collaboratingwithgroups

Blackboard Learn 9.1

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1.0 Workshop Overview

This workshop provides a hands-on introduction to the Groups tool and the communication and collaboration tools used to promote interaction among students.

Research[1] has shown students can benefit from group work in several ways:

- Students retain information longer than with other teaching methods.
- Perspectives from group members offer another opportunity to learn new material.
- Students have a positive feeling about the course material.
- Students who establish good relationships with their peers have a more positive learning experience.
- Successful group work leads to students feeling better about themselves.
- Students increase their social and communication skills.
- Students increase their critical thinking skills.

You will learn to facilitate collaboration among students by setting up Groups. In Blackboard Learn™, Groups can have their own Discussion Board, Blog, Journals, Wikis, and live chats. Group members can exchange documents, submit Group Assignments, send email to other Group members, and distribute tasks to keep the Group on track.

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[1] "44 Benefits of Collaborative Learning." gdrc.org. n.d. Web. 12 Nov. 2009.

ROADMAP

2.0 Student Experience

Access Groups
Learn to access Groups in several ways.

Explore the Group Homepage
Access the Group Homepage and explore the links available, including the Group tools.

Self-enroll in a Group
Use sign-up sheets to join the Group of your choice.

Best practice
Offer students advice for being responsible Group members.

3.0 Creating Groups

Create Groups
Create Groups and Group sets, assign members, and select appropriate collaboration tools.

Add sign-up sheets
Provide students with sign-up sheets to self-enroll in Groups.

Group tips
Explore ways to make Group member selections.

4.0 Managing Groups

Edit Groups
Change Group membership and other properties.

Add Group Links
Allow students to access Groups from the Course Menu, the My Groups area, or in a course area.

Add Group Assignments
Deliver Group Assignments to Groups and assign one grade to all members. Edit an individual member's grade.

Group tips
Provide support to Groups to enhance collaboration.

2.0 Student Experience

In this section, you will use the Groups tool as a student to understand how it appears to your students. You will experience the Group self-enroll option and explore the Group Homepage and Group tools.

The student point of view helps you make choices about how you will provide tools and instructions to the Groups you set up.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this section, you will be able to:

- Access Groups in several ways
- View a Group Homepage
- Self-enroll in a Group
- Use Group tools
- Discuss ways to help students be responsible Group members

About Groups

The Groups tool allows instructors to organize students into Groups of any size. Instructors can provide communication and collaboration tools that only Group members can access, such as a private File Exchange area, a Group Discussion Board, and a Group Journal.

Accessing Groups

Students access Groups in several ways:

- Groups listing page link – appears on the Course Menu or in a course area, such as a Content Area. The Groups listing page lists all available Groups and sign-up sheets for Self-Enroll Groups.

- My Groups – appears following the Course Menu. If a student is enrolled in a Group, the area appears automatically.

- Group Link – a link to a single Group, sign-up sheet, or the Groups listing page made available in a course area.
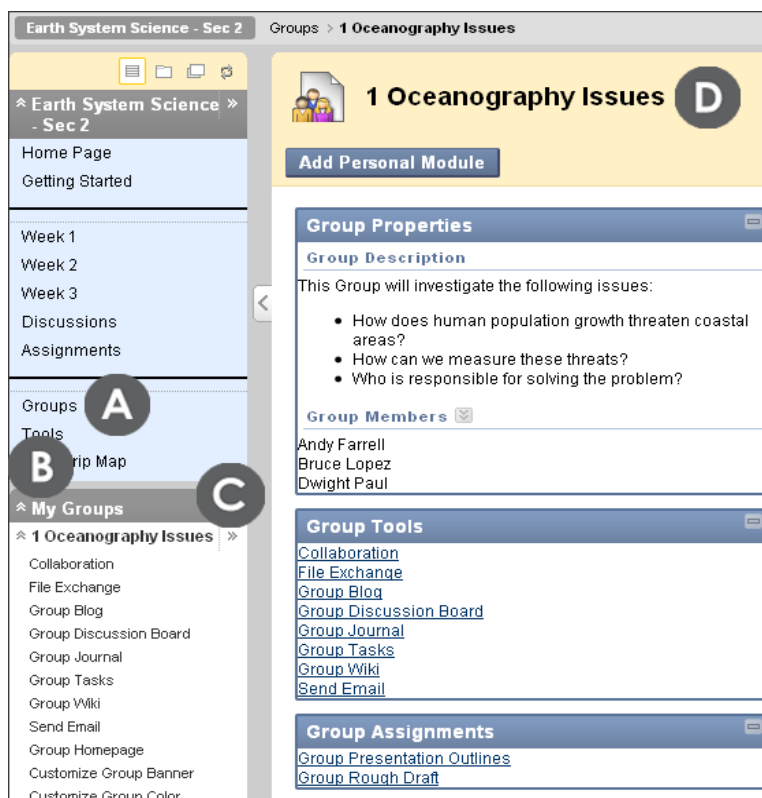

Figure 1.1 – Groups can be accessed in several ways

▶ **Take Note**

A. The **Groups** listing page lists all Groups a student is enrolled in and any available sign-up sheets. A link to the **Groups** listing page can appear on the Course Menu or in a course area, such as a Content Area, folder, Learning Module, or Lesson Plan.

B. Use the double arrows to expand or collapse the **My Groups** area found following the Course Menu. The **My Groups** area only appears if the instructor has added Groups to the course and the student is a member of one or more Groups.

C. Expand the Group to the right using the right-pointing arrows to view the Group Homepage in the content frame.

D. The Group Homepage is specifically tailored for each Group.

A Group Homepage is the hub for group activity and can contain a description of the Group, a list of members, tools, and assignments. Students can customize the page by adding Personal Modules, such as My Calendar or Report Card, which are visible only to the member who added the modules.
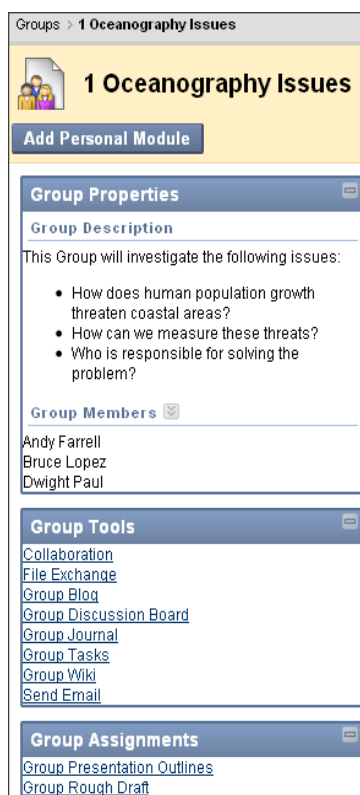

Figure 1.2

Self-Enroll Groups

Instructors have the ability to populate Groups manually, randomly, or by allowing students to join a Group of their choice using sign-up sheets. A Group sign-up sheet can appear on the Groups listing page or in a course area, such as a Content Area, folder, Learning Module, or Lesson Plan. The instructor chooses where students access sign-up sheets.

After students have joined a Group, they access it on the **Groups** listing page or in **My Groups**.
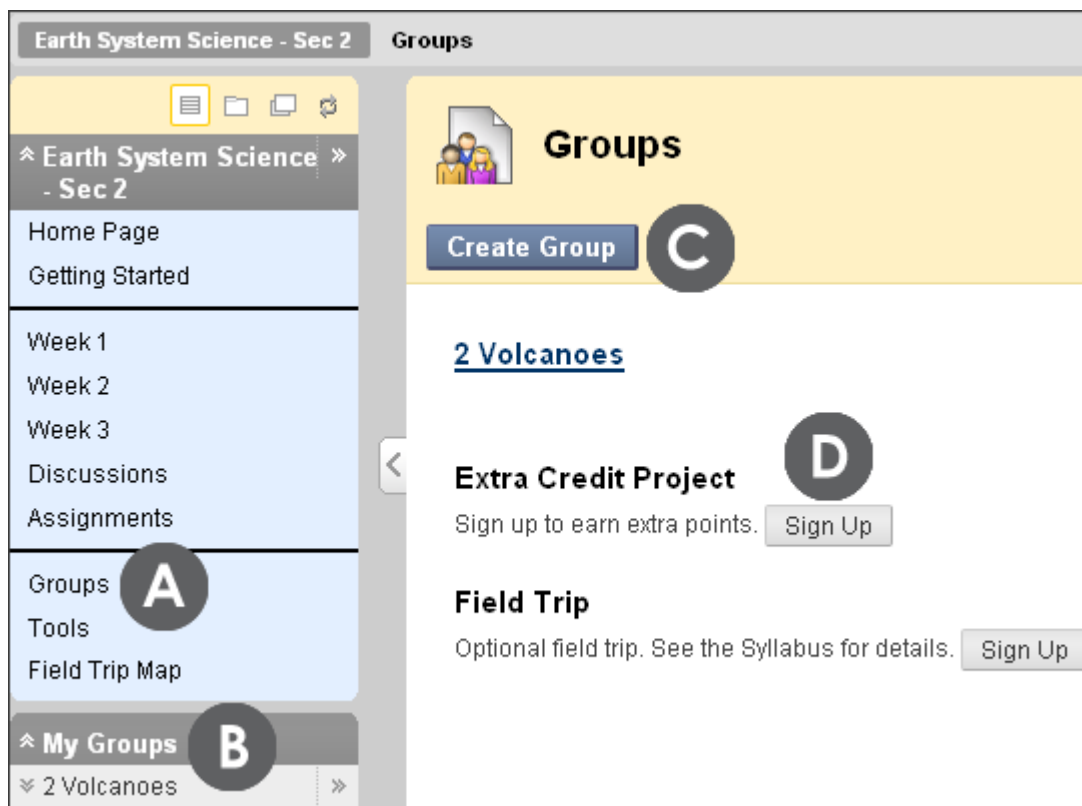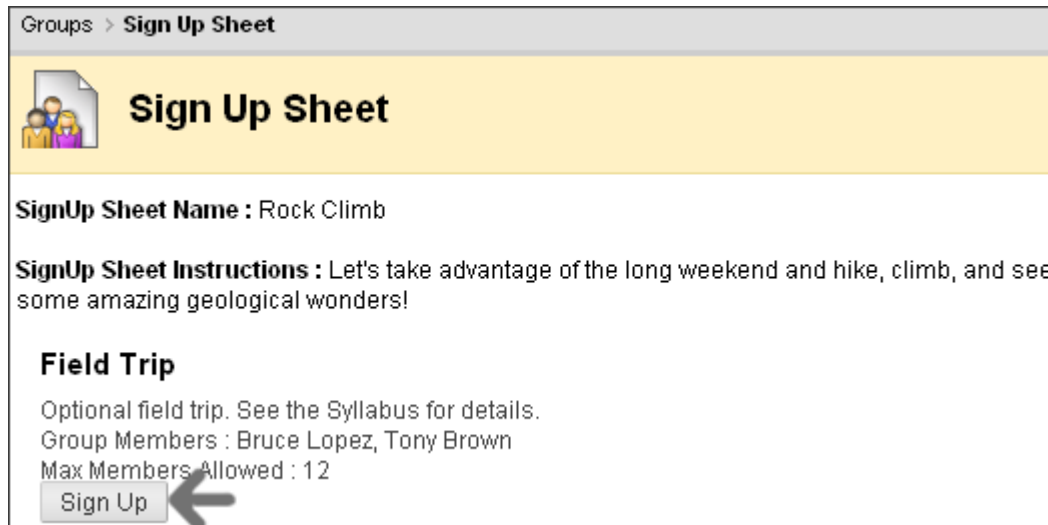

