

SUCCESSFUL GROUP WORK

13 Activities to Teach Teamwork Skills

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by Patrice Palmer

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Introduction

The activities in this book make up a complete course to teach students the teamwork skills they need to work effectively in groups. It is designed for teachers in any subject area who want to use group projects in their classroom and want to prepare their students to work effectively in teams.

Group work has a number of benefits. During my 20-year career as an ESL/EFL teacher, and TESL Trainer, I have used group work countless times. Group work increases student talk time. It gives students a chance to interact with each other and negotiate meaning, providing opportunities for authentic conversation between students. Groups do better at tasks because they share resources and strengths while compensating for weaknesses in each other. When students are proficient at group work, you can assign them more complicated and interesting tasks and projects.

However, you cannot just say to students, “Form a group and work on the task” without putting the time and energy in ahead of time to teach teamwork skills. Without those skills, we all know what can happen. One or two students end up doing all the work. The rest of the group barely participates, meaning they don’t learn. Or the students end up working on the project separately, missing the point of working as a team. The activities in this book emphasize the benefits of teamwork so that students will want to work together.

In other cases, some students may believe that they have nothing to contribute, while other students feel that they can do it all themselves. To prevent this, activities such as Tower Building and Assigning Roles in Groups help students understand that everyone has something to contribute to a project. Students also learn how to organize groups successfully and the value of contributions from different sources.

In some cases, a disagreement may tear a group apart. That's why this book also has activities that target consensus-building and conflict resolution. In fact, students will learn that while disagreements can be difficult, there can also be positive outcomes from conflict.

It may seem time-consuming to implement the activities before students begin working together, however preparing students in advance will help to ensure a successful outcome.

Why Use Team Building Activities?

Team building activities demonstrate different aspects of team behaviors and get students to think about what is essential in order to reach their desired goals or outcomes. Team building activities can also help students think about how certain behaviours contribute to the success of the project. And how other behaviours can obstruct the success of a project or goal. Students will learn positive behaviors from this book such as good communication, problem solving skills, trust, and taking advantage of the strengths of each team member.

Team building activities improve communication skills. The activities outlined in this chapter are practical, experiential, and interactive, providing students with interesting ways to understand what teamwork skills mean, why they are important, and how these skills can be developed for learning, employment and life. Team building activities are also fun. They develop motivation to work in groups.

It is important for students to understand that their teamwork skills are not only developed in dedicated activities like those described in this book. Teamwork skills can, and should be, developed and practiced within their course work. These skills will help students succeed in their studies and their life. As students learn how to work effectively in teams, this should help make your job as teacher easier and more rewarding.

What are Teamwork Skills?

Employability Skills 2000+ published by the Conference Board of Canada are “the skills you need to enter, stay in, and progress in the world of work—whether you work on your own or as a part of a team. These skills can also be applied and used beyond the workplace in a range of daily activities”¹.

Teamwork skills make up one third of those Key Skills. In fact, teamwork skills are so important to our students’ futures, that they are called Employability Skills by the US Department of Education.

The activities in this book target the teamwork skills identified by The Conference Board of Canada. The list below shows the skills most strongly targeted by each activity, although students will be practicing a variety of teamwork skills in every activity.

1. **Stand up If . . .** recognize and respect people’s diversity, individual differences, and perspectives
2. **Getting to Know Your Group** recognize and respect people’s diversity, individual differences, and perspectives
3. **Ground Rules** understand and work within the dynamics of a group
4. **Word Lists** plan, design, or carry out a project or task from start to finish
5. **Team Challenge** contribute to a team by sharing information and expertise

1 Conference Board of Canada, *Employability Skills 2000+* <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/topics/education/learning-tools/employability-skills.aspx>

6. **Tower Building** contribute to a team by sharing information and expertise; select and use appropriate tools and technology for a task or projects
7. **Working in Groups** be flexible: respect, be open to, and supportive of the thoughts, opinions and contributions of others in a group; recognize and respect people's diversity, individual differences, and perspectives
8. **Assigning Roles in Groups** lead or support when appropriate, motivating a group for high performance
9. **Consensus Building** be flexible: respect, be open to, and supportive of the thoughts, opinions, and contributions of others in a group; accept and provide feedback in a constructive and considerate manner
10. **Resolving Conflict** understand the role of conflict when appropriate; manage and resolve conflict when appropriate
11. **Journal Writing** continuously monitor the success of a project or task and identify ways to improve; improve communication skills
12. **Self-Reflection** develop a plan, seek feedback, test, revise, and implement
13. **Final Evaluation** develop a plan, seek feedback, test, revise, and implement

