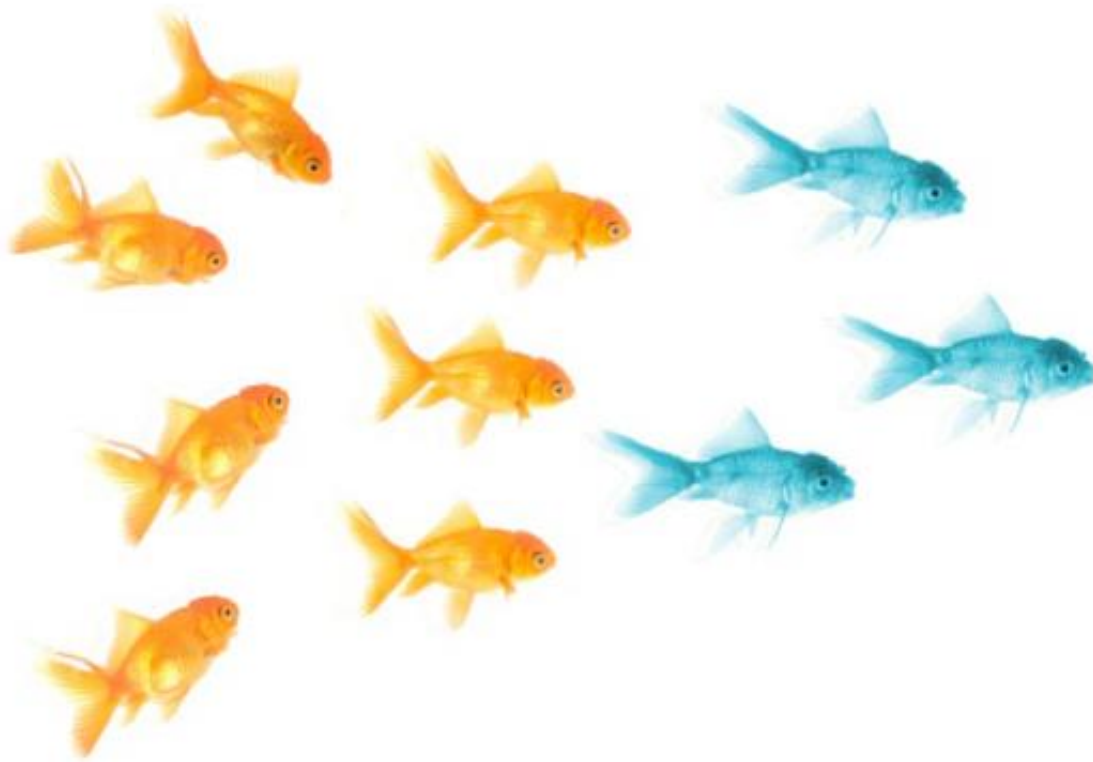


Blackboard Learn GROUPS

By increasing students' interactivity with each other in task-oriented ways, they construct, rather than acquire, knowledge. **Group work improves critical thinking, problem solving, adaptability, and communication** through clarification and evaluation of others' ideas, all of which are valuable job skills.



No matter how large...organize, manage, and monitor your virtual groups easily in Blackboard Learn.

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BENEFITS of GROUP WORK

Research¹ 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.