Figure 2.1

▶ Take Note

    A. The **Groups** listing page link.

    B. **My Groups** contains the one Group the student is enrolled in.

    C. Students can create Groups, if the instructor has enabled this function.

    D. Click **Sign Up** to access the sign-up sheet.

On the **Sign Up Sheet** page, when students click **Sign Up**, they are automatically added to the Group.

Figure 2.2

Using Group Communication Tools

The instructor can add any or all of the following tools to a Group Homepage:

- Blogs
- Collaboration, in the forms of Chat or Virtual Classroom
- Discussion Board
- Email
- File Exchange
- Journals
- Tasks
- My Scholar Home
- Scholar Course Home
- Wikis

If a tool does not appear as a choice, it may have been disabled by the system administrator.

We will look at some of these tools briefly, as they are covered in detail in other workshops, such as *Getting Started with Blackboard Learn*.

Once students are members of a Group, they can access Group tools to communicate with other members, view Group tasks, and fulfill Group Assignments.
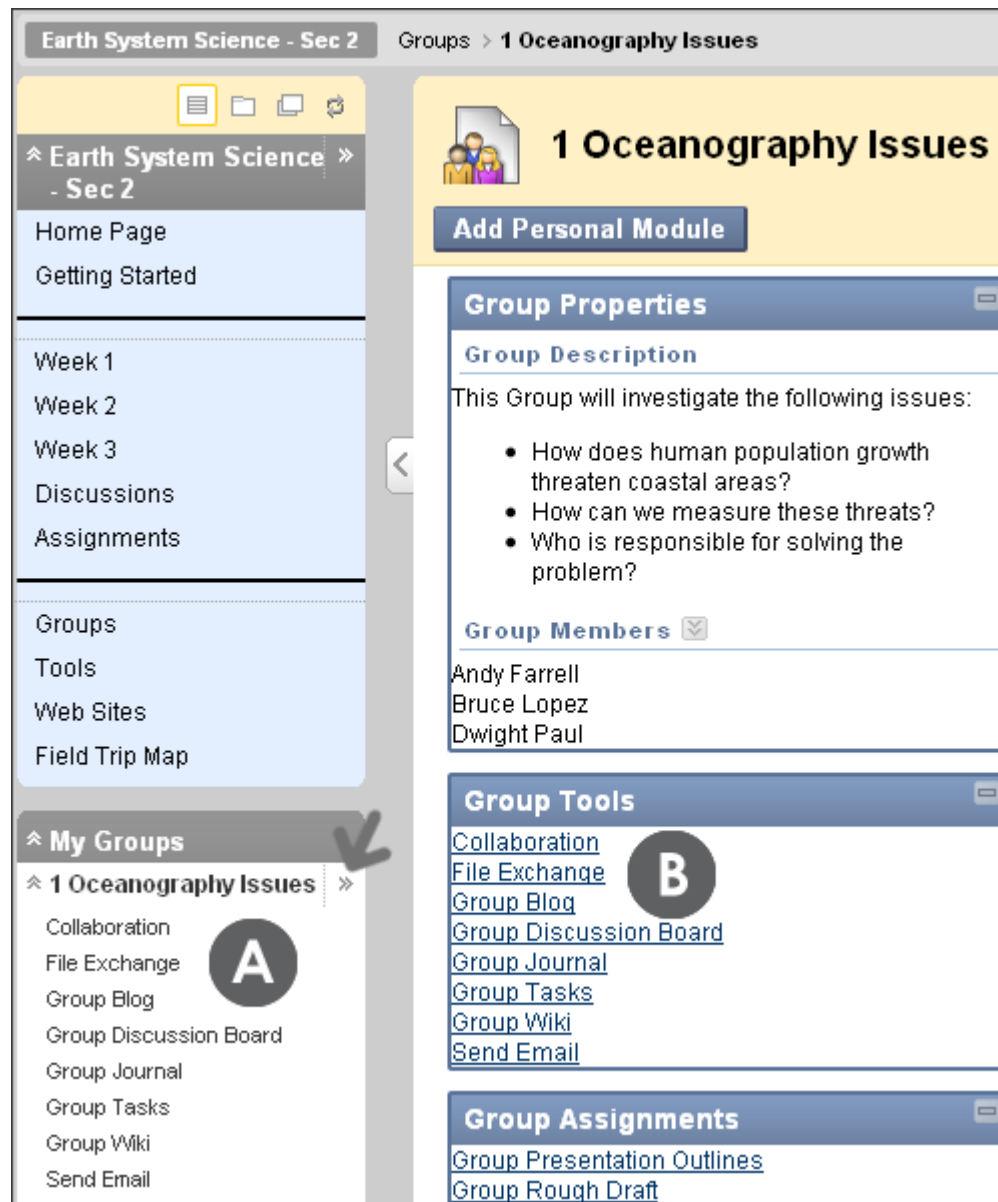
Figure 3

▶ **Take Note**

A. In the **My Groups** area, select a Group's tool to open it in the content frame. The Course Menu automatically collapses.

B. Expand the Group Homepage into the content frame using the right-pointing double arrows. On the Group Homepage, click a tool to access it.

Collaboration

Students can use Virtual Classroom or Chat to collaborate with their Group members in real-time. Students can meet for kickoff meetings, division of tasks, and progress updates. They can post the session time on the Group Discussion Board or use the Group Email tool to notify all Group members with one email.

When the Collaboration tool is accessed, members will see two default sessions: Lecture Hall and Office Hours. These can be edited to suit the needs of the Group or new sessions can be created. Any Group member can add collaboration sessions.

▶ QUICK STEPS: creating a collaboration session

1. From **My Groups**, expand the Group using the double arrows.

2. Select **Collaboration**.

3. On the **Collaboration Sessions** page, click Create **Collaboration Session** on the Action Bar.

4. On the **Create Collaboration Session** page, type a **Session Name**.

5. Use the **Start After** and **End After** date and time fields to limit availability of the session. Select the **Start After** and **End After** check boxes in order to enable the date and time selections.

6. Select **Yes** to make the session available and allow members to use it.

7. Select **Chat** or **Virtual Classroom** from the drop-down list.

8. Click **Submit**.

Figure 4.1

Any available sessions appear as links; click the title to join the session. Sessions set in the future will not be active links. Click a session's Action Link to access the contextual menu. All Group members can use the options to edit or delete sessions.

Figure 4.2

File Exchange

The File Exchange tool provides a space for Group members to share files. For example, it can be used to distribute meeting notes, guidelines, checklists, rough drafts, and images.

All members, as well as the instructor, can add files. They can also delete files, regardless of who added them. Uploaded images appear in a new browser window.

▶ QUICK STEPS: adding files to File Exchange

1. From **My Groups**, expand the Group using the double arrows.

2. Select **File Exchange**.

3. On the **File Exchange** page, click **Add File** on the Action Bar.

4. On the **Add File** page, type a **Name** that describes the file.

5. Click **Browse My Computer** to attach a file from your local drive. Students may see the **Browse Content Collection** function, if your school licenses the content management capability. After selecting a file, it appears on the Add File page.

6. Click **Submit**. Files appear in the order they were uploaded. Sort columns by clicking the column title or the caret.
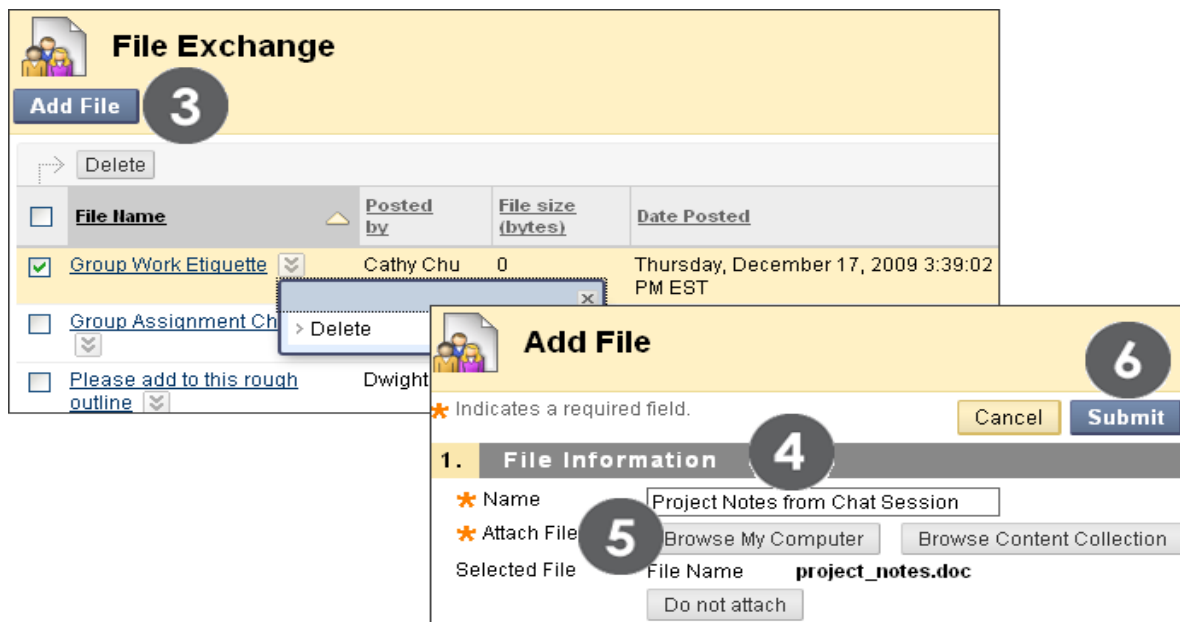
Figure 5

Group Email

The Group Email tool allows for efficient communication. The recipient list is automatically populated with Group members, so you can quickly select all or some of them. Emails are sent to members' external email addresses.