How to Use This Book

This book contains 13 activities that teach and develop students' teamwork skills. It is designed for teachers who want their students to improve their teamwork skills before participating in a group

project or other group work. You can use these activities individually to practice a particular teamwork skill. However, this book works best if your students go through all 13 activities, starting before your students begin their group project. This will set your students up for success in group work.

The timing of the activities is somewhat flexible. Some activities clearly work best if they are done before a group project. These include the activities in the Getting to Know You and The Benefits of Teamwork Section. You may want to do these in the first week of class or the week before introducing a group project.

Others such as the Team Building Activities and Learning Teamwork Skills Activities can be done before students begin their group project. However, you could also do them parallel to the group work, giving students a chance to realize what they are learning in their teams. The Reflection and Evaluation Activities work best during or after the group project.

In addition, as students work in groups, you may notice that they could benefit from revisiting some of the activities. Feel free to go back and repeat some of the activities, giving students a chance to reinforce specific teamwork skills. Many of the activities are short enough that they can be done in the first half of class, leaving the second half for group work.

As you go through the activities in this book, it is important to explain the instructions clearly to the students and to check their understanding of the instructions before starting the activity.

For each activity, remember to take time to fully explain the expectations you have from students, as well as the goal of the activity. Some students prefer to work on their own so teachers may have to “sell” the idea of a group project by making students aware of

the benefits of teamwork (Activity 4: Word Lists is a good place to start).

Each activity is followed by a set of debriefing questions. Please do not skip these. It is essential that students have a chance to discuss how the activity enhanced their understanding of teamwork and their role as a team member.

As you prepare each activity, and then evaluate the session, you can use these objective statements to guide you:

After this lesson, students will:

- understand and discuss what the benefits are in developing their teamwork skills
- learn and apply a useful teamwork skill
- experience and demonstrate examples of what effective teamwork is
- understand clear guidelines regarding teamwork before they are expected to work together
- apply the guidelines for effective teamwork
- be provided with feedback on their teamwork skills in order to reflect on successes and areas for improvement

The activities in this book will set up your students for success in groupwork by teaching them team building skills. Your students will then be ready for any group project or task you give them. They will then be able to apply the skills learned in your class to other projects in school and eventually in the workplace.

Activity 1: Stand Up If...

Not only does this activity require very little preparation, but students enjoy it.

TIME:	<i>5 minutes</i>
MATERIALS	<i>a set of 8-10 statements prepared in advance</i>
TEAM BUILDING SKILL:	<i>recognize and respect people's diversity, individual differences, and perspectives.</i>

Procedure

1. Explain to the class that you will read off a statement. If they can answer “yes” to the statement, they have to stand up.
2. You can also reverse the activity by having students start off standing and sit down if they can answer “yes” to the statement. The statements should be worded to help students learn interesting facts about each other and develop an awareness of the similarities and differences in groups.

Here are a few statements that work well.

Stand up if...

you are an only child

you can play a musical instrument

you can speak more than three languages

you have been to Japan

you like chocolate

you like coffee

you are the oldest in your family

you are the youngest in your family

you like to cook

you think learning English is difficult

you have a pet

you can swim well

you like working in teams

you liked this activity

Activity 5: Team Challenge

This quick team building activity is fun and can create a lot of noise so be prepared.

TIME:	<i>5 minutes</i>
MATERIALS:	<i>List of items to be displayed on a flipchart or PowerPoint slide. You can also dictate the list to the class. The list of items should be easily found in your classroom or students' backpacks/purses.</i>
TEAM BUILDING SKILL:	<i>contribute to a team by sharing information and expertise</i>

Procedure

1. Put students into groups.
2. Display or dictate the list of items.
3. Tell students that their group will work together to find the items on this list, as quickly as possible.
4. All items need to be displayed on their team's table. When they have found all the items, the team shouts, "Finished! Teamwork!"
5. The other groups should continue until all the groups have finished. Make a list of the order in which the groups finish so you can check the items group by group when all groups have finished.
6. The group that finishes first (and has all the correct items) are the winners.

