

Improving Teamwork

Once your project is underway, you may want to develop mini-lessons to improve teamwork. Consider using Harmin's "task and team skill group" strategy where a small group works on a task and simultaneously practices a teamwork skill.

Step 1 is to assign students an individual task. The following are examples of school museum tasks:

- Draft a letter to someone who has firsthand knowledge of your focus question and request information or an interview.
- Create a preliminary drawing of your exhibit.
- Design one interactive component for your exhibit.

Step 2 is to assign a group product for the task. Examples that correspond to tasks listed in Step 1:

- Final version of a letter that incorporates the best of individual drafts
- Drawing of the exhibit that incorporates the best of individual preliminary drawings
- Interactive components for the exhibit that incorporates the best of individual ideas

Students work in their exhibit teams to create this product, and they practice one or two specific teamwork skills that need to be developed, such as listening closely to one another, disagreeing respectfully, paraphrasing, or sharing opinions honestly. Students should consider how they might demonstrate these skills. For example, if they plan to practice listening closely to one another, they should first brainstorm what they might say or do when they are not listening well and when they are listening well.

Step 3 is to review the teamwork skill as soon as teams have developed their product. Ask students to do some reflective writing: "When did you or someone in your group practice the target skill? What would you do next time you have a chance to practice this skill? In what other situations in your life could you use this skill?" After students reflected on the lesson, engage in a large-group discussion about these questions.

Step 4 is to review the task and the work of each small group.

Source: Harmin, Merrill, *Inspiring Active Learning*, ASCD, 1994 (page 114)