▶ QUICK STEPS: sending email to Group members

1. From **My Groups**, expand the Group using the double arrows.

2. Select **Send Email**.

3. On the **Send Email** page, select recipients in the **Available to Select** box.

4. Click the right-pointing arrow to add the selected names to the **Selected** box.

5. Type a **Subject** and **Message**. Click **Spell Check** at the bottom of the **Message** box to check your spelling, if you want.

6. Optionally, click **Attach a file** and **Browse** to select it.

7. Click **Submit**.

Figure 6

The Email tool sends a copy of the correspondence to the sender's external email address.

NOTE: If Groups prefer to keep communication within the course, they can use Messages, the Blackboard Learn internal mail tool. Since the Messages tool is not available as a Group tool, students need to select recipients from the list of all course members. The Messages tool keeps a record of all messages sent.

Group Discussion Board

Instructors can enable a special Group Discussion Board, available only to a Group's members. It is separate from the regular course Discussion Board, which is available to all course members.

Students access their Group Discussion Board in **My Groups** or from the Group Homepage. Students have the capability of creating new forums, just as the instructor does.

Each new Group Discussion Board contains a forum titled with the Group's name. The forum name can be edited and a description can be added.
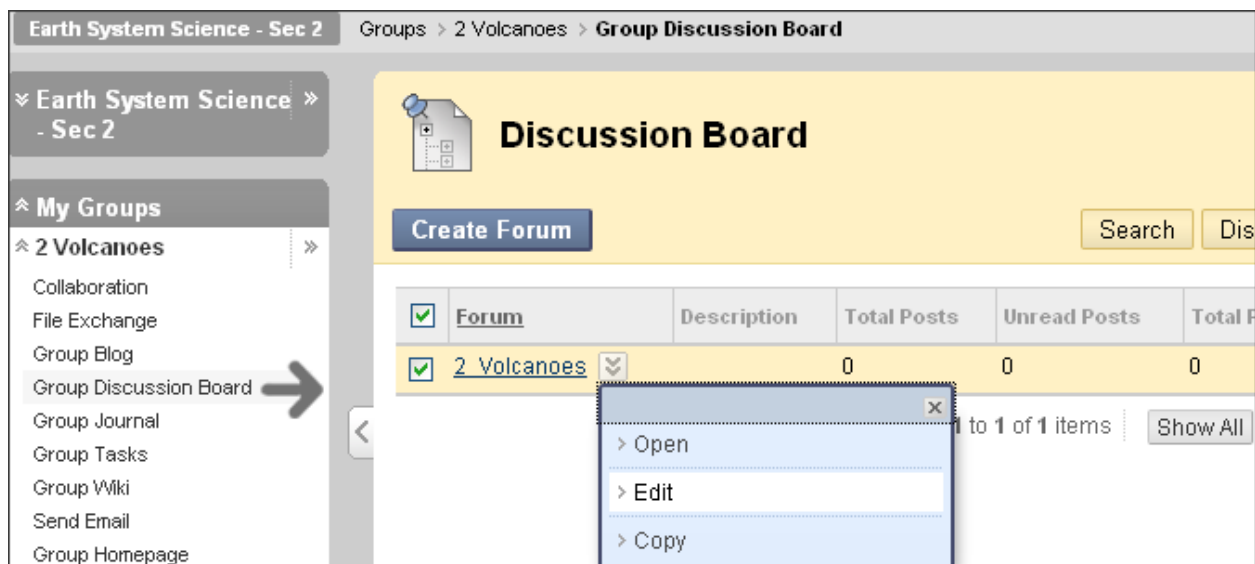

Figure 7

Best Practice: Being a Responsible Group Member

Let students know how they can be successful Group members. You can discuss expectations in an initial Chat session especially for acclimating them to the Group environment, or you can add their responsibilities to a handout or your syllabus. You can include some of the following expectations:

- All Group members are expected to come prepared to all Group meetings. Preparation can include reading, research, writing, a brainstorming list, rehearsal of material, peer editing of materials, and more. In simple terms, complete all tasks assigned by the Group.

- Do not lurk. Become an active participant in all Group work. Ask yourself this question: How can I contribute and further our Group work?

- Support your teammates. Celebrate each other's successes and achievement of goals.

- Provide encouragement and support.

- Answer correspondence as soon as possible.

- Recognize that problems and concerns need to be dealt with early.

- Be willing to compromise and keep an open mind.

- Let your Group members know if you feel you have taken on too much work and need help. Ask for help as early as possible.

- Do not be afraid to ask the instructor for help, but ask for guidance when there is still plenty of time to use it.

- Be willing to assess your own work and work habits to gauge if you are a contributing member to the Group's success.

Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Student Course.

Sign up for a Group

- Sign up for **Group Project 1**, **2**, **3**, or **4** on the **Groups** listing page.

Access your Group Homepage and complete the following activities:

Use Group tools

- Add a document or image to the **File Exchange** area to share a resource.
- Create a collaboration session using **Chat** to set up a meeting to assign tasks. Make it available and set a specific day and time to meet.
- Use the **Group Discussion Board** to invite your Group to the **Chat** session.

3.0 Creating Groups

In this section, you will create Groups and provide communication and collaboration tools for students.

Group projects and collaborative assignments provide valuable instructional benefits. They can improve critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills through clarification and evaluation of others' ideas—all valuable skills in academic and work environments. Group work also encourages active learning where students construct, rather than acquire, knowledge.

Lastly, Groups allow students to establish a closer virtual relationship with members of the class and promote a sense of online community.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this section, you will be able to:

- Create single Groups and enroll students in them
- Select Group collaboration tools
- Create Self-Enroll Groups and sign-up sheets
- Create Group Sets, with randomly enrolled students

Creating Single Groups

Groups can be created one at a time or in sets. The instructor can manually select Group members or allow students to self-enroll. First, we will explore single Group creation with manual enrollment.

As you learned, each Group has its own space, or homepage, with links to tools to help students collaborate. Only the instructor and the Group members can access the Group tools. For example, each Group can have a private Discussion Board that is only accessible to a Group's members.

▶ **QUICK STEPS: creating a single Group**

1. On the **Control Panel**, select **Groups** in the **Users and Groups** section. Alternatively, you can use the Groups link on the Course Menu, if you have made it available.

2. On the **Groups** listing page, point to **Create Single Group** on the Action Bar to access the drop-down list.

3. Select **Manual Enroll**.

4. On the **Create Group** page, type a **Name** and optional **Description**.

5. To make the **Group Available**, select the **Yes** option.

6. Select the check boxes for necessary tools.

7. Select the **Grade** option and type **Points possible** for **Blogs**, **Journals**, and **Wikis**, if you want to grade student submissions.

8. Select the check box for **Allow Personalization** to allow students to add Personal Modules to the Group Homepage.

9. Select members in the **Items to Select** box and click the right-pointing arrow to add the selected names to the **Selected Items** box.

10. Click **Submit**.
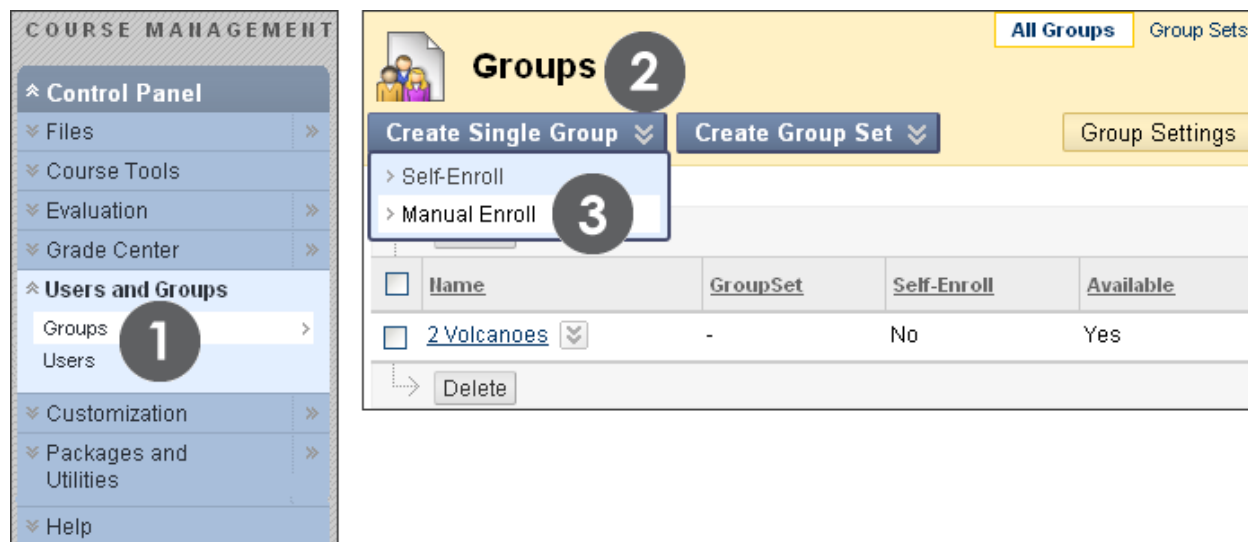
Creating Groups: Creating Single Groups

Figure 1.1 – Expand and collapse the Users and Groups section by clicking the double arrows

Figure 1.2

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Figure 1.3

When **Allow Personalization** is selected, a student can add Personal Modules to the Group Homepage, such as What's New and My Calendar. Only the Group member who added the modules can view them.

Select multiple members at one time by holding down the CTRL key while clicking the names to enroll.