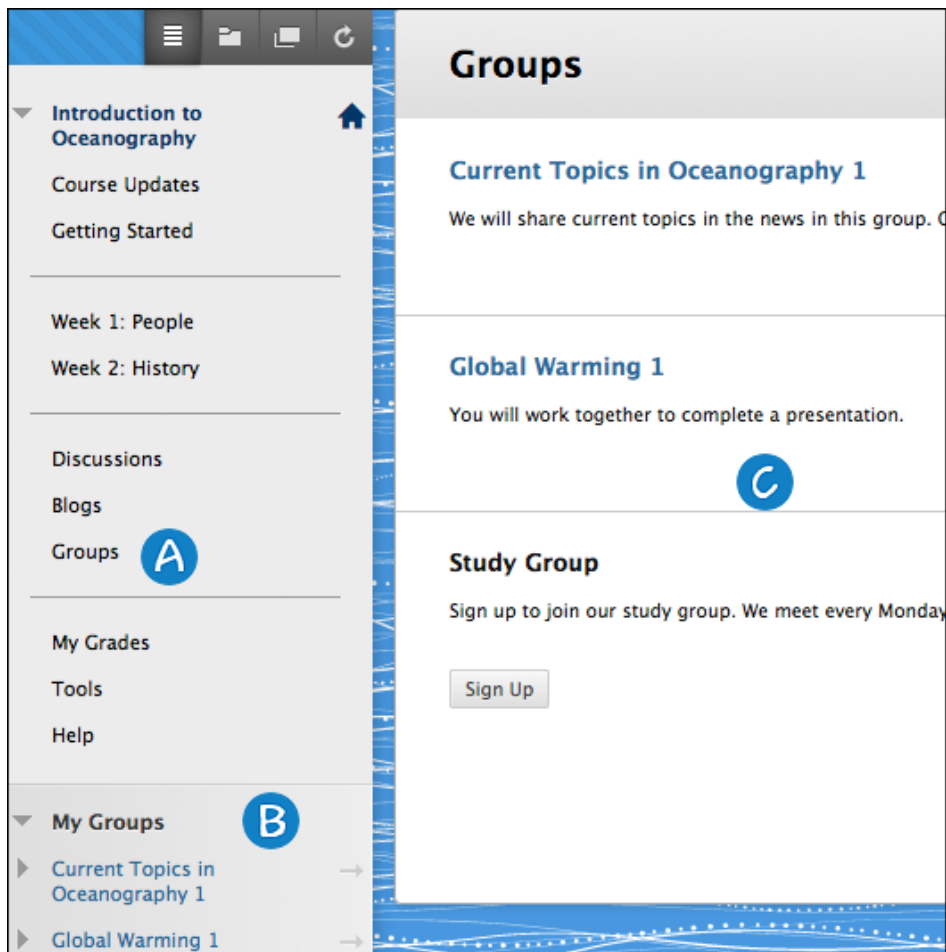
Ideally, all learning includes active student participation and interaction among students. Instructors who have not introduced group activities into their teaching arsenals have valid reasons for being hesitant. Some do not want to transfer control from their tried and true teacher-centered methods of instruction to their students. Others have heard stories from their colleagues that the experience was not worthwhile. Though the move away from a teacher-controlled environment can be a dramatic change, the benefits of collaborative learning far outweigh any obstacles that must be dealt with while implementing group activities.

In this workshop, you 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.



PRESENTING GROUPS

The ways students can access their groups depends on how you set up your course. As shown in the following image, you can use three options for setting up groups to achieve different learning objectives.



Option A: My Groups

What it looks like:

Each 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 users can expand each group name for quick access to its tools. Because **My Groups** is populated automatically when students are added to groups, this option is the easiest to implement. Click the arrow to expand the group homepage into the content frame.

Option B: Course menu links

What it looks like:

Adding 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:

Because **My Groups** does not list sign-up sheets, create a link to the **Groups** listing page, if you want to use self-enroll groups. Adding a 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. Then, select the **Groups** listing page in the pop-up course map.

Option C: Provide links 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.

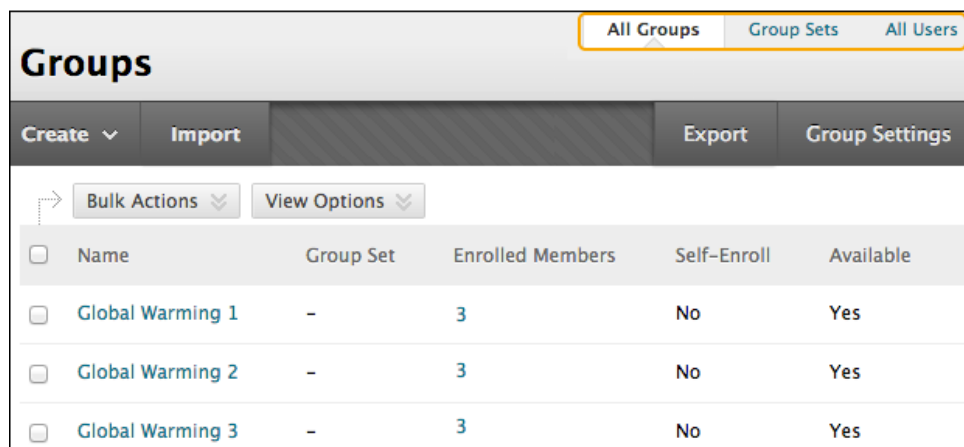
How it works:

Create groups using the groups tool. Next, go to the course area where you want to add the group link. Point to **Tools** on the action bar to access the drop-down list and select **Groups**. Make your selection on the **Create Link: Group** page.

