

## CIE DigiGuide: Online group work

### Overview

This DigiGuide focuses on how online group work can be facilitated using technologies available at the university, it includes:

- [Why use group work?](#)
- [Tips for effective online group work;](#)
- Brief overview of digital tools to support online group work:
  - [Canvas](#) for Canvas users, see also separate step-by-step guide [link];
  - [MS Teams](#) for VITAL/Canvas users, see also separate step-by-step guide [link];
  - [BuddyCheck](#), a peer evaluation tool of group work contribution available in Canvas.
- And [an example of online group work](#).

### Institutional policy/guidance on group work:

- See the Code of Practice of Assessment (CoPA): [Appendix G Annex 1](#): Guidelines for Staff on Group Work. Also check in case your School/Institute has their own guidance (e.g. ULMS).

### Why use group work?

Group work (GW) is a primary element of active learning. Effective design and delivery of group work can potentially foster deep learning, help boost students' confidence and sense of belonging. In the current situation we are moving towards a hybrid model of teaching and group work has a key role to play here. Our face to face interactions with students and also their peer to peer communication is going to be minimised, so group work can deepen engagement with the course and help reduce loneliness and isolation (Hammar Chiriac, 2014; Lui, Poon, & Ng, 2018; Masika & Jones, 2016).

### Tips for effective online group work

1. Ensure assessment outcomes are clear and linked to learning outcomes.
2. Ensure the task is not too complex and is explained clearly.
3. Ensure students have a clear understanding of the assessment expectations- if possible provide them with a marking rubric.
4. The optimal group size is 3-6 members. If possible, avoid large groups.
5. When designing the task, consider that online group work might take significantly longer compared with face to face group work.
6. If possible, divide the task into smaller elements to keep students on track.
7. Build students' digital and communication skills before the actual group work activity takes place by implementing formative assessment, PBL activities, discussions and seminars.
8. Implement formative assessments and activities to allow groups to develop their dynamics and familiarise themselves with the platform.
9. Provide sufficient technical support.
10. Set some rules. You can ask your learners to sign a group work contract in which they specify their roles, meeting times, responsibilities and etc. (this can be one of the first activities they are asked to do).
11. Ensure your chosen platform is suitable for the group task.

12. If possible, facilitate and monitor the group activities and discussion (at least at the beginning). This would help groups to understand what is expected from them and how to get started and communicate.

## Digital tools to support online group work

### Canvas

You can create groups easily in Canvas. Each group will have its own space and tools such as discussion board, collaborative documents, shared files, etc. Canvas groups are suitable for asynchronous group work. Once you have your groups, you can also set group assignments (one submission per group) and group discussions linked directly to your module content areas. For synchronous working, learners can use video conferencing tools, chats (in Teams) or collaborate on documents within Canvas or Office 365.

### Considerations

- Bigbluebutton (Canvas's conference feature) only hosts 10 concurrent meetings. As such, it is better to encourage the groups to use MS Teams meeting or Zoom for their meetings. See also our [web conferencing tools guide](#).
- There is no private chat function for the groups in Canvas. Students can use Teams chat instead.
- If you want to use the [Canvas discussion board](#), you need to moderate it and perhaps post interesting discussion topics or conversation starters to encourage contributions.

### To create groups in your course space on Canvas

- Consult our step-by-step [DigiGuide on Creating groups in Canvas](#).

### Other links / resources

- More information on [All About Group Work FAQ site](#). (external)

### MS Teams

Setting a group activity in Teams is relatively easy. You can use channels or group chats. Teams can be used for both synchronous (video chat, collaborate document, live chat) and asynchronous group work (discussions in channels or chat).

### Considerations

- Channels need to be created by the Team's owner (unless students (members) are given permission to do so). Members of groups, however, can create their own chats. If you want to monitor the group activity, you need to create the chats yourself and add yourself or member of staff.
- If you don't want the groups to be able see each other's work, use *private* channels or chats but make sure you add yourself or member of staff to moderate them.

### To create groups on MS Teams

- Consult our step-by-step [DigiGuide on Creating groups in MS Teams](#).

### Other links / resources

You can learn more here:

- More information on using [MS Teams for teaching and learning](#) (CIE guide).
- This is a great [visual overview of the different functions in Teams](#) (Microsoft guide).

