How to Give in-class Group Work
Todd Young

Motivation:
• Group work is an accepted part of lower division mathematics instruction.
• Many studies have shown that small group learning is effective in college mathematics classes.¹
• Encouraging cooperation among students is cited as one of the seven principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education²

Preparing to Give Group Work

• Announce the existence and weighting of Group Work in your First Day Handout and during class. Explain to the class the procedures and rules you will use.
• Have and announce a plan for dealing with absences. Two options are allowing them to make it up and allowing a fixed number of drops.
• Let the students know when group work will occur at least a class period beforehand.
• I suggest planning to do group work about once per week. Doing it on Fridays works well with the material and boosts attendance on that day. I use an entire class period each week for group work. Using a portion of a class period can also work.
• Choose about 3 challenging problems from the past week’s material.
• It is good to strategically select problems will deepen the student’s understanding of the most important topics.

Administering Group Work:
• At the beginning of class have the students form a group of 3 or 4. (This is important.)
• Some instructors assign groups randomly, others allow the groups to self-form. I allow them to self-organize, but encourage changing groups from week to week.
• Discourage the students from working on the problems as individuals.
• Give the groups help on the assignment as requested. I will answer almost any question other than “work the problem for us”.
• Have each group turn in a single paper, with each of their names on it.
• Tell them that if they disagree with their group, they can turn in a separate paper.
• Grade the papers and record the grades.
• Return the papers to the students promptly.
• Students with excused absences must be given a chance to make-up the group work. I generally let everyone make it up, regardless of the excuse.