

Students learn more when they learn together. Used at the beginning of a course, this skill station builds group identity by asking students to talk about themselves and share their academic goals.

Forming Groups



Fill out your nametag using the template below. Share what you wrote with your group members. Quiz each other until you can recall your names, majors, and interests without help from the nametags.

Hometown Favorite Place	Major
Name in big letters	
Favorite Pastime	Academic Goal for the Semester

After this introduction, discuss your academic goals for the semester. How can participation in this group help everyone achieve their goals?

Forming Groups Teaching Notes



Approximate Time Required

Skill Station and Discussion: 15-20 minutes

Group Processing: not applicable

Materials

3" x 5" note cards

Safety pins

Manila folders (optional)

Colored pencils/markers

- A. **Explain the Need:** This activity helps students learn about each other while building group camaraderie. Name tags ease embarrassment about forgetting names - for the instructor *and* the students. This icebreaker exercise is best used early in the course to establish long-term groups and set an interactive, caring, and inclusive tone for the classroom.
- B. **Define and Model:** Model this activity by making a name tag for yourself and sharing it with the class. By sharing *your* favorite place, etc. as you describe the task, you introduce yourself and your goals for the course. Modeling also helps ease student concerns about looking “dorky” since you will all look dorky together. Just remind them to take their tags off at the end of class, or they really will look dorky.
1. Research shows that instructor-assigned groups perform better than student-selected groups. To assign groups, collect student information during class or ask students to bring in a completed data form (see below). There are several ways to assign students to groups with the goal of maximizing diversity. Issues to consider:
 - *Group size.* Groups should be small (2-4 students). Groups of more than four are too big for equal participation. Groups of four can also split into two smaller groups of two, speeding discussion and ensuring participation.
 - *Gender.* Gender-balanced groups and same gender groups work well. Unbalanced groups can feel hostile to the outnumbered gender.
 - *Educational Background.* Balance academic performance. Mix students with different years, majors, GPAs.
 - *Hometown.* Students from different hometowns won’t know each other and may offer different perspectives, especially if they are from rural vs. metropolitan backgrounds.
 - *Roommates.* Avoid putting roommates or friends together in the same group.

2. Students generally enjoy this exercise. They learn about each other while building group identity. You may want to draw a tag on the board, ask students to respond individually then share between each nametag item. To ensure participation, visit each group or quiz students about their group members.

Extensions:

- a. Group Names: Let groups be creative in coming up with a group name. This helps build group cohesiveness while simplifying classroom management. Have groups use their group name when turning in assignments.
 - b. Group Folders: Some instructors use folders to organize assignments. Distribute folders and ask students to decorate them with their group name. Make sure they also include their full names, then use the folder to collect assignments and distribute course materials.
 - c. Personality traits: Feel free to modify the suggested nametag items. Include favorite food, music, or study location. Ask students to share personality traits that will help the group succeed such as organization, honesty, humor, thoughtfulness.
- C. **Practice**: Ask students to prepare an introduction for each group member to share with the class (name and major) without name tags. Practice came during the time spend learning about each other.
- D. **Evaluate**: Randomly select students to introduce their group to the class.
- E. **Feedback/Reflection**: Have the students write down their academic goals for the semester. Ask, “How will your group help everyone achieve their goals?”

Student Data Form

Name _____ Year in school _____

What other math or science classes have you taken? _____

Do you have any special needs to help make my teaching more effective? How so?

Personal Information (optional):

What part of the state are you from (Hometown)? _____

How old are you? _____ Where do you live now? _____

What is your GPA? _____

What do you like to do when you are not studying?