

## Q5: What are strategies to facilitate online group activities?

A5: There are three strategies you may consider to facilitate online group activities and enhance students' engagement:

1. Carefully plan and design group activities before class
2. Proactively facilitate group activities during class
3. Include Peer Evaluation to incentivize student engagement throughout the semester

### 1. Carefully plan and design group activities before class

We recommend (a) assigning dynamic group roles and (b) designing a clear activity structure when planning group activities

#### a. Assign Dynamic Group Roles:

Assigning students with group roles can reduce slacking, make all members more active and accountable instead of just the group leader. It can also increase the quality and focus of the discussion, and allow students to improve communication with each role

#### The 4-5 suggested Group Roles

1. **Recorder**  
**Manages documents from instructor:** records the critical points/findings and submits answers to Canvas
2. **Facilitator**  
**Moderates discussion:** leads discussion, keeps the team on task and encourages everyone to participate
3. **Reporter**  
**Summarizes the group activity:** guides consensus building, summarize understanding, assists recorder and presents discussions to the class relying on recorder's notes
4. **Task Keeper**  
**Keeps team on track under time constraints:** keeps track of time, progress and checks over work for clarity of thinking before group members finalize answers
5. **Wildcard (Optional)**  
**Fills in where needed:** questioner, devil's advocate, looks for holes in discussion

#### Suggested strategies when adopting Dynamic Group Roles:

- Introduce the group roles at the beginning of the semester
  - o Be transparent about why you are assigning group roles to increase student buy-in
  - o Provide students with list of roles and brief descriptions for each role (Refer to the [role cards](#))
  - o Assign roles randomly and rotate roles in each session to help students develop communication skills in each role

- Reinforce roles throughout the semester and by monitoring discussions
  - Acknowledge exemplar role behaviors and share them with the class.
 

*“I noticed Kit was an effective facilitator. He helped redirect his group back to the question when the discussion went off track.”*

**b. Design a clear activity structure:**

We also recommend instructors to carefully design the rundown of the group activity. Some important aspects of a group activity that instructors should consider:

- Questions to discuss
- Steps to kick-start the activity
- Duration of the activity
- Expected output from student groups

### Guiding questions when designing a clear activity structure

#### Questions to discuss:

- Do students know the rationale for the activity?
- What is the expected outcome/ product from the activity? (Short write-up or slide?)
- How will you give students instructions for the activity?
  - Give students a Word doc or PPT Slide with the following ([See sample](#))

#### Steps to kick-start the activity:

- Is there a scaffold, structure and clear instructions for the activity?
- What are the suggested group sizes? (In an online environment, we suggest 3-5 students per group to encourage participation, more effective communication and decrease changes of free-riding)
  - Group roles may be modified or combined based on the group size.

#### Duration of the activity:

- Does the structure give students time to process the new information before they are asked to respond?
- Does the activity include adequate time for student groups to present ideas to the class?

#### Expected output from student groups:

- How are you going to evaluate students’ output from the activity?
- What are the main takeaways from the activity?

## 2. Proactively facilitate group activities during class

- Provide clear instructions to students prior to the group activity. Give a copy of the instructions to students and walk them through
- Assign each student a group role

Proactively facilitate student groups during the activity

- Provide feedback or coaching to groups during the activity
- Keep up with the groups' progress regularly to ensure the activity does not overrun

See [facilitating group activity sample](#) from Mixed Mode Seminar.

Involve students by allowing groups to share their work with the class after the activity

- Invite student groups to share the outcomes in form of write-up or slideshow
- Debrief group responses vs the main takeaways you wanted students to get from the activity

## 3. Include peer evaluation to incentivize student engagement throughout the semester

- Conduct peer evaluation mid-semester and end of semester using [iPeer](#)
- Review peer results of individual students' performance

Click here to go back to [CEI Zoom Teaching Good Practices and FAQs](#)