The newly created Group appears on the Groups listing page.
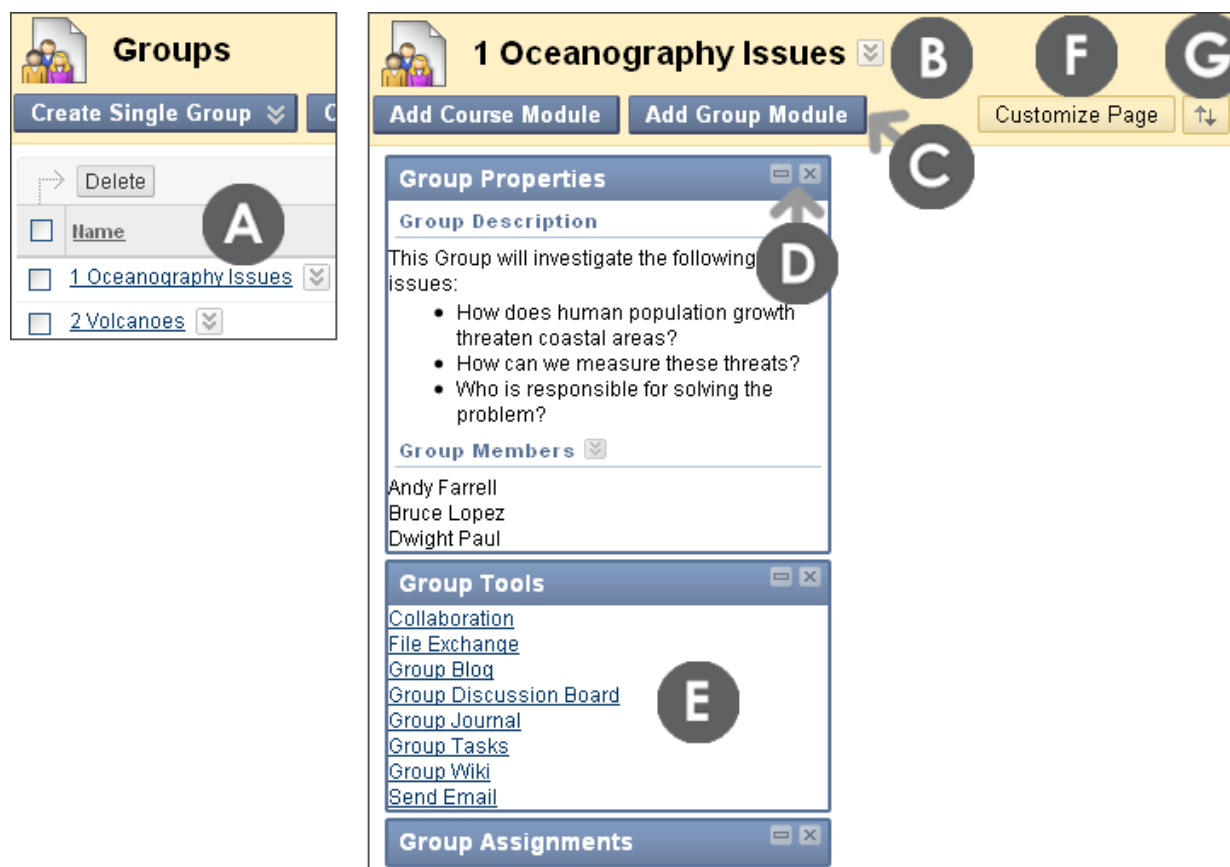
Figure 1.4

▶ **Take Note**

    A.   On the **Groups** listing page, select the Group to view. Alternatively, click the Group's Action Link and select **Open**.

    B.   Click the Group name's Action Link and select **Edit** to change the Group name, description, availability, settings, or membership.

    C.   Click **Add Course Module** on the Action Bar to add a module to the Group Homepage, such as **My Calendar**. Remove modules using the **Delete** function in the module's title bar. Click **Add Group Module** on the Action Bar to add a Group module, if you previously deleted one. All Group Modules appear by default.

D. View information about the Group in the **Group Properties** module. **Collapse** or **Delete** the module using the functions in the module's title bar.

E. Select a Group tool to use.

F. Click **Customize Page** on the Action Bar to change the color palette for the Group. The color palette choice is seen by all the members of the Group, but does not affect colors in the rest of the course.

G. Click the Keyboard Accessible Reordering tool on the Action Bar to reorder the modules or use the drag-and-drop operation: press and hold the module's title bar, move it to a new location, and release. The modules can be rearranged in a two column layout. The second column is currently empty in our example.

Tools for Group Collaboration

Students access the tools added to the Group Homepage under Group Tools. Only the instructor and the Group members can access tools enabled for the Group, with the exception of the Group Blog and Group Wiki tools. Group Blogs and Wikis appear to all course members when the tools are accessed on the Tools page. The following pages provide information about the tools that can be enabled for Groups.

Group Blog Tool

The Blogs tool allows Group members to post entries and add comments in order to share ideas. To add instructions or change the default settings for the Group Blog, select the Group Blog from the Group Homepage. Next, click the title's Action Link and select **Edit**. The **Edit Blog** page appears and changes can be made.

Figure 2.1
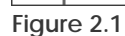
The default name for the Group Blog is the name of the Group. You can change the Group Blog's name on the **Edit Blog** page, if you want. Alternatively, edit the name and settings for a Group Blog from the Blogs listing page using a Blog's contextual menu.

A Group Blog can be graded, but once that setting is made, it cannot be reversed. When a grade is entered for a Group Blog, the grade is automatically given to all the members of the Group and is populated in the corresponding column in the Grade Center for each Group member. All members are assigned a grade, regardless if a member did not contribute. An individual member's grade can be edited to assign a different grade than the Group's.

A Group Blog cannot be deleted without deleting the Group, but it can be made unavailable by clearing the check box for the Group Blog tool on the Edit Group page or by making it unavailable on the **Edit Blog** page. Any existing Group Blog entries will not be removed—just made unavailable until the Group Blog tool is selected or made available for the Group again. The Group Blog grade column will remain in the Grade Center, if the Group Blog is graded.

Group Journal Tool

The Journals tool allows Group members to share their thoughts with each other and communicate with the instructor. Journal entries made in the Group Journal are visible to all Group members and the instructor. A Group Journal has no Journal topics; it is created by the Journal entries submitted by Group members. Similar to the Group Blog tool, add instructions or change the default settings for the Group Journal by selecting the Group Journal from the Group Homepage. Next, click the title's Action Link and select **Edit**. The **Edit Journal** page appears and changes can be made.

The default name for the Group Journal is the name of the Group. You can change the Group Journal's name on the **Edit Journal** page, if you want. Group Journals **cannot** be edited from the Journals tool accessed on the Tools page, as they are not available to all course members.

A Group Journal can be graded, but once that setting is made, it cannot be reversed. When a grade is entered for a Group Journal, the grade is automatically given to all the members of the Group and is populated in the corresponding column in the Grade Center for each Group member. All members are assigned a grade, regardless if a member did not contribute. An individual member's grade can be edited to assign a different grade than the Group's.

A Group Journal cannot be deleted without deleting the Group, but it can be made unavailable by clearing the check box for the Group Journal tool on the **Edit Group** page or by making it unavailable on the **Edit Journal** page. Any existing Group Journal entries will not be removed—just made unavailable until the Group Journal tool is selected or made available for the Group again. The Group Journal grade column will remain in the Grade Center, if the Group Journal is graded.

Group Wiki Tool

Wikis are used to create a collaborative space for Group members to view, contribute, and edit content. By default, Group Wikis can be read by all course members, but you must be a member of the Group to make a comment on a Group Wiki page. The instructor can change the default setting to allow only Group members to view a Group Wiki. To add instructions or change the default settings for the Group Wiki, select Wikis on the Tools page. On the Wikis listing page, click the Group Wiki's Action Link and select **Edit Properties**. The **Edit Wiki** page appears and changes can be made.
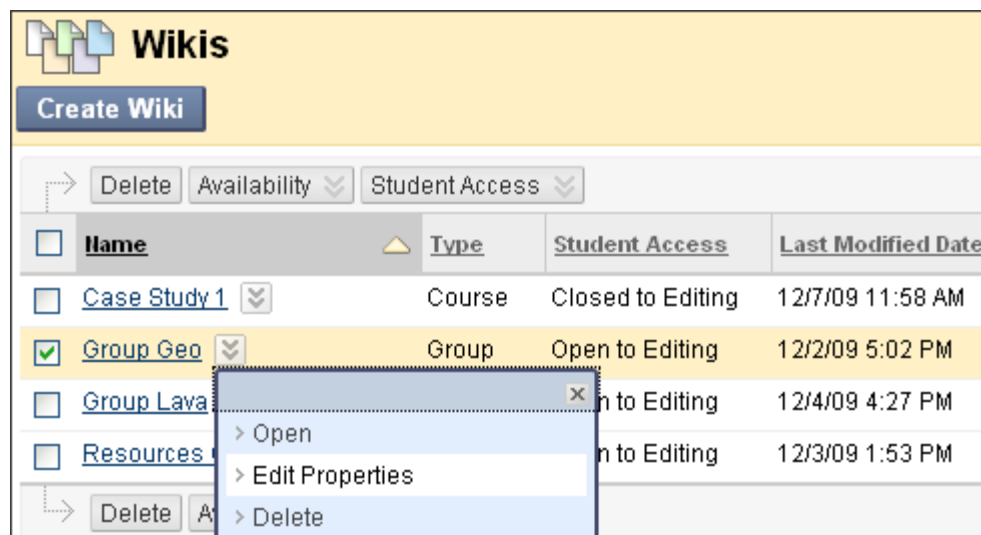

Figure 2.2

The default name for the Group Wiki is the name of the Group. You can change the Group Wiki's name on the **Edit Wiki** page, if you want.

Each newly created Group Wiki requires a first page, which is the home page. The instructor or any Group member can create the home page. The home page cannot be deleted, but if the Wiki is open to editing, it can be edited by any Group member. The instructions you add only appear on the home page because it cannot be deleted.

A Group Wiki can be graded, but once that setting is made, it cannot be reversed. When a grade is entered for a Group Wiki, the grade is automatically given to all members of the Group and is populated in the corresponding column in the Grade Center for each Group member. All members are assigned a grade, regardless if a member did not contribute. An individual member's grade can be edited to assign a different grade than the Group's.

A Group Wiki can be deleted from the Wikis listing page. The Group Wiki will no longer be listed under Group Tools on the Group Homepage. The Group Wiki tool can be enabled again when a new Group Wiki is needed.

Important: In the *Advanced Communication* manual, read more about assigning Group grades, changing an individual member's grade, determining settings, and general tool usage for Journals, Blogs, and Wikis.