TOUR the GROUPS PAGE

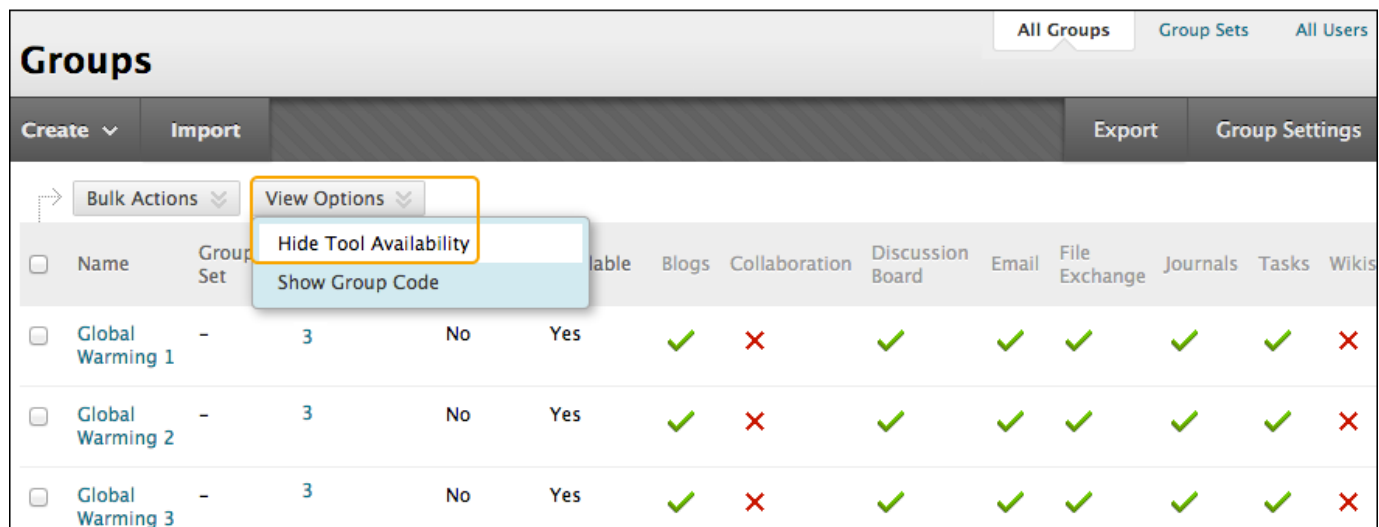
When you access the **Groups** page, you will see three links at the top of the page for **All Groups**, **Groups Sets**, and **All Users**.

Use the **View Options** drop-down list on the action bar to show or hide tool availability.



The screenshot shows the 'Groups' page with the 'View Options' dropdown menu open. The menu has two options: 'Hide Tool Availability' and 'Show Group Code'. The 'All Groups' link is highlighted in the top navigation bar.

	Name	Group Set	Enrolled Members	Self-Enroll	Available
<input type="checkbox"/>	Global Warming 1	-	3	No	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	Global Warming 2	-	3	No	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	Global Warming 3	-	3	No	Yes



The screenshot shows the 'Groups' page with the 'View Options' dropdown menu open. The menu has two options: 'Hide Tool Availability' and 'Show Group Code'. The 'All Groups' link is highlighted in the top navigation bar. The table below shows the tool availability for each group.

