

Transitioning Teaching Online



Supporting virtual teams

Virtual teamwork can be a positive experience for students, but they need to be supported so they can overcome the unique challenges associated with working online.

Top 10 tips for supporting virtual teamwork

1. Discuss with students the benefits and challenges of working in virtual teams and devise together solutions that work for individual teams (see below for benefits, common challenges are addressed in the tips below).
2. Make the purpose of teamwork clear. Ensure students have access to the marking rubric and assessment instructions and that teamwork is clearly linked to the ULOs, CLOs and GLOs.
3. The assessment task should be designed so all students need to work together to complete the whole, rather than a task that can easily be broken up to be completed by individuals separately (ie. 'group work'). For large tasks, set stages with deadlines and formative feedback if possible.
4. Sense of team may be lacking, so organise students into groups (4-5 students) early so they can begin forming connections with peers. (Contact Faculty Support Teams/Websites to assist with creating groups in CloudDeakin). Create informal team activities to quickly build up a sense of team, eg. encourage team to create a team name, use profile pictures, participate in ice-breakers that invite them to share their interests and backgrounds.
5. For smaller group activities in seminars, rather than have students always working with people they know, survey them for their interests and allocate groups according to these, and move students between groups for different activities.
6. Assist students to organise their team by providing students with a [virtual team charter](#) (or get them to develop their own) so they can map out their responsibilities and develop a shared understanding of how they will communicate and their individual and group expectations. Allow seminar time for this

important task and check their progress.

7. Students will have different competencies and access to technology, so encourage them to use multiple channels for communication and Deakin [support tools for collaborative work](#) (eg. Skype, MS Teams, BB Collaborate Ultra or Zoom, while MS Teams and Trello/Slack allow for easy documentation of input from team members). Provide links to [user guides](#) and/or demonstrate how these tools work.
8. Non-verbal communication can be missing online, so remind students that text communication can be ambiguous and encourage them to make use of multimodal communication (eg. GIFs, emojis) in combination with video/audio capacities in MS Teams or Zoom where possible. This can help to clarify issues that may otherwise be misinterpreted.
9. Reassure students you will assist their virtual teamwork by informing them how you will monitor team contributions, and be available to support them if there is an issue. Check in with groups regularly to ensure all students are participating and communications are respectful, and address any problems promptly.
10. Support students to develop their virtual teamwork skills by giving them the opportunity to reflect on the teamwork process periodically (this can be in the form of a short reflection or a forum) and debrief about their experiences.

Benefits to virtual teamwork

- Increased flexibility: allowing students to work at different times and places that suit their schedule
- Greater diversity: leading to more diverse perspectives, greater decision-making abilities and creativity and less 'group think'
- Greater participation: some students will feel more confident to contribute and check their understanding in a group than in the whole class
- Increased effectiveness and efficiency: as virtual teams have a greater focus on task objectives
- Development of virtual teamwork skills: the use of virtual teams is on the rise, so skills for working in virtual teams, including communication, negotiation and inclusivity, will be highly valued by employers
- Higher-level thinking: virtual teamwork fosters higher-level thinking as students have time to respond, and more opportunities to articulate and refine their thinking
- Connection amongst students: they reduce the sense of isolation for Cloud learners
- Ease of reporting: communication & individual participation can be easily documented.

Additional supports available during this time

- Faculty Support Teams:
 - SEBE: sebe-clouddeakinsupport@deakin.edu.au; [SEBE support website](#)
 - Health: hedu@deakin.edu.au; [Health support website](#); Pod email: dlf-healthpod@deakin.edu.au
 - Business and Law: bl-learninginnovations@deakin.edu.au; [B&L support site](#)
 - Arts and Education: artsed-digital-learning@deakin.edu.au; [A&E support site](#); Pod email: dlf-artsedpod@deakin.edu.au
- [Enjoy Group Work](#) for further tips to help manage group work with diverse students inclusively
- Deakin current students [Group work Study Support](#) website
- Check in with the [Transitioning Teaching Online](#) website for current information during COVID-19
- Subscribe to the [DTeach newsletter](#) for updates on teaching and learning, and COVID-19 information