Other Group Collaboration Tools

The **Collaboration** tool allows members of the Group to create and attend real-time Chat or Virtual Classroom sessions.

The **Group Discussion Board** tool allows members to communicate as a Group, as well as create and manage their own forums.

The Group **Send Email** tool provides a list of Group members for quick selection of recipients.

The **File Exchange** tool allows members to share files. This tool is only available to Groups. Group members can browse their local drives and upload files. If your school has licensed the content management capability, students can also browse the Content Collection for files to upload. File Exchange allows members to share meeting notes, checklist documents, images, and rough drafts for peer review and editing. All Group members and the instructor can add files. They can also delete files, regardless of who added them. Files appear in the order they were uploaded.

The **Group Tasks** tool allows Group members to define and separate the workload into tasks, while distributing the list to the entire Group. Each task has a status and a due date to help keep members on track. Group members can view the Group assigned tasks in the Group Tasks tool or in the course Tasks tool. Other course members and the instructor will not see tasks for Groups they are not enrolled in when viewing the course Tasks tool.

Self-Enroll Groups and Sign-up Sheets

Self-enrollment allows students to add themselves to a Group using a sign-up sheet. You can make sign-up sheets available to students on the Groups listing page or by adding a link to a course area, such as a Content Area, folder, Learning Module, or Lesson Plan. When you create a Group using sign-up sheets, the Group can be immediately available to use or made available after all members have signed up.

▶ **QUICK STEPS: creating a self-enroll Group**

1. On the **Control Panel**, select **Groups** in the **Users and Groups** section.

2. On the **Groups** listing page, point to **Create Single Group** on the Action Bar to access the drop-down list.

3. Select **Self-Enroll**.

4. On the **Create Self-Enrollment Group** page, type a **Name** and optional **Description**.

5. To make the **Group Available**, select the **Yes** option. Members can use the Group area immediately. Or, to create a sign-up sheet for the Group that limits enrollment, select **Sign-up Sheet** Only. The Group is unavailable until the instructor changes the setting.

6. Select the necessary tools and grading options.

7. Select the check box for the **Module Personalization Setting** to allow students to add Personal Modules to the Group Homepage.

8. Type a **Name of Sign-up Sheet** and optional **Sign-up Sheet Instructions**.

9. Select **Sign-up options**.

10. Click **Submit**.

Figure 3

After students have signed up for a Group using a sign-up sheet, the instructor must edit the settings and make the Group available so students can access the Group Homepage.

The following table explains the options for Self-Enroll Groups and sign-up sheets.

▼ Option	▼ Description
Group Availability	Controls whether or not students can access the Group after enrollment: • No – sign-up sheet is unavailable; the Group is unavailable. • Yes – sign-up sheet is available; the Group is available immediately after a student signs up. • Sign-up Sheet Only – sign-up sheet is available; the Group is unavailable even after a student signs up. To make the Group available to students who have self-enrolled, an instructor must edit the Group to change its availability.
Name of Sign-up Sheet	Use a descriptive name so users will understand the nature of the Sign-up Sheet.
Instructions	This field is optional and can provide information in addition to the Group description.
Maximum Number of Members	Type in a number so students know how many are allowed to join. Once this number has been reached, other users cannot join the Group. You can leave this blank.
Show Members	Allow users to see existing members before they sign up.
Allow Students to sign-up from the Groups Area	This option automatically adds the sign-up sheet to the **Groups** listing page. If you use this option, be sure a Groups link is available on the Course Menu or in a course area to provide student access. If this option is not selected, the sign-up sheet is unavailable to students until the instructor adds a link to the sign-up sheet.

Creating Group Sets

You can generate several Groups at one time by using Group Sets.

In addition to Manual and Self-Enroll, you can select Random Enroll for Group Sets. This option populates the Groups automatically—you simply choose the number of Groups or members per Group. For example, if 24 students are enrolled in your course, you can request 4 groups and the system will randomly enroll 6 students per Group.

▶ **QUICK STEPS: creating a Group Set**

1. On the **Control Panel**, select **Groups** in the **Users and Groups** section.

2. On the **Groups** listing page, point to **Create Group Set** on the Action Bar to access the drop-down list.

3. Select **Self**, **Manual**, or **Random Enroll**.

4. On the **Create Enrollment Group Set** page, type a **Name** and optional **Description**.

5. To make the **Group Available**, select the **Yes** option.

6. Select the necessary tools and grading options.

7. Select the check box for the **Module Personalization Setting** to allow students to add Personal Modules to the Group space.

8. Depending on the type of enrollment, select sign-up sheet options, members, or random enrollment options.

9. Click **Submit**.

Figure 4.1

Figure 4.2 – Random enrollment membership options
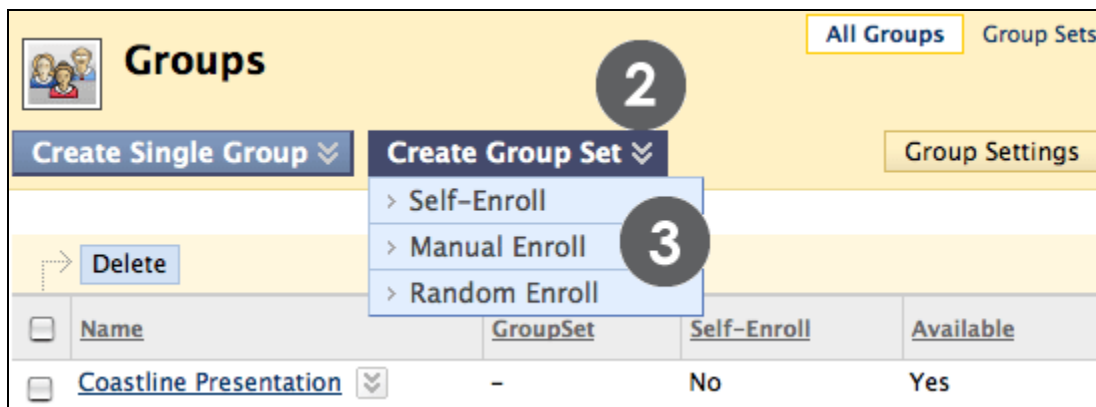
When Random Enroll Groups are created, select the number of students per Group or the number of Groups. Next, select the option to determine how to enroll any remaining members:

- Distribute the remaining members amongst the groups
- Put the remaining members in their own group
- Manually add the remaining members to groups

Focus on Design: Presenting Groups

Here are some options for setting up Groups to achieve different learning objectives.

Option A: Default setup

What it looks like:
Every student's Groups appear by default in **My Groups**.

How it works:
After you create Groups and add users, the Groups are available to enrolled members in **My Groups** where each Group name can be expanded for quick access to its tools. Since **My Groups** is populated automatically, this option is the easiest to implement.

Option B: Provide a link to the Groups listing page on the Course Menu

What it looks like:
A Course Menu link to the **Groups** listing page displays all Groups a student is enrolled in and available sign-up sheets.

How it works:
Since **My Groups** does not list sign-up sheets, create a link to the **Groups** listing page on the Course Menu, if you will use Self-Enroll Groups. Adding the link to the Course Menu is easy and convenient to use. Use the Course Menu's **Add Menu Item** drop-down list and create a **Tool Link** or a **Course Link**, and select the **Groups** listing page from the pop-up Course Map.

Option C: Provide links to the Groups listing page, individual Group Homepages, or sign-up sheets in a course area

What it looks like:
A link to the **Groups** listing page, a Group Homepage, or a sign-up sheet appears in a Content Area, folder, Learning Module, or Lesson Plan in close proximity to related content.

How it works:
Create Groups using the Groups tool. Next, go to the course area where you wish to add the Group Link. Point to **Add Interactive Tool** on the Action Bar to access the drop-down list and select **Groups**. Make your selection on the **Create Link: Group** page.

Best Practice: Selecting Group Members

As you learned, groups can be created one at a time or in sets. You can manually select group members, have the system randomly select them, or allow students to self-enroll. When determining how many members to add to groups or how best to select members, consider the following information.

Size

Try creating groups with at least four members. Four member groups can accommodate an absence and the group work can still move forward. The size does not permit any student to lurk and work can usually be distributed evenly. Also, four members will bring enough diversity, opinions, and learning styles for worthwhile brainstorming, productivity, and solutions. If you will assign group activities more than once, consider rotating groups throughout the term, while still allowing adequate time for groups to bond.

Manually Assigning Members

With a bit of knowledge about your students, you can successfully assign members to groups to ensure heterogeneity or diversity. Groups containing assorted personality traits or mixed abilities have been shown to produce the best results. Students have reported preferring a group assignment made by an instructor over membership they have chosen for themselves.

You want to create groups that include individuals with varied strengths, knowledge, and even work habits. Gender and cultural differences need to be considered also. Heterogeneous groups work especially well for generating new ideas and exploring a project from different points of view. The stronger members of a group will gain deeper knowledge of the subject as they assist others who are stuck or may have given up. The weaker students will not only acquire knowledge from the motivated students, but may also gain insight on how their group members approach their learning. Hopefully, the end result will be students who feel good about themselves for helping others and students who are motivated to work harder based on peer examples.

Randomly Assigning Members

Random assignment to groups may work best for instructors who teach courses containing many students and may not have the opportunity to know them individually, or use learning style surveys to full advantage. Though random assignment is easy for an instructor, as no preparation is required, some students may view random assignment as the instructor not caring.

By assigning students to groups, you avoid the risk that students who select their own partners will spend too much time socializing, forming cliques, or that some students will feel excluded or disregarded because they are chosen last. Also, some instructors feel one of the goals of group work is to collaborate with people you do not know, and random assignment increases this likelihood.

Self-Enrollment

Self-enrollment allows students to use a sign-up sheet in order to join a group. You can make sign-up sheets available to students on the Groups listing page or by adding a link to a course area. When students self-enroll in groups, they tend to do so based on previous relationships or characteristics: friends, teammates, organization membership, social groups on campus, ethnicity, and gender. Students who have few affiliations may find it difficult to become a member of groups comprised of like individuals.

Homogeneous groups may not need to spend a great deal of time bonding, as they may already have a high level of trust and agreement. These groups may fit your intended outcomes best.

You need to consider how to promote inclusiveness or use self-enrollment only for those courses where you have students with like abilities, interests, and affiliations. Self-enrollment can also be used for group formation based on interest, non-graded collaborations, extra credit, volunteer situations, or for study groups.

Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Practice Course.