## BuddyCheck – a tool for peer evaluation of contribution to group work

### Overview

To assist you with marking group work we also have an institutional licence for BuddyCheck. This is a tool for peer evaluation of members' contribution to group work, integrated in Canvas. Student group members are asked to evaluate their peers by giving a Likert-scale rate on different criteria.

### Why use BuddyCheck?

Peer evaluation ratings can be really useful to assure fairness of the group process, by enabling tutors to inflect the grades of group members, based on their group contribution (+/- the average group mark), as demonstrated by students' feedback on Dr Andy Bates' survey below (see full video case study: [Peer evaluation of groupwork using Buddycheck and Canvas](#)). Students also found the tool very easy to use.

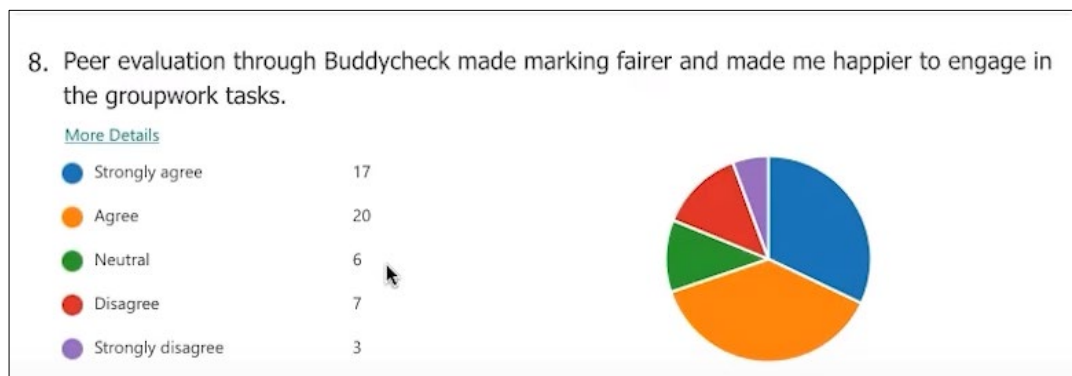


Figure 1 Student survey results on use of BuddyCheck as a peer evaluation tool of their group work contribution (Source: Andy Bates, Life Sciences, Semester 2, 2019/20, n=45)

### How does BuddyCheck work?

1. You set up your groups in Canvas, and create an evaluation in BuddyCheck.
2. Groups work on their project (e.g. report, presentation) – typically getting a group mark.
3. Tutor asks students to evaluate their team members according to set criteria drawn from rigorous research (e.g. Ohland *et al.*, 2012) (Figure 2).
4. Free text comments can also be set by the tutor.
5. Students carry out the peer evaluation.
6. Buddycheck presents students with their self- & peer rating, and the group mean (Figure 3).
7. Buddycheck computes a factor which can be used to inflect the group mark (Figure 4).
8. Students get an individual mark: a composite of the group product and their contribution.

See Andy Bates demonstrating [how peer evaluation of group work works via BuddyCheck on Canvas](#).

