

The group feature in Blackboard can be a productive meeting place where learners can share resources and collaborate as they complete assignments, design in-class presentations, and prepare for tests. It is an important tool for creating community among on-line learners.

As a teacher, you can see exactly what each student contributes to the group; you can participate and support the group activity; and you may have access to examples of good quality assignments for future learners to see. Groups can be set up ahead of time and made visible at a later date.

Add Groups to your Blackboard Course

Click through this sequence:

- **Control Panel**
- **User Management – Manage Groups**
- **Add Group**

Give the group a name. It may be helpful to list the names of the group members in the **Description** box along with any instructions. For most classes, it is a good idea to enable all four **Group Options**.

Select whether or not you wish to make the group available. Click on **Submit**.

Now that you have created a group you need to add users to the group:

- Click on the **Modify** button of the group you just created.
- Click on **Add Users to Group**.
- Click on **List All**. A note will appear but click on **List All** once more.
- Select the learners for that group and then click on **Submit**.

➔ Note: you will have to submit one page (group) at a time. Remember to add your name to the group to participate in, or assess what the group is doing.

Enable Groups in your Blackboard Course

This function is outlined in more detail in [Manage Course Menu](#), another **Blackboard tip sheet**. Click through this sequence:

- **Control Panel**
- **Course Options – Manage Course Menu**
- **Groups – Modify**
- **Make Available for Student/Participant users**
- **Submit**

- ➔ Note: you can follow this procedure to disable the **Groups** area when groups are no longer active.

Tips to Help Groups Work Effectively

Learners need clear directions about participating in their Blackboard groups. Refer to the tips below for ideas about helping groups work effectively:

- Tip 1:** **Careful planning** is key to a successful outcome. Learners need to know exactly what they have to accomplish and the various roles that need to be held. Your role in the group must also be clearly stated. You might consider adding a file called "How to be an effective Blackboard group member" to the file exchange. Downloading this could be their first task.
- Tip 2:** **Use a general discussion board for learners to sign up in a group.** Let learners choose their own groups. Be clear about the process and deadlines for signing up.
- Tip 3:** Set up a **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) forum** for each group where they can ask questions and invite your input. A general FAQ forum on the general discussion board can be used to facilitate communication to all groups. Let students know how often you will check the forum. Learners appreciate ongoing teacher support.
- Tip 4:** **Include the group experience as part of students' evaluation.** This places a value on the activity and encourages learners to do their part.
- Tip 5:** **Make the groups invisible once the activity is completed only if you are sure students would not benefit from using the group repository of learning as a reference or review.**
- Tip 6:** Add the **marking scheme** as a file to the file exchange – this could be in the form of a rubric or checklist. Ask the group to post a brief summary of where they are at with their work at least once during the experience.
- Tip 7:** **Caution students about using the email feature to send "behind the curtain" messages,** which pertain to the whole group. Although this is an easy way to communicate with the group, it has the potential of breaking down the collaborative nature of the group.

Tip 8: **Be aware of other group work** students may be doing in other courses. Online group work tends to be intensive because the contributions are so visible to all members. Do not overload your students.

Tip 9: **Keep a log of “lessons learned”** with your first few Blackboard groups. **Ask learners for feedback via a survey** about their experiences as well. This tool is a great means of receiving anonymous and typically very honest feedback that is important for designing future activities of a similar nature.

Gotchas

Course discussion boards are not equal to group discussion boards. See the Tip Sheet on [Discussion Boards & Forums](#).

Use unique filenames in the File Exchange. If two students submit a file named “Project One”, the second submission will overwrite the first one! Make sure students add their initials or some other unique attributes to differentiate the file names.

The Remove button will delete! Some learners use the **Remove** button in the **File Exchange** as a downloading command, when in fact it removes the file completely from Blackboard. Unaware, learners have been known to delete an entire presentation belonging to other members of the group.