

How to Conduct Student Team Exercises (STEs)

Office of Educational Development

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Course directors and faculty may use Student Team Exercises (STEs) as an alternative to standard faculty-developed lectures and exams.

What are Student Team Exercises (STEs)?

Student Team Exercises are faculty-developed small group (2-15 members) activities in which students use course content to complete a graded team task such as a case or problem set. The primary purpose of an STE is to teach course content while encouraging students to hone their analytical and communication skills. Students receive three scores as part of their participation in the Student Team Exercise: a score on a short pre-exercise online Readiness Exam, a score for the performance of their team as a whole on the group task (as recorded on the Team Task Report), and a score from their fellow team members for their contribution to accomplishing the assigned task (as reported on the STE Peer Evaluation Form).

What's so good about Student Team Exercises?

Student Team Exercises involve students in teaching one another course content and applying the content in solving realistic problems. They motivate students to read and organize assigned course materials in preparation for a public discussion based on their knowledge. They require students to apply communication and problem-solving skills among their peers.

Student Team Exercises prime students for subsequent course lectures and assignments. Students arrive better prepared, ask more profound questions, and “get it” more quickly. This allows instructors to lecture on more advanced concepts and make more subtle distinctions.

How do instructors develop Student Team Exercises?

During course and syllabus planning

- Review course learning objectives, and create a team task that relates to specific course learning objectives not covered by other lectures or exercises. The task may be a case, set of problems, standardized patient, or action plan. Determine the number of students in each team based on the task (2-15, but 5-8 is optimal). Considering the team's task, determine those responses that would represent excellence on the task, and then determine those responses that represent failure. Use this information to create a student team exercise scoring matrix. HINT: Instructors may find it easy to identify seven sets of student responses that scale from failure to excellence, and score these as 1 to 7.
- Determine the readings, lectures, or other exercises that students must complete to acquire the content knowledge needed to actively participate in the team task, and present them to students as required readings for the Student Team Exercise in the course syllabus.

- Using the content found in the reading assignment, develop a short (10- to 20-item) multiple choice Readiness Exam that students must complete prior to participating in the Student Team Exercise. This Readiness Exam helps ensure that students have enough content knowledge to contribute to their team task. The Readiness Exam will be administered as an online, take-home exam that students must complete prior to the beginning of the Student Team Exercise.
- Have a colleague review the learning objectives, assigned readings, Readiness Exam, team task, Team Task Report, and scoring matrix associated with the Student Team Exercise for pertinence, clarity, and fairness, and offer suggestions.
- Schedule the Student Team Exercise and associated online Readiness Exam, and determine the weight given to the Student Team Exercise in calculating the course grade. For students to prepare for and take the Student Team Exercises seriously, they **must** be scored and counted in the course grade.
- Students' STE score (0-100) may be calculated as the sum of their weighted Readiness Exam, Team Task Report, and Peer Evaluation scores. For example, if an instructor weights the Readiness Exam, the Team Task Report, and Peer Evaluation as 30%, 50%, and 20%, respectively, and a student scores 90, 70, and 90, respectively, on these exams, the student's STE score will be $(.3 \times 90) + (.5 \times 70) + (.2 \times 90) = 80$.

At the first course meeting

- Notify students as early as possible—in the course syllabus is preferable—about the Student Team Exercise. Describe the STE-related learning objectives and readings. Describe the online Readiness Exam (take-home), including number of multiple choice items, and the weight given to the Readiness Exam scores, Team Task Report scores, and Peer Evaluation scores in calculating the STE overall score. Tell students what percentage of their overall course grade will be determined by STEs. Discuss with students the OED handout “How Students Should Evaluate their Peers in Student Team Exercises.”