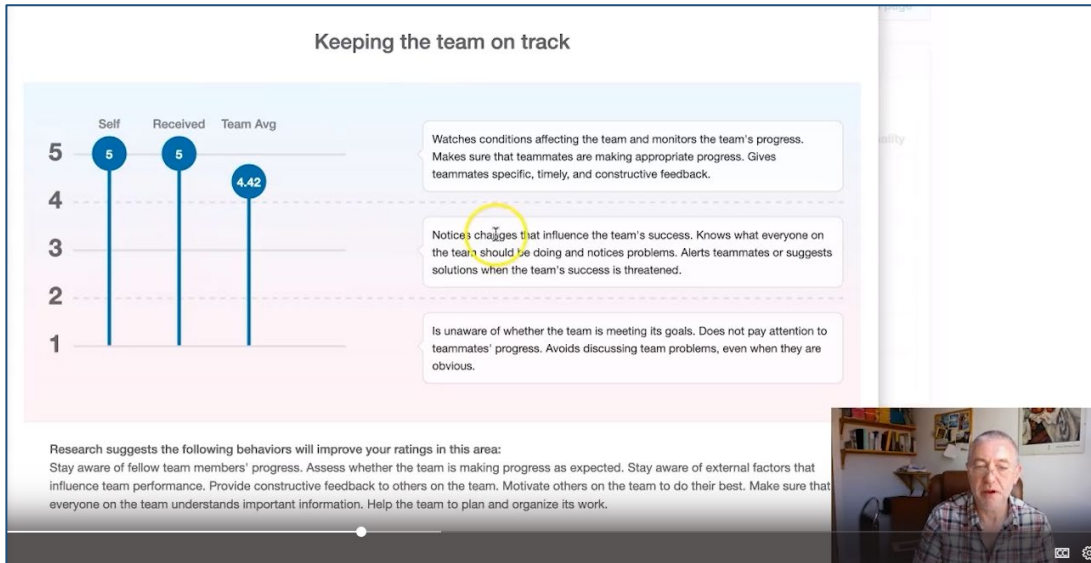


Figure 2 Screenshot of BuddyCheck: result of a student's self- and peer ('received') as compared with the team average on the criteria of 'keeping the team on track' (Source: case study video, Andy Bates, Life Sciences)

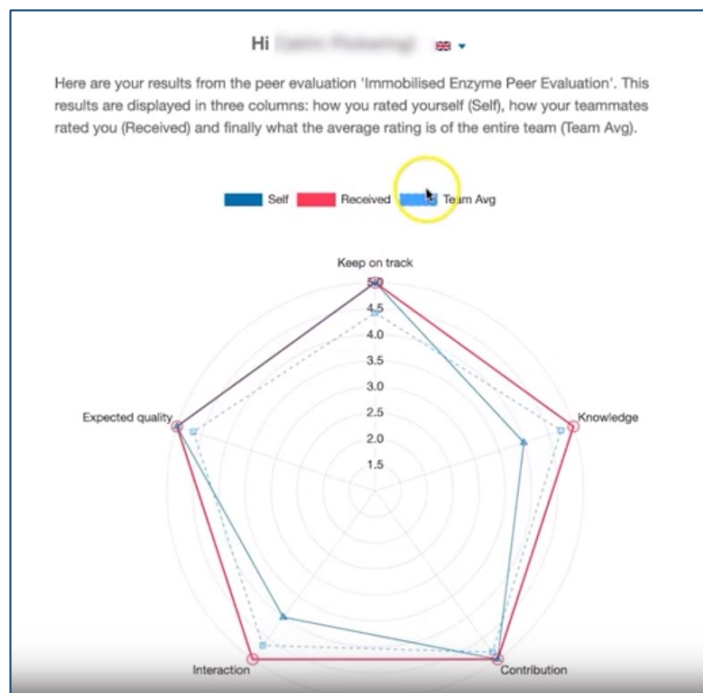


Figure 3 Screenshot of BuddyCheck: result of a student's self- and peer ('received') as compared with the team average on all the five criteria (Source: case study video, Andy Bates, Life Sciences)






Student ⇅	Group ⇅	Labels	Avg	Factor	Submitted ⇅
	LIFE224 Group 1		5	1.07	2 months ago
	LIFE224 Group 1		4.2	0.9	2 months ago
	LIFE224 Group 1		4.87	1.04	2 months ago
	LIFE224 Group 1		4.6	0.99	2 months ago
	LIFE224 Group 10		3.27	0.81	2 months ago

Figure 4 Screenshot of BuddyCheck: the factor computed by BuddyCheck (1=team average, 1< member contributed above team average, >1 member contributed below team average). The factors in well working groups are all close to 1. (Source: case study video, Andy Bates, Life Sciences)

## Example of an online group work activity

Group presentation (summative or formative):

- Groups are assigned with a topic.
- They research this together or divide it between themselves.
- They work together to produce multimedia such as PowerPoint, Word document, video, podcast and etc.
- They present back to the class either synchronously in a class video conference or asynchronously by uploading their recorded presentation as a group assignment.
- Fellow learners and the module team can then comment on the uploaded groups' products.
- Each group member can be also asked to write a reflective report and rate their team members' and their own contribution to the group process in BuddyCheck.
- Students receive an individual mark based on their group product and their group contribution factor.

The above example can be used for a range of group tasks.

Dr Linda Kaye in her blog explains step by step how she set up group work in MS Teams, you can read it here: [How Microsoft Teams can support group work](#)

Watch an example of [using groups in Canvas and Buddycheck](#) by Dr Andy Bates, Life Sciences.

## References

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Lui, A. K. F., Poon, M. H. M., & Ng, S. C. (2018). A Digital Storytelling Group Assignment for Fostering Sense of Belonging of First-Year Students. In *International Conference on Blended Learning* (pp. 136–147). Springer.

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