

Key Practices for Effective Small Group Facilitation

Small group teaching (via tutorials and seminars) helps students develop understanding through discussion and collaboration. Effective facilitation of these sessions creates the conditions for meaningful participation and productive discussion.

1 | SET STUDENTS UP FOR SUCCESS

Clear expectations help students engage confidently

- Explain the purpose of each activity and how it supports learning
- Provide clear instructions and timeframes
- Check students understand the task and invite questions before they begin
- Arrange the teaching space setup to support collaboration



2 | ENCOURAGE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Active participation helps students learn from one another

- Use icebreakers or introductory activities to build rapport
- Use structured discussion techniques (e.g. round robins, think-pair-share)
- Give students time to think individually before sharing with others
- Encourage students to share ideas, experiences and perspectives openly



3 | USE QUESTIONS PURPOSEFULLY

Questions can shape the quality of discussion and learning

- Ask questions encouraging students to think more deeply about the topic
- Use open-ended questions to invite explanation and analysis
- Ask students to justify and explain their reasoning
- Build on student contributions and draw out alternative perspectives



4 | FOSTER AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

Students participate more when they feel respected and valued

- Establish expectations for respectful class etiquette
- Monitor participation and ensure all voices can be heard
- Consider allocating groups rather than relying on self-selection
- Check Individual Student Support Agreements for reasonable adjustments



5 | CONSOLIDATE LEARNING

Reflection helps students make sense of key ideas

- Encourage students to identify key takeaways from the discussion
- Summarise the main themes and discussion points as a class
- Address any remaining questions or misconceptions
- Highlight connections to future classes, assessment or real-world practice



Need more support?

Contact the Centre for Educational Development (CED) for further advice on small group teaching and facilitation: ced@qub.ac.uk.