Two weeks prior to the date of each Student Team Exercise

- Send an email to Chris Osmond (osmond@med.unc.edu) in the Office of Educational Development (OED) indicating your intent to conduct a Student Team Exercise. In your email, specify:

The course name and number

The email and phone number of the contact person for Student Team Exercises

The scheduled date and room(s) in which the exercise will take place

The desired team size: 2 to 15 (5 to 8 is optimal)

OED staff members will contact the designated contact person to arrange to support the exercise. OED's support will consist of:

- Preparation and scoring of the 10- to 20-item online Readiness Exam that students will complete (as a take-home) the evening prior to the date of the exercise.

- Production of an Excel spreadsheet with students assigned to teams of the size specified. Students are assigned to teams so as to maximize gender, race, and ability diversity within teams. These spreadsheets, which will include students' PIDs (which are public) and assigned teams, will be sent to the course STE contact person as an email attachment.
- Production of bubble-in STE Peer Evaluation Forms on which student team members evaluate the contribution and participation of their fellow group members. (See the sample.) Team members' names will be pre-printed on the STE Peer Evaluation Forms to enable them to complete the forms quickly. An MSTL staff member will deliver the STE Peer Evaluation Forms and No. 2 pencils needed for completion to the STE contact person prior to the exercise. An MSTL staff member will pick up completed STE Peer Evaluation Forms and return them to OED for scoring.

Day of the Student Team Exercise

- Give students information sheets needed for the STE, copies of the assigned team task and the Team Task Report, STE Peer Evaluation Forms, and sharpened No. 2 pencils. As STE Peer Evaluation Forms are customized for each student, check to be sure that each student has her or his own Peer Evaluation Form.
- Introduce other faculty or staff who may serve as resources for students during the Student Team Exercise. Announce to students that these consultants will not solve problems or make decisions for team members. Remind teams that they should select a spokesperson who may be asked to report on the team's findings or solutions. If the teams are allowed to go to the Health Science Library or use resources at other sites, remind them of the time to reconvene with the whole class. Finally, remind students that they have a professional obligation to evaluate their peers honestly during the STE, using the STE Peer Evaluation Forms.
- Immediately after the STE has ended and prior to any discussion, have each team's spokesperson turn in the Team Task Report that will be used to grade the team. Be sure that the team has properly completed the Team Task Report sheet and indicated the group number. (The instructor may elect to give students a brief period to review the Team Task Reports before beginning the post-STE discussion.)
- If desired, ask for oral reports from STE spokespersons, or pose questions to teams based on the assigned tasks. However, be sure that you lecture enough on the content to cover the stated learning objectives of the STE. Students want to know the "best" answer and "why." Use the answer to teach course content and the reasoning that students should use in applying that content.
- Remind students to check that their STE Peer Evaluation Forms have been fully marked, and have them turn in their forms and pencils. Ensure that an MSTL staff member picks up the completed Peer Evaluation Forms to be returned to OED for scoring.

Within one week (five class days) after the Student Team Exercise

- Instructors will receive Readiness Exam feedback. OED will email the STE contact the STE Peer Evaluation scores in an Excel format.

Peer Group Activity Pearls

These Pearls are drawn in large part from the literature of Team Based Learning. For a deeper understanding of the rationale for the following pearls, please visit these websites:

www.ou.edu/idp/teamlearning/, www.bcm.tmc.edu/fac-ed/team_learning/index.html,
www.med.wright.edu/aa/facdev/TBL/index.html, www.tlcollaborative.org

- Require task-related readings before the group session.
- Take time to develop a rigorous Readiness Exam.
- Develop a team task that requires knowledge of assigned reading and application of that knowledge to a realistic problem with significant outcomes for “real” people.
- Use team tasks that teach course content or skills related directly to stated course learning outcomes, not unstated “feel good” communication/relationship activities.
- Require the team to make decisions and be ready to defend them.
- Indicate that the students’ group decisions on the task will be made known to, and may be challenged by, other groups in class, and that group decisions will count as part of the course grade.
- Treat peer evaluation as a serious matter, and remind students that honest peer assessment is a professional responsibility and a service to patients.
- Make STEs count in the students’ course grade.