

Collaboration in Research—Norms, Expectations, and Best Practices

Module 5, Foundations for Collaborative Research

The College Board's Task 1, Collaborative Research Part 1

Students work in teams of three to five to identify, investigate, and analyze an academic or real-world problem or issue, e.g., local, national, global, academic/theoretical/philosophical). Each team develops a team research question and conducts preliminary research. They identify approaches, perspectives, or lenses and divide responsibilities among themselves for individual research that will address the team's research question. Then, collectively, each team designs and/or considers options and evaluates alternatives; develops a multimedia presentation to present the argument for their proposed solution or resolution; and provides an oral defense to questions posed by the teacher.

The College Board's Task 1, Collaborative Research Part 2

The Components

Individual Research Report (IRR)

- ★ 1200-word report, literature review
- ★ Scored by The College Board
- ★ Half the score for Task 1 (10% of overall score)

Team Presentation and Defense (TMP)

- ★ 8-10 presentation of argument
- ★ One oral defense question per group member
- ★ Scored by teacher/advisor after passing certification
- ★ Half the score for Task 1 (10% of overall score)

Groups in Task 1—Horizontal Research Collaboration



- ✓ Groups select a research topic, build an overarching research question
- ✓ Groups—together—identify subtopics and questions
 - Dissect major question, interpret through lenses
 - Recognize relevant perspectives in each lens
 - Each group member selects a different lens, approach
- ✓ Horizontal Research = cross-curricular, inter-disciplinary division of overall topic
- ✓ Research Collaboration is NOT “division of labor”
 - Students bring individual research together
 - Discuss along the process to ensure research & topic alignment
 - Evaluate intersections throughout the process, adapt/evolve research question for argument claim & evidence

Challenges That Arise in Collaborative Research —Part 1

- **Poor Use of Time:** research takes time & development—often meaning ‘scrapping’ dead ends or changing course when better questions or sources of information emerge; groups need to set schedules, assess timelines, and keep each other moving and accountable.
 - **Contribution Inequity:** it is easy to ‘divide the labor’ or allow certain members to ‘pick up the slack’; groups will need clear expectations for who is doing what work and ensuring that members are keeping up with the task.
 - **Lack of Inclusion, Professionalism:** it is easy for certain members to lead & dominate group decisions while other group members take a back seat—it may also be that groups form tensions and hostilities over differences of opinion; group dynamics require professionalism, detachment of personal feeling, and a need for compromise.
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Challenges That Arise in Collaborative Research —Part 2

- **Unclear Communication and Expectations:** often, groups make assumptions early on about the kind of work they're doing, divide the labor, and then only engage when required for the presentation; this makes for issues later on, lack of cohesion and alignment for the presentation, which means more work in the end.
- **Working with/as Friends*:** be aware that working with friends might make some things easier but can ultimately put the friendship—and the project—at risk, especially if engagement is lacking, professionalism isn't maintained, or assumptions are poorly made (may also mean that different perspectives are less likely to be engaged, which for this project, is a bad thing)

*supplemented information from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst ADVANCE program

Best Practices



- ✓ Agree on expectations upfront
- ✓ Set, follow, and only make necessary amendments to a group schedule
- ✓ Communicate professionally, formally, and frequently
- ✓ Take notes during meetings
- ✓ Have a set, central, and organized place for shared work
- ✓ Establish a consistent peer reviewing process, and follow through
- ✓ Address concerns, tensions & conflicts when they arise (and set group expectations for code of conduct before they do)
- ✓ Be willing to compromise, adjust, and evolve as necessary

Setting Group Expectations and Norms

Introduction, per Group Norms and Expectations Form:

The College Board Task 1 Team Project and Presentation requires students to exercise a key feature of research—working within a group setting for a shared, common outcome. Unlike many projects, that can be completed through pure task delineation, Task 1 must truly be a group effort. The project’s success lies in all members’ shared responsibility, accountability, and willingness to share and discuss findings. The best projects show recognition of the strengths of each member of the group, a willingness to fulfill necessary roles, and a healthy amount of compromise. Communication facilitates this kind of outcome, especially when all members are aware of the desires of the group as a whole. By establishing norms and expectations, members clearly communicate and thus can help each other to achieve goals with clear accountability.

[example courtesy of *Wilfrid Laurier University Library*]

Part 1—Establish Methods of Communication

Team Member	Phone Number	Email Address	Potential Availability Conflicts
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Part 2—Establishing Working Process

- Who will be responsible for organizing and maintaining team notes, written work, shared files, and materials? Where will they be stored and what will the process be for changing or adding materials?
 - Where and when will collaborative meetings happen (especially if/when they are necessary outside of class time)?
 - What are the expectations for group members who miss a meeting or a class period? Who will be responsible for catching group members “up to speed,” and what will that process look like? What will missing members need to accomplish, and in what time frame?
 - Add any other team-specific expectations or agreements.
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Part 3—Address Individual and Collective Roles and Responsibilities

- Doing a bit of metacognitive awareness: what are the strengths each member brings to the team effort?
 - What will be specifically expected of each team member in light of the assigned task?
 - Think about key roles in a collaborative enterprise—who will be the team leader/manager, the working editor, the compiler, etc., and how will the overall workload be fairly distributed?
 - Add any other team-specific expectations or agreements.
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Part 4—Consider Group Dynamics

- What are the group expectations for participation in the project? How will it be ensured that everyone participates fairly? What will the procedures be for members whose participation may be lacking?
 - How will this group be mainly interacting? What are the expected meeting dynamics? How should meetings begin and end? What are behavioral expectations during meetings?
 - What norms do all group members agree on in terms of work interaction? (e.g., commitments to deadlines, rules for editing group documents, communication issues, etc.)
 - How will this group resolve conflicts? What conflicts can be anticipated from the beginning?
 - Add any other team-specific expectations or agreements.
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