Debriefing Questions

- How well did your team work together?
- Did your team have a strategy before you started on this challenge?
- What skills did you need in order to finish the task?
- What role did you play in this activity?
- How do you think this activity might be similar to your group project?
- How can you apply what you learned in this activity to your group project?

Sample List of Items:

pen

marker

book

gum

sunglasses

coin

hairbrush

photo

phone

student card

Activity 9: Consensus Building

This activity will give students an opportunity to practice brainstorming techniques while learning to come to a consensus, which is important for successful group work.

TIME:	<i>20 minutes</i>
MATERIALS:	<i>An ordinary object such as a paperclip, a spoon, or a pencil.</i>
TEAM BUILDING SKILL:	<i>be flexible: respect, be open to and supportive of the thoughts opinions and contributions of others in a group; Accept and provide feedback in a constructive and considerate manner</i>

Procedure

1. Explain that the purpose of brainstorming is to come up with as many ideas as possible in a short period of time, using the following rules:
 - Students should attempt to list as many ideas as possible within the given time limit.
 - During the brainstorm, no one says whether the ideas are good or bad, workable or not workable. All ideas are acceptable. After the brainstorm is finished, they will be able to evaluate all the ideas.
2. Show the object to the class. Ask students to suggest all the things that they could do with the object other than its purpose (for example, a spoon is used for eating so students must list

an alternative purpose). Encourage students to be creative with their responses. Give students 2 minutes for this part of the task.

3. When time is up, ask each group to read out their ideas. Write their suggestions on the board, noting any duplicate ideas.

Debriefing Questions

- What can you learn from sharing/pooling ideas?
- What was your strategy for getting your creative juices flowing?
- Was it difficult not to evaluate other people's ideas while brainstorming?
- What is a good way for teams to decide or come to a consensus on one idea?
- Is this a strategy that you can use in your teams when you need to make a decision?

About the Author

After 20 years in the ESL classroom, I have made the successful transition to teacherpreneur. A teacherpreneur is an educator who combines his/her creativity, skills and expertise to develop products, resources and/or services for additional income. In short, I make a living doing the things that I love: teaching, writing courses and ELT materials, blogging, as well as teaching online courses. And writing books like the one you are holding in your hands right now.

As a teacher, I have taught students from 8 to 80 years in a variety of educational environments such as English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), Business English, and taught communication courses at post-secondary institutions. During my 7 years in Hong Kong, I was responsible for developing English Language curricula for secondary schools, vocational training programs and summer intensive courses. I also developed and delivered workshops for teachers of English related to teaching and learning. The idea for this resource resulted from my work with teachers and students in Hong Kong.

I have a Master of Education degree in Teaching, Learning and Development from Brock University, Canada; a Master of Arts degree from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) of the University of Toronto and a Bachelor of Arts degree from York University, and an OCELT qualification.

As a teacherpreneur, I have written several online courses, including a 10-module course for students in Saudi Arabia, a course on Anger Management for a psychologist, a course in increasing one's well-being. I also have an e-book, *an A-Z Guide: How to Survive and Thrive as a New ESL Teacher* (coming out in a new edition from Alphabet Publishing soon) and *Dream Beyond the Classroom: The*

Essential Teacher to Teacherpreneur Toolkit. I also write bi-monthly blog posts for two ESL/EFL websites including my own weekly blog posts.

I am a certified trainer (CTDP) and I have a coaching credential with the Centre for Positive Psychology in the USA. I am also TESL Ontario certified and accredited as a TESL Trainer for Methodology and Theory, and accredited as a Practicum Supervisor and Academic Coordinator.

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If you have any questions about this book, please contact me at teslinstructor@gmail.com. You can also write to let me know if you would like to receive my free newsletter of weekly wisdom blog posts. Or find me on Twitter and LinkedIn.

For additional teaching resources for ESL/EFL teachers, please visit my website at www.patricepalmer.ca.

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