Create Groups

- Create a single Group with manual enrollment titled **Extra Credit**. Make the Group available, add members, and select tools for the Group.

- Create a Group Set with random enrollment containing two Groups. Use the base name **Mars**.

- Create a single **Self-Enroll** Group. Make the Group available, set a maximum number of members, and allow students to sign up from the **Groups** listing page.

Self-Enroll in a Group

- Click **Groups** on the Course Menu and turn **Edit Mode** to **OFF** to view the Groups and sign-up sheets as students see them.

- Sign up for the **Self-Enroll** Group you created. Notice that after signing up, the link to the Group is available and also appears in **My Groups** following the Course Menu.

4.0 Managing Groups

In this section, you will learn how to edit and manage the Groups you have created for your course. You will also learn how to create assignments specifically for Groups and grade the submitted Group Assignments.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this section, you will be able to:

- Navigate the Groups listing page
- Edit a Group's settings
- Add a Group Link to a course area
- Create and grade Group Assignments
- Discuss ways to provide support for Group work

Editing and Managing Groups

On the Groups listing page, you can create Groups, as well as edit and manage them. Each Group's contextual menu provides quick access to the Group Homepage and Email. You can also access the options to edit Group properties and delete Groups.

Editing a Group allows you to add or remove members, as well as change its name, availability, and tools. In addition, you can allow students to create their own Self-Enroll Groups using the **Group Settings** option on the Action Bar.
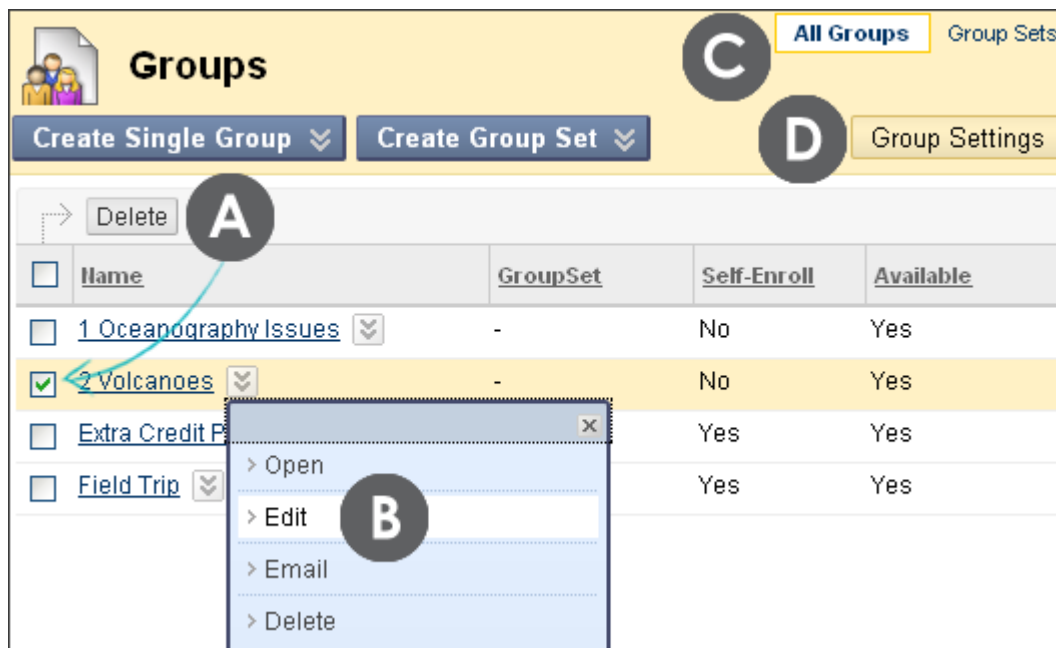
Figure 1

▶ **Take Note**

   A.   When you want to delete multiple Groups, select the check boxes and click **Delete** on the Action Bar. Alternatively, delete one Group at a time using a Group's **Delete** function in the contextual menu.

   B.   Use the Group's contextual menu to edit properties.

   C.   Toggle between the lists of **All Groups** and **Group Sets**.

   D.   By default, students are allowed to create and edit and their own Self-Enroll Groups. Click **Group Settings** on the Action Bar to disable these capabilities.

Adding Group Links to Course Areas

You can allow students to access Groups in several ways. **My Groups** automatically provides a link to any Group in which a student is enrolled. You can also provide a link to the **Groups** listing page on the Course Menu, so students can view all available Groups and sign-up sheets. In addition, you can manually add links to individual Groups and sign-up sheets in Content Areas, Learning Modules, Lesson Plans, and folders.

NOTE: When you add a link to a specific Group in a course area, all students will see the link; however, if the student is not a member of the Group, he or she will not be able to access the Group Homepage.

▶ **QUICK STEPS: adding a Group Link**

1. In **Edit Mode**, access the course area where a Group Link will be added. In our example, we will add a Group Link to a Content Area.

2. On the Action Bar, point to **Add Interactive Tool** to access the drop-down list.

3. Select **Groups**.

4. On the **Create Link: Group** page, select the type of link: Groups Page, single Group, or Group Set. If linking to a Group or Group Set, select it from the list.

5. Click **Next**.

6. On the next **Create Link: Group** page, complete the **Link Information** to specify how it will appear in the Content Area. Select **Options**, if you want.

7. Click **Submit**.

Figure 2.1

In our example, the Group Links are shown on the Course Menu, under **My Groups**, and being linked in a Content Area. The instructor added herself to the **2 Volcanoes** Group and, therefore, can see the **My Groups** link following the Course Menu.
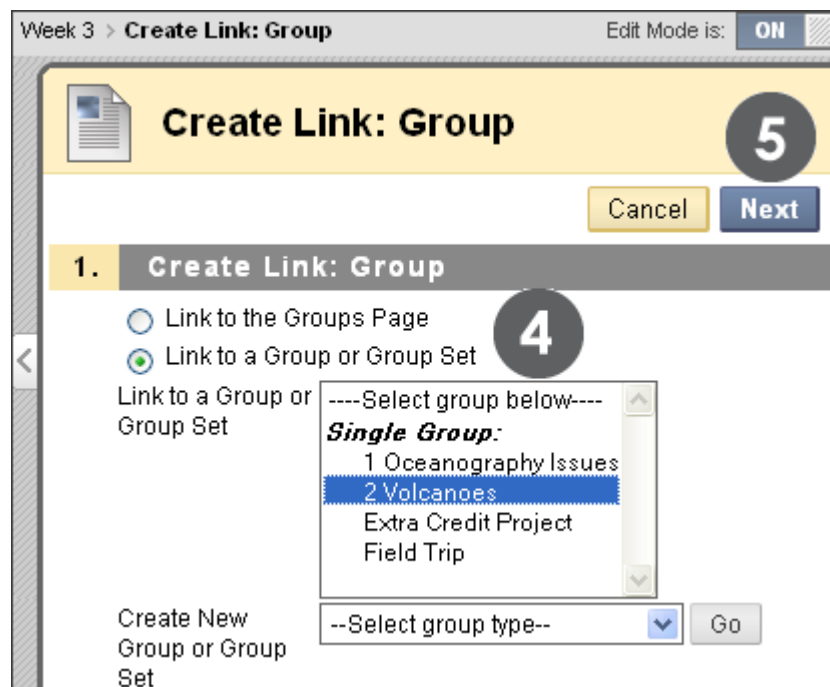
Figure 2.2

NOTE: On the **Create Link: Group** page, you can also create a new Group or Group Set.
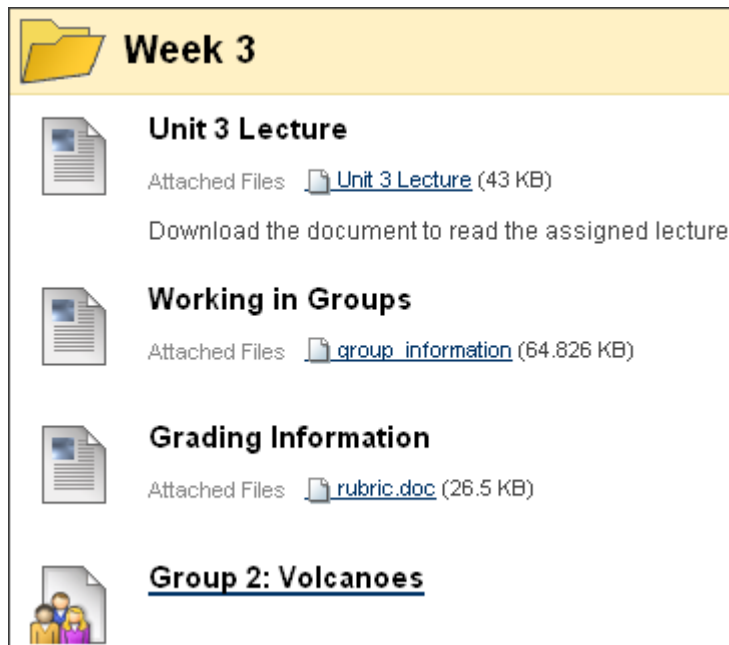
Figure 2.3 – Student view of a single Group Link added to a Content Area

Creating Group Assignments

Why Collaborate?

Ideally, all learning will include active student participation and interaction among students. To ensure students do collaborate, the Groups tool and Group Assignments can be used to foster an interactive online environment. A good rule of thumb to use before adding group activities is to only assign group work for projects that an individual student cannot do as well independently, and finish in the desired amount of time. You want to select group assignments that create interdependence. Positive interdependence can help produce meaningful relationships, greater productivity, and growth.

Group activities must not be seen as busy work or just another way to assign the work. Only use group collaboration when it will enhance your learning objectives. If it will provide value, consider alternative teaching techniques or using it for a different project. Otherwise, students may see it as a hindrance instead of a benefit to their learning.

You can create an assignment that is to be completed and submitted by a single Group or multiple Groups. Each Group submits one collaborative assignment and all members receive the same grade.

Before creating an assignment for Groups, ensure that the correct members are assigned to your Groups. All students that will be required to participate in the Group Assignment need to be assigned to the selected Group or Groups. If a student is in multiple Groups receiving the same assignment, an attempt is recorded for that student every time one of his or her Groups submits the Group Assignment.

You can create a single assignment and assign it to all Groups, or create several unique assignments and assign them to individual Groups.

▶ **QUICK STEPS: creating a Group Assignment**

1. In **Edit Mode**, access the course area where a Group Assignment will be created. In our example, we will create a Group Assignment in the **Assignments** Content Area.