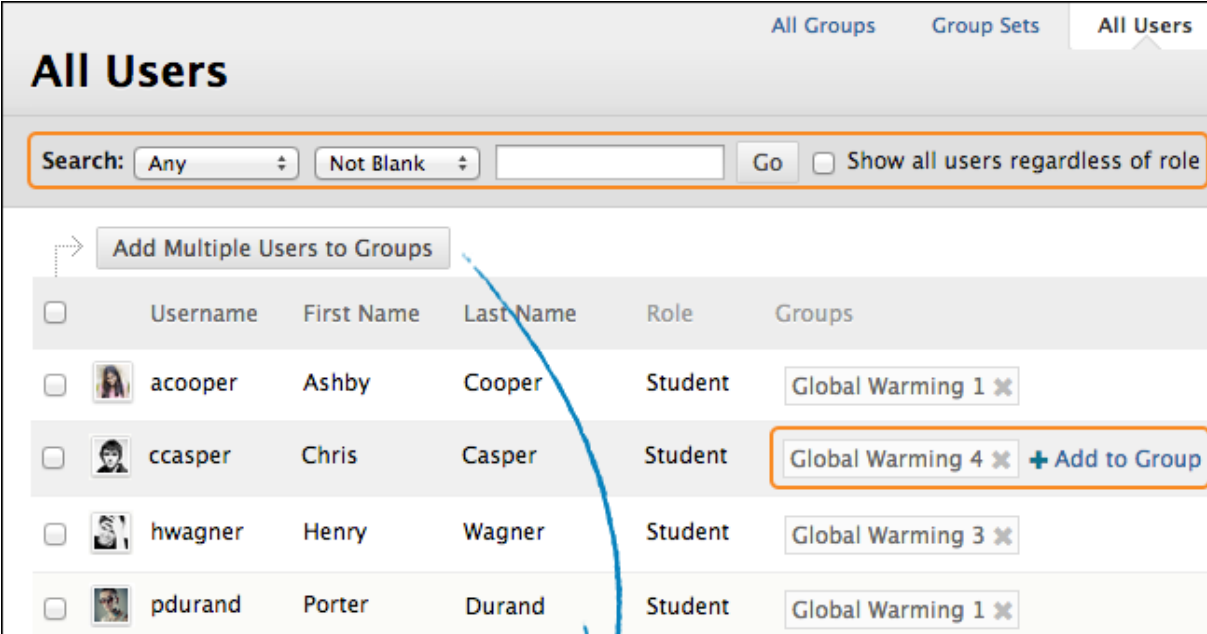
	Name	Group Set	Enrolled Members	Self-Enroll	Available	Blogs	Collaboration	Discussion Board	Email	File Exchange	Journals	Tasks	Wikis
<input type="checkbox"/>	Global Warming 1	-	3	No	Yes	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
<input type="checkbox"/>	Global Warming 2	-	3	No	Yes	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
<input type="checkbox"/>	Global Warming 3	-	3	No	Yes	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗

After you create groups, you have the option to make tools available or unavailable. Click the check mark in a tool's column to make it unavailable—an **X** appears. Click the **X** in a tool's column to make it available—a check mark appears.

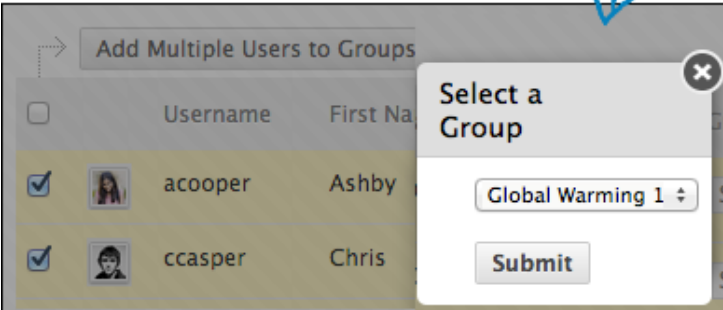
With the **Bulk Actions** drop-down list on the action bar, you can select groups for deletion or create smart views in the Grade Center for each group. A smart view is a focused look at the Grade Center. It shows only the columns that match a set of criteria, and the view is saved for continued use. When the Grade Center includes a great number of students and columns, you can use smart views to quickly find data.

TOUR the ALL USERS PAGE

On the **Groups** page, click the **All Users** link at the top of the page. On the **All Users** page, you can view which groups students belong to, search for users, add multiple users to a group you select, and delete users from groups.



