

## Group Exams

In Modeling Instruction, we conduct much of the class in small groups of three students which then participate in larger whole class discussions. As a result, the skill of working in groups to achieve some understanding is a prominent feature of the Modeling Instruction classes. In order to ensure that what we value in terms of grades reflects our practices in the classroom, we typically give two exams. The first exam is a fairly standard individual exam. The second is given in groups. The final is then given as individuals.

We feel that the combination of group and individual assessments reasonably represents the goals and values of the class and ensures that student feel both a sense of individual and group accountability.

Students are typically uncertain of the idea of a group exam at the beginning, but after considerable time in class working in groups, they generally feel like it is an acceptable practice, many even enjoy the group exam.

A group exam is not simply an individual exam given to a group, instead there are a number of management strategies and underpinnings which will help ensure a successful group exam.

Group Exam Parameters (all of which are announced in syllabus):

[Giving instructions 1](#), [Giving instructions 2](#), [Giving instructions the day of the exam.](#)

Instructor announces groups on day of exam

- Encourages students to study like an individual exam
- Each group receives two copies, but can hand in only one
- All group members receive the same grade
  - Students who are late are docked a proportional percentage of the exam score.
- You may not participate in group exam if you have not attended at least 80% of the class meetings.
  - They receive an individual exam of relatively similar difficulty
- In the case of cheating, if one member is caught cheating, we consider it that the whole group has cheated.
  - This typically strongly dissuades cheating, and you should feel free to include this or not, but we typically do.

Managing group exams: (These are clips of the instructor discussing the group exam in class and an introduction)

- Group exams are both shorter and harder than individual exams. Students need extra time to argue/process in group exam, typically we think a group exam is roughly 2/3 as long as an individual exam. Also, we want students to need their classmates, so making the questions harder encourages this.
- We assign new groups the day of the exam to prevent either despair or overreliance on their team mates.
- We assign groups in the following manner (assuming 30 students ~ 10 groups, you can adjust according to your needs):
  - Rank students according to overall percent in course & pair the top ten students with the bottom ten, i.e. highest grade with lowest grade, tenth best grade with tenth from the bottom. This tends to keep the overall grade of the groups similar.
  - Match the middle ten students into the existing groups considering the following heuristics.
    - Avoid groups with one woman
    - Think about how groups might positively work together.
    - Cram remaining students into groups.
- Dissuade a divide and conquer approach, this defeats the purpose of a group exam and generally leads to lower scores.
- Be willing to mediate heated disputes (this almost never happens, but will rarely, think about how to handle it ahead of time, we will allow them to submit two justified answers but never mention this.)
- We provide candy at the front to encourage students to come to the front of the class and ask questions. It is an easy thing to do and it sets a good mood.

Underpinnings:

- **No curves are used in grading throughout the course.** If a student's grade is dependent on other student grades, it is not in their best interest to help other students. The group exam is designed to promote positive interdependence, so that students are encouraged to help each other learn, as they may end up as teammates on the group exam.