2. On the Action Bar, point to **Create Assessment** to access the drop-down list.

3. Select **Assignment**.

4. Add the appropriate assignment information, attach assignment files, and select the settings you need.

5. In the **Recipients** section, select the **Groups of Students** option.

6. In the **Items to Select** box, select the Group or Groups you want.

7. Click the right-pointing arrow to move the selection into the **Selected Items** box.

8. Click **Submit**.
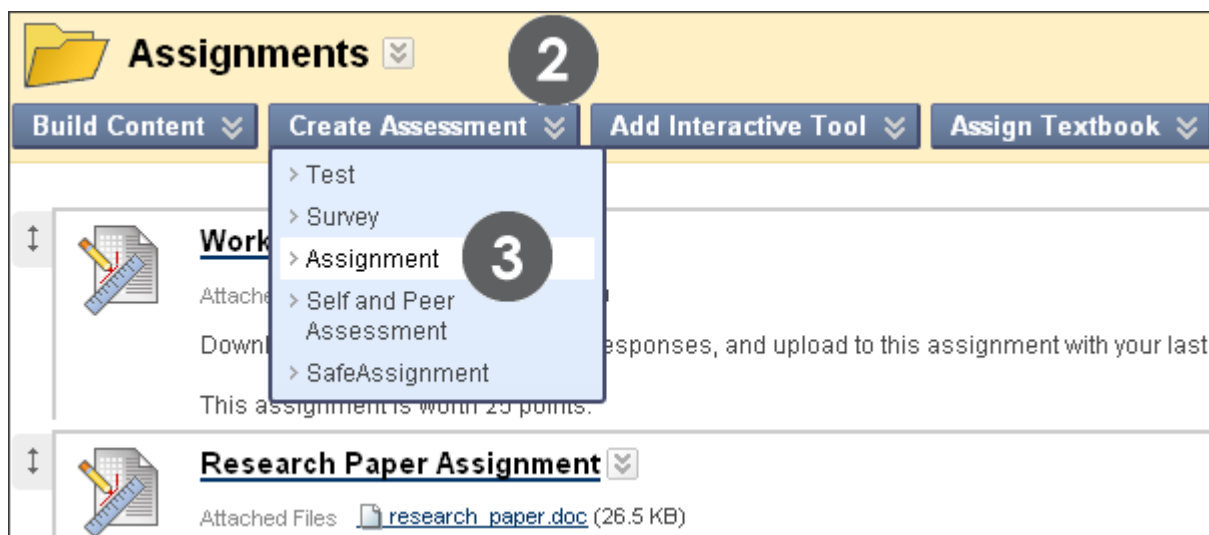
Figure 3.1

To select multiple Groups in a row, hold down SHIFT and click each Group. To select Groups out of sequence, hold down the CTRL key and click each Group.
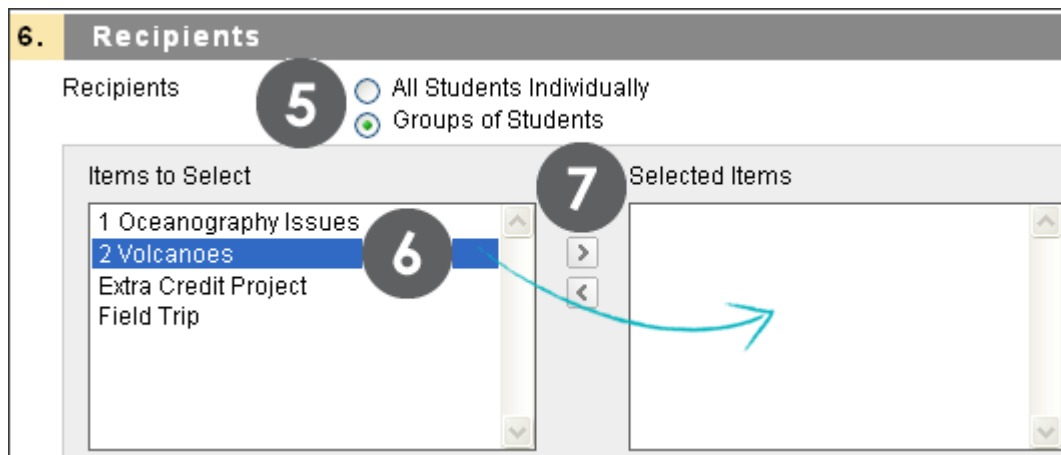
Figure 3.2

In our example, the assignment is created in the **Assignments** Content Area and the **2 Volcanoes** Group is selected to receive the assignment.

The assignment appears in the Content Area where it was created and on the Group Homepage, but only to the Group's members in both places.

Figure 3.3

Grading Group Assignments

A group is a team. Whether the instructor assigns the membership for each group, or students select their teammates, hopefully, most students will be committed to accomplishing a common goal. Individual accountability is essential for a group to work effectively and produce worthwhile results. When each member of the group receives the same grade, individual accountability can become an issue.

Determining individual grades for a group project can be challenging. An instructor can use peer assessment to obtain feedback from group members, and students can receive a wider range of feedback when critiques are shared. Peer assessment is a means of allowing students to participate in the evaluation process by commenting on and judging a group member's work. The instructor can use the feedback to add a participation grade or bonus points to reward group members who performed to the outlined requirements.

If group members are aware of rating their peers in advance, students may feel a greater sense of involvement and responsibility. Therefore, the team may produce a higher quality end product and learn more. Peer assessment can be part of the collaborative process, and not just a survey submitted at the end when no opportunity for improvement can be employed. Provide students with opportunities to assess their group and members' contributions to the workload while the process is occurring. Quick checks of how the collaborative process is working can have two important results. Instructors can gauge how the group is functioning, and under-achieving students may understand they cannot just hitch themselves to the workhorses of the group and receive a decent grade at the end of the ride. Ultimately, the grading of the group's achievement and the grading of the individual members needs to be a combination of how the group has evaluated its success and each other, and if the group deliverable meets the assignment's requirements.

Provide rubrics and guidelines before students assess each other's work. Take the time to meet in Chat with each team to discuss team roles, how the team is expected to work together, how often meetings need to take place, and how the peer assessment portion will affect the final grade. Peer assessment must be carefully considered before it makes or breaks a student's grade.

A simple weekly progress report can be the easiest way to help group members stay on track. Questions can include three or four of the following:

- Were the week's goals achieved?

- Was enough time spent on the group work?

- Did all members contribute equally?

- Did the group work well together?

- What else could you have contributed to help your team this week?

- What else could others have contributed to help your team this week?

- Who contributed the most or least this week?

- What is one aspect of the team dynamic that you would change?

Another way to assess how students feel about their groups is to ask the question: What are three positives and one negative about your group experience this week?

Student Perspective: Group Assignment Submission

Students will need to collaborate to complete the assignment for the Group, as all members receive the same grade for the submission. One student submits the assignment by clicking the Group Assignment link and adding the assignment materials for the Group. If one student accesses the Group Assignment, the next student who clicks the assignment link is informed which member has also accessed it.

After clicking **Submit**, a pop-up message alerts the student that he or she is submitting the assignment for the entire Group. The student clicks **OK** to submit the Group Assignment.
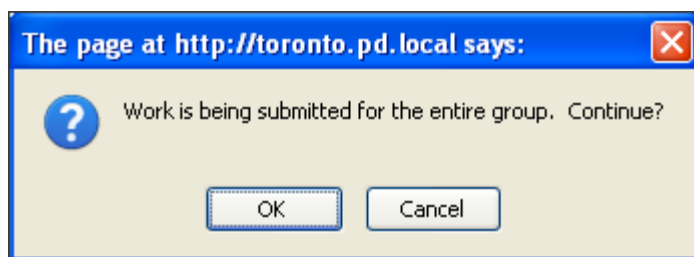
Figure 4.1

Once a Group Assignment has been submitted, it cannot be resubmitted by another Group member, unless multiple submissions have been allowed. When the Group

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Assignment link is clicked after submission, the students see the **Review Submission History** page.

Figure 4.2 – Student view of the Review Submission History page

▶ **Take Note**

    A.   The Group Name is listed.

    B.   The members of the Group are listed.

    C.   Students can view who submitted the Group Assignment.

    D.   Any student can view the file that was submitted for the Group.

E. In the **Instructor Feedback** section, Group members can see the assignment is not graded yet because the exclamation mark shows. The exclamation mark means the assignment is ready to be graded.

F. Click **OK** to go back to the course area holding the Group Assignment.

On the **Review Submission History** page, if a Group Assignment can be submitted more than once, students see **Start New Submission** on the Action Bar. Any Group member can make another submission. When more than one submission exists, they appear on the page in the **Review Submission History** section. Click the plus sign to display the information about a submission.

Review Submission History

	OK Start New Submission

1. Assignment Information

Name: Group Rough Draft
Instructions
Due Date
Points Possible   100
Group Name   1 Oceanography Issues

2. Review Submission History

⊞ Attempt #2 (December 15, 2009 4:55:55 PM EST)
⊞ Attempt #1 (December 15, 2009 4:54:31 PM EST)

Figure 4.3

Instructor Perspective: Group Assignment Grading

The entire grading process for assignments is not detailed here; a simple overview is provided. More information about creating and grading assignments can be found in the Working with Assignments manual.

Group Assignment submissions are reviewed and graded in the Grade Center. When a Group Assignment is created, a grade column is automatically created. Group Assignments that have been submitted, but not graded, are indicated with an exclamation mark—the needs attention icon—in the Grade Center. All Group

members' cells display the exclamation mark, regardless of who submitted the Group Assignment.

When reviewing Group Assignment submissions, you can provide a grade and feedback.

▶ QUICK STEPS: grading a Group Assignment

1. On the **Control Panel**, select **Assignments** in the **Grade Center** section.

2. In the **Grade Center**, locate the cell for the Group Assignment containing an exclamation mark. You can use any Group member's cell.

3. Point to the cell to access the Action Link and click it to access the contextual menu.

4. Select **Group Attempt**.

5. On the **Grade Group Attempt** page, view **Assignment Information**, download assignment files, type a **Group Grade**, type optional **Feedback to the Group**, and type optional **Instructor Notes**. Click **Spell Check** at the bottom of the boxes to check your spelling, if you want.

6. Click **Save as Draft** to complete grading at another time or **Save and Exit** to complete the grading of this Group only.

