

# Group Work That Does Not Collapse

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Role cards are not the mechanism. Individual accountability and a real shared goal are. From the guide at [ElevateTheNorm.com/group-work-roles-for-students/](https://ElevateTheNorm.com/group-work-roles-for-students/) — no new claims, no email required.

**The finding that should change your planning:** a meta-analysis of 51 effect sizes put cooperative learning's achievement effect at 0.54 — and found the **secondary level significantly lower** than both primary and university. Group work is hardest to make pay in exactly the grades this page is written for.

## Five tests before you assign a single role

| # | Test                                                           | If the answer is no                                                        |
|---|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Does each student produce something with their own name on it? | You have a group grade, not accountability. Add an individual artifact.    |
| 2 | Would the task actually fail if one person did it alone?       | It is not a group task. It is parallel homework with a seating plan.       |
| 3 | Does the group need each other's work to finish?               | Build in the dependency, or expect one student to carry it.                |
| 4 | Can you say what each role actually <i>does</i> this period?   | The card is decoration. Cut it or define it.                               |
| 5 | Do roles rotate?                                               | Assignment bias quietly hardens into a caste system. Rotate automatically. |

## The one sentence that answers the parent email

"Your child is graded on the work that carries their name. The group score does not replace it, and it does not average with it."

If you cannot say that truthfully about your task, the task needs changing before the next complaint, not after it.

## The marking cost, stated honestly

Four individual artifacts per group is more to look at. **Check them; do not mark them all.** A tick, a score and one line is enough. If you write full comments on every one you will quit this structure by November, and then nothing is accountable.

# The Group Task Planner

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Fill this in before you make the cards. If a box will not fill, that is the finding.

| Field                                                                                                                      | Mine                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The shared goal</b><br>One thing the group genuinely cannot reach alone.                                                | <input type="text"/><br><input type="text"/>                         |
| <b>Group size</b><br>The cooperative-learning evidence does not settle it. The loafing literature points to three or four. | <input type="text"/>                                                 |
| <b>Each student's individual artifact</b><br>Named, marked on its own merits.                                              | <input type="text"/><br><input type="text"/>                         |
| <b>The dependency</b><br>What one member holds that the others need.                                                       | <input type="text"/><br><input type="text"/>                         |
| <b>Roles, if any — and what each DOES today</b>                                                                            | <input type="text"/><br><input type="text"/><br><input type="text"/> |
| <b>Rotation plan</b>                                                                                                       | <input type="text"/>                                                 |

## What the evidence actually supports

| Claim                                             | Status                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cooperative learning raises achievement           | <b>Supported</b> — ES 0.54 across 51 effect sizes, but significantly weaker at secondary level than at primary or tertiary.                       |
| Assigning roles improves outcomes                 | <b>Not established.</b> A 2023 review of 36 studies states the empirical evidence for the role-assignment assumption “has not yet been provided.” |
| Group rewards beat individual rewards             | <b>No significant difference</b> in the meta-analysis — which the authors themselves flag as contradicting earlier reviews.                       |
| Making effort matter works like making it watched | <b>Supported</b> — unevaluated participants who believed their effort was instrumental matched the evaluated condition.                           |