	Username	First Name	Last Name	Role	Groups
<input type="checkbox"/>	acooper	Ashby	Cooper	Student	Global Warming 1 ✕
<input type="checkbox"/>	ccasper	Chris	Casper	Student	Global Warming 4 ✕ + Add to Group
<input type="checkbox"/>	hwagner	Henry	Wagner	Student	Global Warming 3 ✕
<input type="checkbox"/>	pdurand	Porter	Durand	Student	Global Warming 1 ✕



	Username	First Name
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	acooper	Ashby
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ccasper	Chris

Select a Group

Global Warming 1 ▾

Submit



Group code

On the **Groups** page, you can reveal unique identifiers for each group that are used strictly for importing groups.

Group homepage

Each group generates a page that becomes 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 **Report Card**, visible only to the member who added the modules.

Group set

You have the ability to generate multiple groups at one time.

Manual enroll

You assign each student to the course group you want them in. Manual enrollment is available for both single groups and group sets.

My Groups panel

The **My Groups** panel appears following the course menu. It provides direct links to the group space for each group a student belongs to. Students can expand the panel to reveal all the tools that are available for the group to use. The panel appears automatically if a user is enrolled in one or more groups.

Random enroll

For group sets, the system automatically distributes membership based on a designated number of students per group or the designated number of groups.

Self-enroll


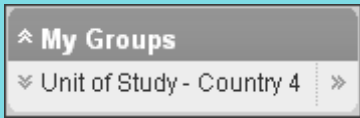



With sign-up sheets, you can allow students to sign up for the groups they want to join.

IN ACTION

In Olivia's teacher education course, online students create lesson plans that incorporate a unifying theme across different subject areas. Olivia divides her 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
	Channing receives an email from his instructor that directs him to the group homepage.
	Channing accesses the group homepage and sees the names of other group members and the group assignment.
	Channing 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.
	They submit the final project for a grade by using the group assignment link on the group homepage.



[Student View: Working in Groups](#)

GROUP COMMUNICATION TOOLS

You can add any or all of the following tools for a group to use:

-  Blogs
-  Collaboration, in chat or the virtual classroom
-  Discussion board
-  Email
-  File exchange
-  Journals
-  Tasks
-  Wikis

If a tool does not appear as an option, your school may have disabled it.

After students are members of a group, they can access group tools to communicate with other members, view group tasks, and fulfill group assignments.



[Group Tools](#)

[Send Email to a Course Group](#)

[Group Homepage](#)

[File Exchange](#)