Figure 4.4 – Assignment view of the Grade Center; the 2 Volcanoes Group has one Group Attempt for the assignment

If more than one attempt has been submitted by the Group, both attempts appear in the contextual menu. All attempts must be graded before a grade appears in the cell, so regardless of which attempt you select, the first attempt appears. Type a grade and feedback for the first attempt. Click **Save and Next**, as shown in Figure 4.5, to view the next attempt. When all attempts are graded, the most recent attempt's grade appears in the Group Assignment's cells for the members.

If you want to use additional attempts as a means of providing guidance to help the Group refine their work, only allow one attempt when creating the Group Assignment. Then, you can add another Group attempt on the **Grade Details** page to allow the Group to take your comments under consideration and submit a new attempt. Once the new attempt has been submitted, the previous grade is replaced with the exclamation mark. If multiple attempts are allowed, any member can submit the next attempt, regardless of who submitted the first attempt.

Figure 4.5

▶ **Take Note**

A. The **Assignment Information** can be collapsed.

B. The members of the Group are listed and you can view who submitted the Group Assignment.

C. In the **Submission History** section, all attempts appear.

D. Download any attached files.

E. Type a **Group Grade** and optional **Feedback to the Group**.

F. Click **Save as Draft** or **Save and Exit**. If multiple attempts exist, click **Save and Next** to view and grade the next attempt.

The Group grade you assigned is automatically added to each Group member's cell in the Grade Center, regardless if a member did not contribute. You can also view the Group grade on the **Review Submission History** page. Access the page by clicking the assignment link on the Group Homepage.

Figure 4.6

Students can view their Group Assignment grades in the My Grades tool and on the Group Homepage by clicking the assignment link.

Edit a Group Grade

Follow the same steps for adding a Group grade to change a Group's grade. Edit the **Group Grade** and **Feedback to Group**, and click **Save and Exit**.

Change an Individual Member's Group Grade

You can assign an individual Group member a different grade than the Group by editing the grade for the member in the Grade Center. If a Group member's grade is

changed, and a new Group grade is given, the new Group grade does not affect the individual's new grade. The individual's new grade does not appear to the other Group members.

▶ **QUICK STEPS: changing an individual member's Group grade**

1. From the **Grade Center**, access the member's **Grade Details** page.

2. On the **Grade Details** page, click **Edit User Attempt**.

3. On the Group member's **Grade Details** page, type a new grade in the **Current Grade Value**.

4. Type optional **Feedback to User**. Click **Spell Check** at the bottom of the box to check your spelling, if you want.

5. Type optional **Grading Notes**, only available to you.

6. Click **Save**. The new grade appears in the Group member's cell in the Grade Center.

Figure 4.7

Figure 4.8

NOTE: On the **Grade Details** page, you can allow additional Group Attempts for the Group Assignment, if you want. You can also click **View Group Attempt** to review the submission before changing the grade.

Figure 4.9

The Group grade is shown in the **Current Grade** section. Make edits to the individual member's grade in the **Current Grade Value** box.

Figure 4.10

The new grade for the Group member appears on the member's **Grade Details** page and in the member's cell in the Grade Center.

Revert a Member's Edited Grade

You can revert a member's edited grade to the original Group grade, which all Group members received.

▶ **QUICK STEPS: reverting an individual member's Group grade**

1. From the **Grade Center**, access the member's **Grade Details** page.

2. After a member's Group grade has been edited, the **Revert To Group Grade** function appears, as shown in Figure 4.10. Click **Revert To Group Grade**.

3. Click **OK**. The member's grade is changed to the original Group grade.

Click **Return to Grade Center** to return to the Grade Center page and view the grades.

Adding and Deleting Group Members

If a member of a Group is added after a grade is given for a Group Assignment, the new member will not receive a grade, as they were not part of the process. Even if the instructor updates the Group grade, the new member does not receive a grade. A grade can be entered for the new member from the member's **Grade Details** page, but there is no submission available to view when grading.

If a member of a Group is removed, and a grade has been entered for a Group Assignment, any grading updates will be applied to that Group member's cell. To remove a score for a member you have removed from a Group, click **Delete User Attempt** on the member's **Grade Details** page. You are asked if you are sure you want to delete the attempt. The Group Assignment grade is deleted from the member's cell in the Grade Center.

Figure 4.11

Spotlight on Groups and Assignments

We will look at how the Groups and Assignments tools can be used together to create collaborative learning experiences.

The Scenario

In a teacher education course, online students create lesson plans that incorporate a unifying theme across different subject areas. The instructor divided students into Groups, each with a designated country as the theme. Each student develops a lesson plan in one subject area. Finally, the Group combines the lesson plans into one themed unit of study as their final product. View the process in the following table.

The Group Work Process

▼ In Blackboard Learn	▼ Student process
	John receives an email from his instructor which directs him to the Group Homepage.
⁂ My Groups ⌄ Unit of Study - Country 4 »	John accesses the Group Homepage and sees the names of other Group members and the Group Assignment.
	John posts to the Group Discussion Board to volunteer for a project task. The Group members use weekly chats to keep track of their progress.
	The Group uses File Exchange to review each other's lesson plans before combining them into one comprehensive unit.
Group Assignments ▭ Submit Unit of Study	They submit the final project for a grade by using the Group Assignment link on the Group Homepage.

Hands-on Activity

For this activity, use your Practice Course.

Edit and manage Groups

- Add yourself to each Group so you will receive Group Email.

- Delete one of the Mars Groups.

- In a Content Area, add a link to one of the Groups you created.

Create a graded Group Assignment

- In a Content Area, create a "Group Assignment" and select a Mars Group as the Recipients. Be sure to add Points possible.

- Because you added yourself as a Group member, you can view the Group Assignment in the Content Area as students will by turning Edit Mode to OFF.

- Access the Group Homepage where you can also view the Group Assignment.

- From the Grade Center, view the grade column that was automatically created.

Grade a Group Assignment

- From the Grade Center, grade Group Saturn's Group Outline assignment submission. In the Grade Center, view the Group grade, and note how all members have the same grade.

- Edit Sarah Spooner's Group grade. Return to the Grade Center, view the Group grade column, and note how only Sarah Spooner's grade changed.

- Edit the Group grade and type a score that is different than what you assigned to Sarah Spooner. In the Grade Center, view the Group grade column, and note how Sarah Spooner's grade did not change from the individual grade you assigned.

- Revert Sarah Spooner's grade to the Group grade. Return to the Grade Center, view the Group grade column, and note that all Group members have the same grade now.

- Group Jupiter's Group Plan assignment has two submissions. View and grade the last attempt. Return to the grade column to see if a grade has been added.

Ask Dr. C

In the following table, Dr. C discusses common issues in group collaboration.

▼ Your Question	▼ Dr. C's Reply
What can I do to help group discussions stay organized and on track?	When a Group is created, a default forum is automatically created in a Group Discussion Board. Instructors or students can create additional discussion forums. Let students know they can create forums and utilize threads to organize their conversations. Instructors have full access to every Group Discussion Board, so they can manage the availability of forums and threads, as well as delete or move them.
Students often complain only a few group members do all of the work. How can I encourage ALL members to participate?	Assign students different roles so they have an expectation to fulfill in order for the Group to complete the assignment. For example, assign the following: • Team leader • Recorder • Editor or proofreader • Researcher Outline how much of the grade depends on individual contributions versus the Group's final product. Ask for private peer critiques, submitted only to the instructor, to gauge group participation.

Best Practice: Provide Support

The following table lists tips for using technology to facilitate group work.

▼ Goal	▼ Use of technology
Prepare students for success	• Have a real-time kickoff meeting in Chat to explain how the group should function. • Provide direction during initial group discussions. • Handle technical difficulties promptly and provide a list of frequently asked questions.
Create instructor presence	• Provide feedback throughout the process in the Group tools, such as Group Discussion Board and Group Journal. • Enroll yourself in the Groups to receive Group Email. • Hold regular office hours.
Set timelines	• Use Announcements, Calendar, and Group Email to remind students of upcoming due dates. Alternatively, the Notification modules on the course Home Page can be used in place of Announcements and the Calendar.
Provide objectives and instructions	• Provide an assignment overview, grading rubric, instructions, task checklists, and resources.
Promote sharing	• Teach students the different ways to share ideas and work, such as through the Group Discussion Board, Chat, Group Blogs, or File Exchange.
Keep it interesting	• Assign unique case studies to each Group. • Have participants role-play and take on their assigned persona in online interactions. • Create Groups randomly or pick a heterogeneous mix of students to generate various viewpoints.

5.0 Workshop Wrap Up

The Workshop Wrap Up provides the opportunity to reflect on what has been learned by focusing your attention on the key concepts presented in the workshop. Also, the next page includes a worksheet for designing collaborative learning projects.

This workshop provided the skills to use the Groups tool to enhance your students' learning. Often, the learning process is as valuable as the outcome and you discovered ways to make the Groups tool run smoothly for your students.

In this workshop, you learned how to do the following:

- Create Groups, add members, and enable collaboration tools
- Allow students to self-enroll in the Groups of their choice using sign-up sheets
- Create Group Sets
- Consider how best to select members for your Groups
- Edit and manage Groups
- Add Group Links to course areas
- Create and grade Group Assignments
- Explore ways to organize and use Groups in your course
- Support group work in your course

As with any new tool or feature, start with basic tasks and build upon them for more advanced use of the tool.

Spotlight on YOUR Course

Use this guide to document the phases for designing collaborative learning projects.

Forming the groups

- How many students will be in each Group?
- Will you randomly assign students, form Groups based on certain characteristics, or allow students to volunteer for Group membership?

Planning the project

- What is the final product of the project?
- What learning outcomes does this project accomplish?
- What specific instructions will you provide?

Exchanging work on the project

- Which communication tools will students use to collaborate? (Group Discussion Board, Email, Chat, File Exchange, Group Journal, Group Blog, Group Wiki)
- Will students meet face-to-face or synchronously using conference calls?
- What is your role, if any, in this step?

Submitting the project

- In what format will the Group submit their work?
- Do you want all Groups to be able to view the final projects?

Evaluating the project

- How will you evaluate the project? Will you provide a grading rubric?
- Will all students receive the same grade, or will grades be assigned based on individual contribution?
- Will Group members help determine the grades of others in their Group?

Source:
Reid, J., Forrestal, P., & Cook, J. (1989). Small group learning in the classroom. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann.