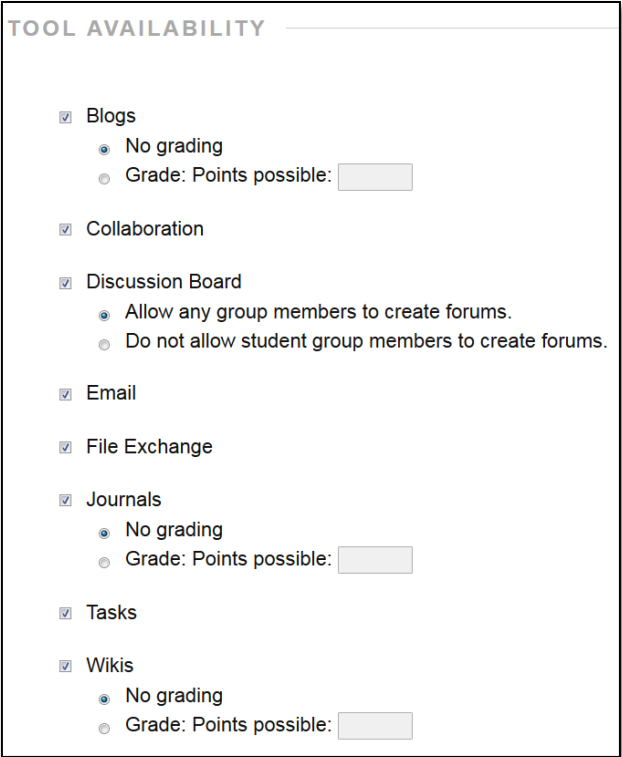
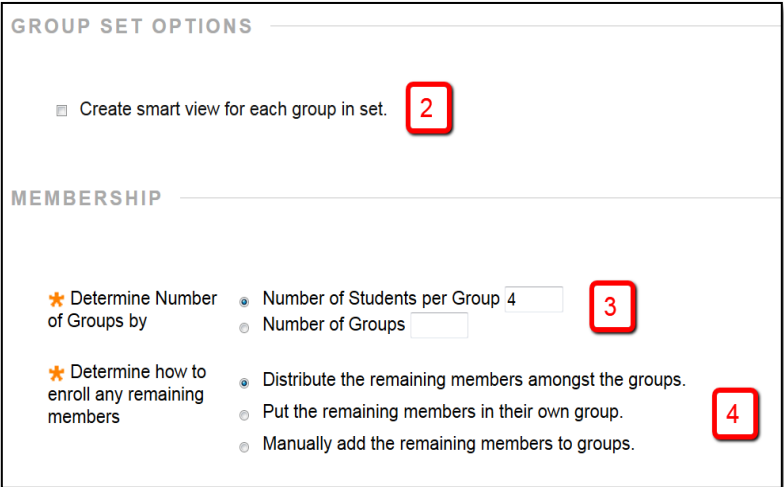
Note: The above section draws on material from ["The Case for Group Work" on the Blackboard Blog](#) and ["Strategies for Effective Group Work in the Online Class"](#) by Debbie Morrison.

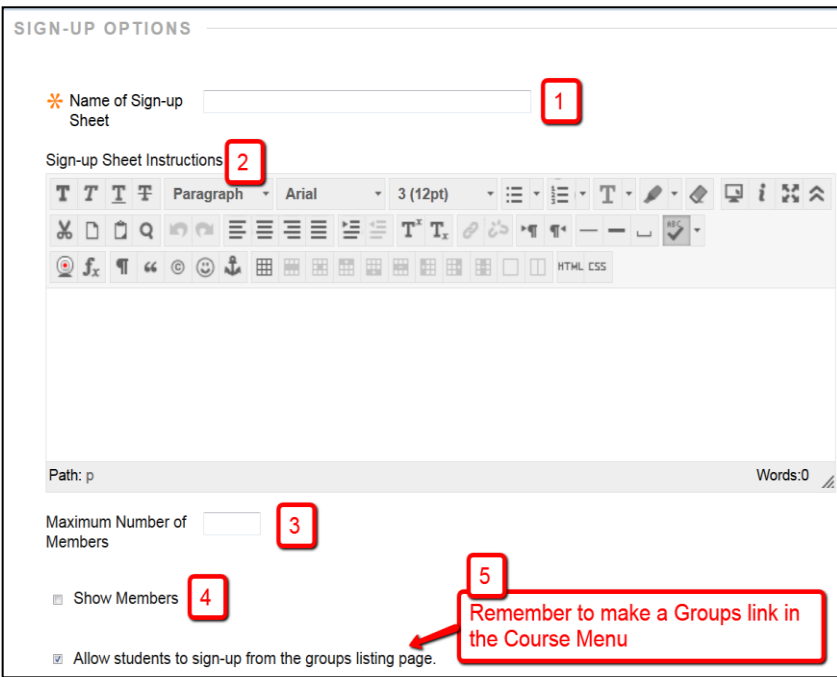
### This guide covers:

- How to create groups (Steps 1-9)
- Creating a typical group assignment (Step 10)
- How to grade a group assignment (Step 11)

This guide does not cover every option Blackboard makes available for groups (i.e., giving each group a distinct assignment). It also assumes you know how to create and grade an individual assignment. For an introduction to creating and grading assignments, see our Quick Guide: Creating and Grading Assignments in Blackboard, available at the [SPS Faculty Community Site](#).

Step Number and Description	Screenshot
<p><b><u>Step 1</u></b></p> <p><b>Create Groups</b></p> <p>To create groups, scroll down to the Control Panel, click on the “Users and Groups” link to expand that menu, and select “Groups.”</p>	
<p><b><u>Step 2</u></b></p> <p>On the Groups page, click on “Create.” You have the option to either create a single group or a group set; in most situations you will create a group set (see note). There are three options for group set enrollment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Random Enroll (Steps 3-5):</b> Blackboard will automatically assign students to groups.</li> <li>• <b>Self-Enroll (See Step 6):</b> Students will form their own groups.</li> <li>• <b>Manual Enroll (See Step 7):</b> You assign students to each group.</li> </ul>	 <p><b>NOTE:</b> Create a <b>Group Set</b> when everyone will be working on the same assignment; create <b>Single Groups</b> when groups will be working independently on very different projects.</p>
<p><b><u>Step 3</u></b></p> <p>Whichever enrollment option you select, you will be taken to the “Create Group Set” page. Enter a meaningful title next to “Name.” You can add a description of the assignment in the “Description” field. Tick “yes” next to “Group is visible to students” to make the group available.</p>	

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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Step 4</b> <b>Tool Availability</b></p> <p>By default several tools are available to each group.</p> <p>We recommend only making available the tools students will be using in order to avoid confusion. Deselect any tools you will not be using.</p> <p>You should decide beforehand which tools students will use, depending on the group assignment(s). Any instructions given to students about group work should list the tools they should use for each step.</p> <p>For more information about each group tool, see <a href="#">Blackboard Help</a>.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Step 5</b> <b>Group Settings</b></p> <p>Scroll down to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create smart view: Select this option only if you are using Smart Views in the Grade Center. (For more info on smart views, see our Quick Guide “Grade Center – Beyond the Basics” at the <a href="#">SPS Faculty Community Site</a>.)</li> <li>• Determine the number of groups by the number of students you’d like to be in each group, or the number of groups you’d like to distribute the students between.</li> <li>• Decide what to do with any remaining students (ex., If you have 21 students and you have set 5 groups of 4, determine what you want to do with the 1 remaining student.)</li> </ul>	

Step Number and Description	Screenshot
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Step 6</b> <b>Self-Enrollment</b></p> <p>If you select Self-Enroll, you must set options for the sign-up page where students can pick their groups.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Name the sign-up sheet</li> <li>2. Provide students instructions for the sign-up sheet.</li> <li>3. Indicate the maximum number of members in each group.</li> <li>4. "Show Members:" Decide whether you will show students who has already signed up for which group.</li> <li>5. Make sure "Allow students to sign-up from the groups listing page" is checked. If this is not checked, students will not be able to see the sign-up sheet.</li> </ol> <p>Here is what the sign-up sheet option looks like when students go to the Groups page.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> We recommend creating a tool link to "Groups" either on your course menu or on a course page for easy access to the sign-up sheet.</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Student View</b></p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="border: 1px solid gray; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Groups</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Create Group</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Lit Review Groups</b></p> <p style="text-align: center; border: 1px solid gray; padding: 2px;">View Sign-up Sheet to Join a Group</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid gray; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Sign Up Sheet</b></p> <p>SignUp Sheet Name: Lit Review Groups Sign-Up Sheet</p> <p>SignUp Sheet Instructions: <b>Lit Review Groups 1</b></p> <p>Group Members : None Max Members Allowed : 3 <a href="#">Sign Up</a></p> <hr/> <p><b>Lit Review Groups 2</b></p> <p>Group Members : None Max Members Allowed : 3 <a href="#">Sign Up</a></p> </div> </div>

**Step Number and Description**

**Step 7  
Manual Enrollment**

If you select “Manual Enroll,” The steps are the same as for Random Enrollment (Steps 3-5), but when you click Submit, you will be taken to the Edit Group Set Enrollments page, where you can:

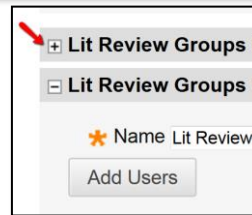
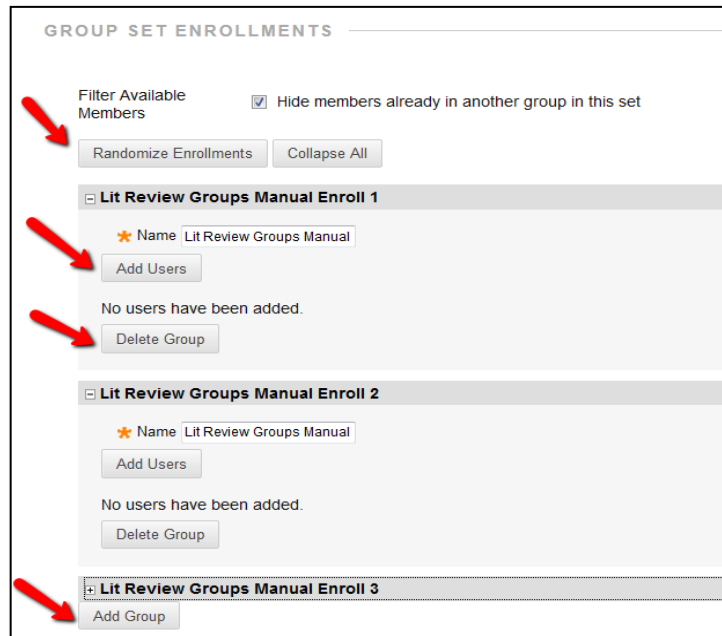
- Randomize enrollments
- Add users to each group
- Delete groups
- Add groups

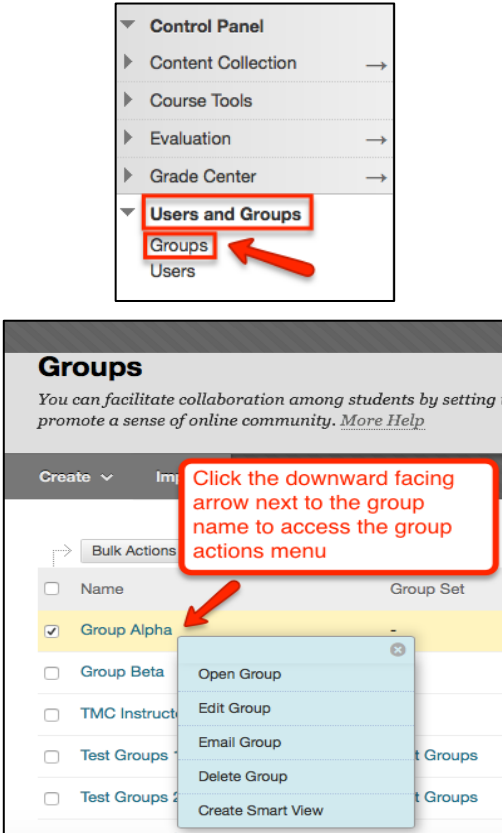
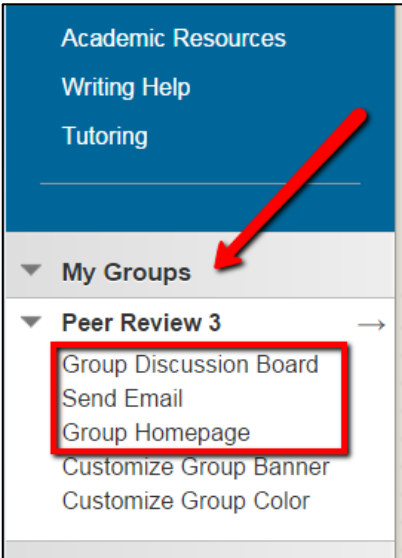
If the options for a group are hidden, click on the + next to the group name to expand the view for that group