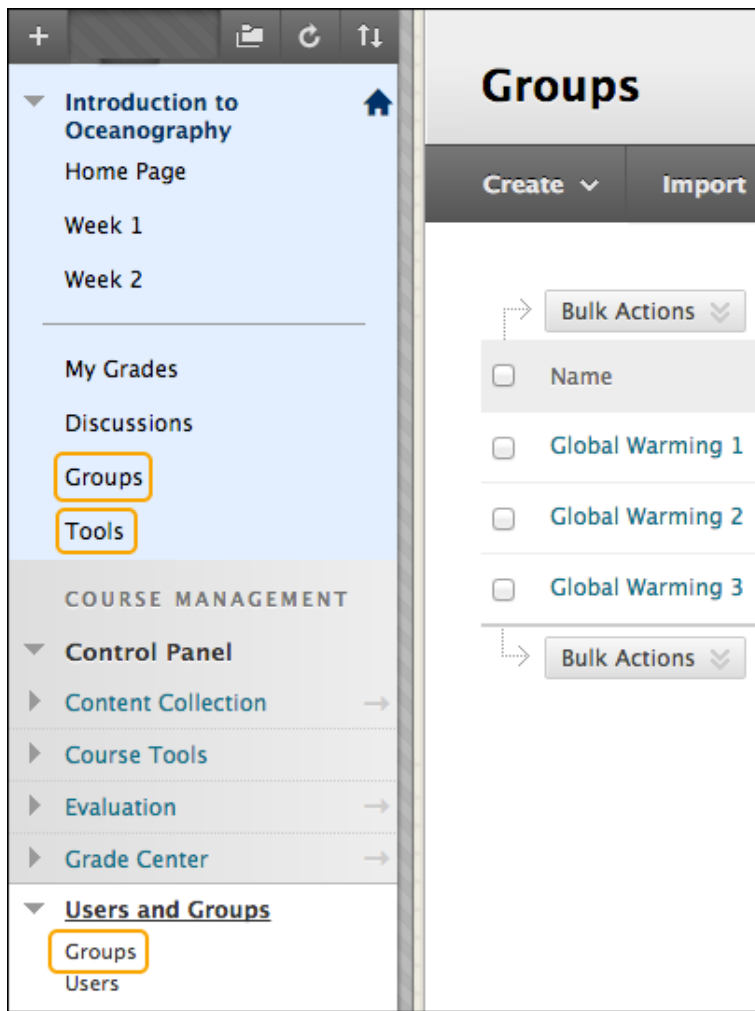
BEST PRACTICE

To help students understand your expectations, **establish discussion etiquette** immediately. You can model proper online interaction and reinforce appropriate behavior with public recognition.

In addition, you can provide specific guidelines, such as:

- Use **descriptive subject lines** to make threads easy to follow and scan.
- **Keep posts short** and use uncomplicated language. Your audience is reading onscreen and may have several messages to read. Also, English may not be the first language of all participants.
- **Include something new** in your reply. For example, include more than “I do not agree” or “Good point.”
- **Back up your statements** when you agree or disagree with others.
- Use professional language, including **proper grammar**, in academic-related posts. No slang, emoticons, or chat acronyms allowed.
- **Use attachments or links** to websites for long, detailed information.
- **Stay on topic**. If you want to introduce a new tangent, find a suitable forum or start a new thread if it is allowed.
- Be **respectful** of other people's opinions and remember the golden rule—to treat others, as you want to be treated.
- For graded forums and threads, tell students specifically what you expect both in terms of **quantity and quality** of posts, and consider sharing some exemplary posts. You can also use rubrics to help students understand your objectives. By compiling your grading criteria in a rubric, you can provide students with clear performance standards and grade consistently.

ACCESS the GROUPS TOOL



In a new course, click the default **Groups** link on the course menu.

-OR-

Access groups using the default **Tools** link on the course menu. On the **Tools** page, select **Groups**.

-OR-

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

CREATE SINGLE GROUPS

Quick Steps

The Facts

You can **create groups one at a time or in sets**. You can manually select group members or allow students to self-enroll.

As you learned, **each group has its own space, or homepage**, with links to tools to help students collaborate.

Only you 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.

Do It

1. On the **Groups** page, point to **Create** on the action bar to access the drop-down list.
2. Under **Single Group**, select **Self-Enroll** or **Manual Enroll**.
3. On the **Create Group** page, type a **Name** and optional **Description**.
4. Select the group availability, tools, and grading options.
5. For self-enroll **Sign-up Options**, type the **Name of Sign-up Sheet** and provide instructions. You might tell students that they cannot unenroll themselves from groups. Type the **Maximum Number of Members**. Select any other **Sign-up options** you want to include.

-OR-

For the manual enroll **Membership** section, search for and select students from the **Add Users** pop-up window.
6. Click **Submit**.

Help

[About Group Enrollment](#)

CREATE GROUP SETS

Quick Steps

The Facts

You can **generate several groups at one time 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 randomly enrolls 6 students per group.

Do It

1. On the **Groups** page, point to **Create** on the action bar to access the drop-down list.
2. Under **Group Set**, select **Self-Enroll**, **Manual Enroll**, or **Random Enroll**
3. On the **Create** page, type a **Name** and optional **Description**.
4. Select the group availability, tools, and grading options.
5. For self-enroll **Sign-up options**, type the **Name of Sign-up Sheet**. Type the **Maximum Number of Members**. Select any other **Sign-up options** you want to include.
-OR-
6. For random enroll **Membership** section, type the **Number of Students per Group** to create or the **Number of Groups**. Select an option to **Determine how to enroll any remaining members**.
-OR-
For the manual enroll **Group Set Options** section, type the **Number of Groups** to create. On the next page, click **Add Users** for each group to make your selections.
7. Click **Submit**.

