



Group Position Paper

When the class enrollment is too large to expect a written paper from every student, a group paper written by 2 to 4 students may be a viable alternative. The challenge is to avoid the 'divide and conquer' technique thus missing the intended collaboration component of the activity.

Appropriate Student Level: Any

Suggested Class Size: 3 – 60

Ease of Use Rating: Easy

Activity Description:

As the title implies, a group of students research and then express their opinions in a position paper on a controversial issue. The chosen topic should challenge and promote extensive discussion among group members. The topic research should be too complex for one person to easily or adequately complete and the answers should be complicated enough that students must discuss options and then agree on an answer, thus avoiding the 'divide and conquer' approach.

The advantage to a group position paper include fewer papers for the instructor to grade, collaboration among students that promotes greater understanding and more opportunity for extensive research. Since the instructor has fewer papers to grade, the scope of the final product can be more extensive than if it were to be completed by just one person.

There are a number of disadvantages to group writing as well. Completing a writing project with a number of other people can be frustrating, especially if there is a lack of focus or commitment from all group members. Equal distribution of the work is often an issue for group members, especially if the project has been devised to avoid the 'divide and conquer' approach. Finally, the writing process is different for everyone, compromise and patience is important in group writing assignments, this may require you to put some time aside for monitoring and problem-solving with groups. However, the benefits will far out-weigh the consequences by providing an authentic working environment for exchanging ideas.

If you decide to employ this learning strategy it will be important to anticipate the issues students may encounter, particularly if this is the first time they have participated in a group writing project.

References:

Budesheim, Thomas Lee (1999) "Consider the opposite: opening minds through in-class debates on course-related controversies" *Teaching of Psychology*, 26(2)

The Core Competencies are:

1. Writing, speaking and/or other forms of self-expression
2. Information gathering, such as the use of the library, computer/electronic resources, and experimentation or observation

3. Synthesis and analysis in problem solving and critical thinking, including, where appropriate, the application of reasoning and interpretive methods, and quantitative thinking
4. Collaborative learning and teamwork
5. Activities that promote and advance intercultural and/or international understanding
6. Activities that promote the understanding of issues pertaining to social behavior, scholarly conduct, and community responsibility
7. A significant alternative competency for active learning designed for and appropriate to a specific course