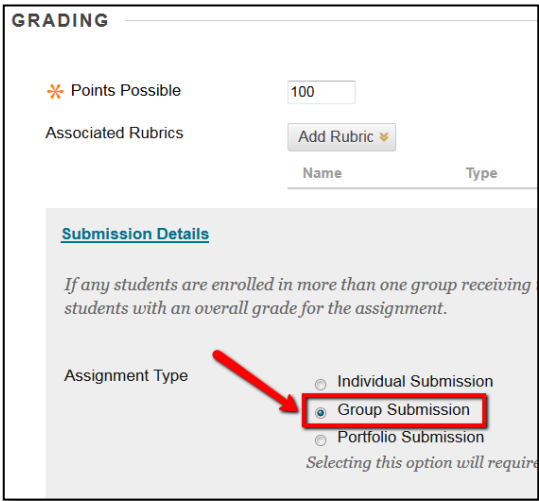
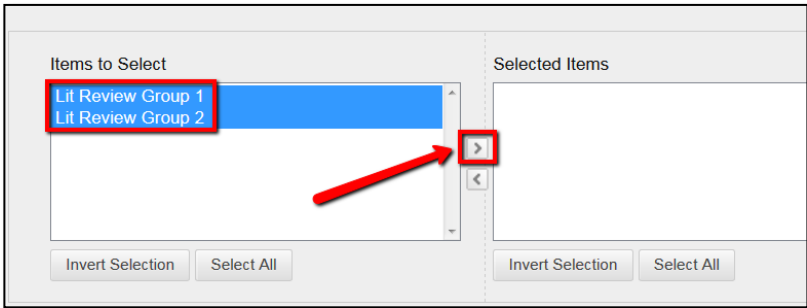
If there are users in a group, you can also remove all users, or to remove an individual user from a group, you can click the X at the end of the row containing the user’s info.

Remember to click Submit to save any changes.

**Screenshot**



Step Number and Description	Screenshot
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Step 8</b> <b>Editing Groups</b></p> <p>When you have set up groups in your course, they will be listed on the Groups page. You can access the group page by scrolling down to the “Users and Groups” link in the “Control Panel” and clicking on “Groups.”</p> <p>If you want to make changes to a group, click on the downward arrow next to the group name to reveal the group actions menu. With this menu, you can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open the group</li> <li>• Edit the group (see steps 3-5)</li> <li>• Email the whole group</li> <li>• Delete the group</li> <li>• Create a Smart View for that group in the Grade Center.</li> </ul>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Step 9</b> <b>Student View: My Groups</b></p> <p>When students are enrolled in groups, a My Groups subheader appears at the bottom of their course menu with a link to each group they are enrolled in, and easy access to all enabled group tools.</p> <p>If you have made a link to the Groups page, either in the course menu or as an item in another section of your course, students can also access their groups via that link. Students can only see groups that they’re enrolled in.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Student View</b></p> 

Step Number and Description	Screenshot
<p><b>Step 10</b> <b>Creating a Group Assignment</b></p> <p>Once you have created groups, you can make a graded group assignment in which the graded component is a Discussion Board, Blog, or Wiki (see Step 4). You can also create a Blackboard Assignment for group work, like a group essay.</p> <p>In order to create a group assignment, follow the usual steps for creating an assignment. In Grading &gt; Submission Details, select Group Submission.</p> <p>In the field that appears below, select <b>all</b> the groups that should complete the assignment and click on the arrow to move them to the Selected Items window.</p> <p>Then, continue with assignment setup as usual and click Submit.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> You might want to explain to students that only one group member submits the assignment for the whole group (as opposed to each student having to submit the assignment).</p>	 

Step Number and Description	Screenshot
<p><b>Step 11</b> <b>Grading a Group Assignment</b></p> <p>After one group member submits an assignment for the entire group, a “Needs Grading” icon will appear in the respective assignment column of the Grade Center for each student in the group.</p> <p>To grade the group assignment, click the downward facing arrow in one of the cells and select “Group Attempt [Title].”</p> <p>Grade the assignment as though it were an individual assignment. Blackboard automatically assigns the same grade to every group member.</p> <p>If you would like to modify an individual group member’s grade, simply type it in the grade next to their name (listed under “Group Members” on the same screen).</p>	