Help

[Add a Link to Your Group](#)

BEST PRACTICE

Selecting Group Members

As you learned, you can create groups 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 bring enough diversity, opinions, and learning styles for worthwhile brainstorming, productivity, and solutions. If you 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 can produce the best results. Students report preferring a group assignment made by an instructor to membership they choose for themselves.

You want to create groups that include individuals with varied strengths, knowledge, and even work habits. You need to consider gender and cultural differences 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 is 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—without the opportunity to know them individually. Though random assignment is easy for an instructor as no preparation is required, some students may view random assignment as their 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 and forming cliques. No students are excluded, disregarded, or 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 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 students self-select groups, they tend to do so based on previous relationships or characteristics: friends, teammates, organization membership, social groups on campus, ethnicity, or 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. They may already have a high level of trust and agreement so 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. You can also use self-enroll groups for group formation based on interest, non-graded collaborations, extra credit, volunteer situations, or for study groups.

TRY IT

For this activity, use your **Practice Course**.

Explore the Groups page

- On the **Groups** page, access the drop-down lists and experiment with the functions. For example, show and hide tool availability. You can also change a group's tools. **Do not delete any groups.**
- Access a group's contextual menu to view the options.

Create groups

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

Self-enroll in a group

- Click **Groups** on the course menu and change **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** panel following the course menu.

EDIT GROUPS

On the **Groups** page, you can create groups, as well as edit and manage them. Each group's contextual menu provides access to the group homepage and email. You can also access the options to edit group properties, create smart views, and delete groups.

Editing a group allows you to add or remove members, as well as change its name, availability, and tools.

From a group's contextual menu, you can delete a group. If grade columns exist in the Grade Center for the group such as for gradable group blogs, journals, or wikis, you can retain the columns. On the **Delete Confirmation** page, do not select the check boxes for any columns that you need to preserve.

You can allow students to create their own self-enroll groups. On the **Groups** page, click **Group Settings** on the action bar and make your selections.



[Edit Groups](#)

[Remove Members](#)

IMPORT and EXPORT GROUPS

You can export a CSV (comma-separated value) file containing your existing groups and group members, reorganize as needed offline, and then import them.

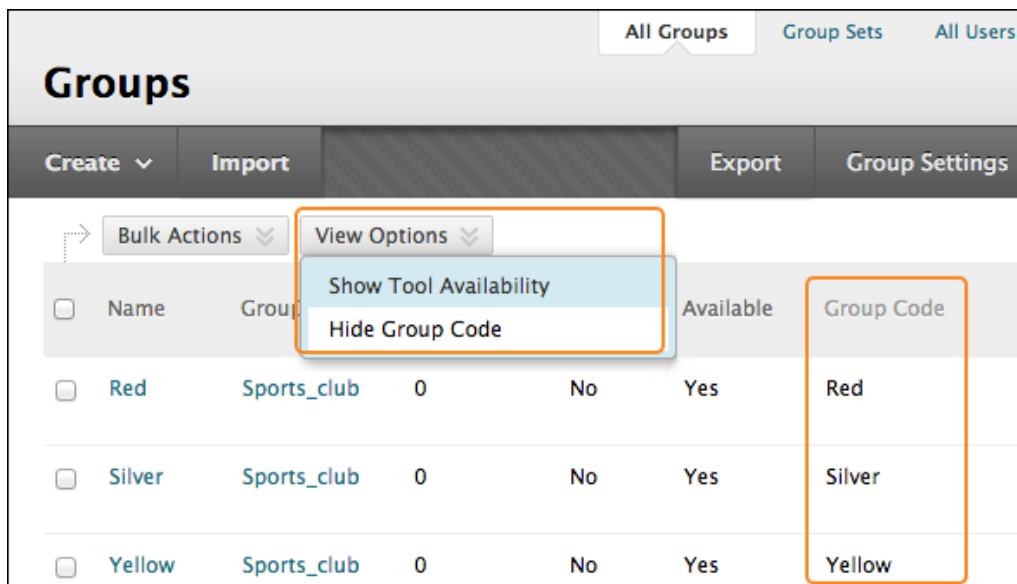
You can use the import and export functions to add new users and groups, but you cannot remove users or groups. During these processes, you cannot add new users to your course.

Group Codes

Group codes are unique identifiers used strictly for import purposes. You may reveal a column in the interface to see the group codes, but you cannot edit group codes while in your course.

Group codes also appear in downloaded CSV files. You can edit the group codes in the CSV file when importing existing users to a group to ensure the users are added to the correct group. Group codes are necessary to provide a way to identify each group in case they have the same name.

When viewing all groups, use the **View Options** drop-down list to show and hide the **Group Code** column.



The screenshot shows the Blackboard Groups interface. At the top, there are tabs for "All Groups", "Group Sets", and "All Users". Below these is a header bar with "Groups". Under the header bar are buttons for "Create", "Import", "Export", and "Group Settings". A "Bulk Actions" dropdown menu is open, showing "View Options". The "View Options" dropdown menu is open, showing "Show Tool Availability" and "Hide Group Code". The "Group Code" column is highlighted with an orange box. The table below shows three groups: Red, Silver, and Yellow, all under the "Sports_club" group set. The "Group Code" column shows the group names: Red, Silver, and Yellow.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Name	Group			Available	Group Code
<input type="checkbox"/>	Red	Sports_club	0	No	Yes	Red
<input type="checkbox"/>	Silver	Sports_club	0	No	Yes	Silver
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yellow	Sports_club	0	No	Yes	Yellow





FREQUENTLY ASKED



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 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 you, to gauge group participation.



How do I let my presence be known?

Provide direct feedback to individual students or general comments and suggestions to the group as a whole. Although the instructor's name does not come up in the group list, you can automatically:

-  Contribute to the discussion forums.
-  Participate in the virtual classroom and chat sessions.
-  Submit and access files in file exchange.

If you enroll yourself in a group, you will also receive group email.



How do I provide access to resources?

Steer them toward the best resources so they use their time efficiently. Provide documents or lists of websites in file exchange or the group discussion board.



For this activity, use your **Practice Course**.

Edit and manage groups

- Add yourself to each group so you receive group email.
- Delete one of the **Mars** groups.
- In a content area, add a link to one of the groups you created.



BEST PRACTICE

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

Goal	Use of technology
Prepare students for success	<p>Have a real-time kickoff meeting in chat to explain how the group should function.</p> <p>Provide direction during initial group discussions.</p> <p>Handle technical difficulties promptly and provide a list of frequently asked questions.</p>
Create instructor presence	<p>Provide feedback throughout the process in the group tools, such as group discussion board and group journal.</p> <p>Enroll yourself in the groups to receive group email.</p> <p>Hold regular office hours.</p>
Set timelines	<p>Use announcements, calendar, and group email to remind students of upcoming due dates. Alternatively, use the notification modules on the course home page in place of announcements and the calendar.</p>
Provide objectives and instructions	<p>Provide an assignment overview, grading rubric, instructions, task checklists, and resources.</p>
Promote sharing	<p>Teach students the different ways to share ideas and work, such as through the group discussion board, chat, group blogs, or file exchange.</p>
Keep it interesting	<p>Assign unique case studies to each group.</p> <p>Have participants role-play and take on their assigned persona in online interactions.</p> <p>Create groups randomly or pick a heterogeneous mix of students to generate various viewpoints.</p>

SPOTLIGHT on YOUR COURSE

Use this guide to document the phases for designing collaborative learning projects.²

Forming the groups

- How many students will you add to 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

- 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 or chat?
- 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 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 you assign grades based on individual contribution?
- Will group members help determine the grades of others in their groups?

GOING FURTHER

To continue learning about the Blackboard Learn groups and tools, and ways you can use them, visit these training manuals and Blackboard Help topics.

Manuals	<i>Assignments</i>
	<i>Interactive Tools</i>
Blackboard Help	<u>Create Group Assignments</u>
	<u>Grade Group Assignments</u>
	<u>Rubrics</u>

Bibliography

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

²Reid, J., Forrestal, P., & Cook, J. (1989). *Small group learning in the classroom*. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann.