

Creating Group Ground Rules



See this lesson in action on pages 162, 189, 217.

→ **TIP:** You obviously must review the consequences for appropriateness. If kids propose paddling miscreants, not OK. But if one group wants to keep laggards out until they catch up, while another wants to put them to work as a recorder, both are defensible and potentially constructive solutions. For primary kids, we'd do this lesson as a whole class, rather than asking groups to develop separate ground rules.

WHEN and WHY: Use this lesson when a new group is just forming for an inquiry project.

INITIATE: "We have already made a list of things that make meetings and discussions more effective and more fun. Now you are launching into different inquiry projects with your own groups, so you may need some special guidelines just for your particular team. You'll be doing more than just discussing: you'll be researching, interviewing people, doing experiments or surveys, and creating writing or charts, videos, artifacts, or performances. That's a lot of work! So it's a good idea to talk now about how you will work together and solve any problems that arise, before you begin your projects."

TEACH/MODEL: "Get into your groups and brainstorm for a few minutes. What would be some important rules to have as your team works together?"

Allow five or six minutes for kids to talk. Regather the class and list suggestions on a chart as kids volunteer. Expect to hear comments like these:

- Show up prepared, having done your work
- Do what you promise
- Bring all materials
- Join in the discussions and work time
- Help other people in the group

Comment on the entries, letting kids know which ones sound useful and enforceable. There will probably be overlaps with the discussion skills chart already developed, existing classroom practices, or your classroom constitution, if you have one. Work for a long list, maybe eight to twelve items.

"Now you have two jobs. First, you need to decide what rules you want to adopt; some may be from this list and others may be just for your group. You don't want tons of rules—maybe just three or four important guidelines for your project. When you have decided, write them down on the Ground Rules form I've given you. (See the website for this form.)

"Finally, you have to decide what would be appropriate action if a member isn't following a particular guideline. How do you get someone to change their behavior? What will you ask people to change if they aren't contributing what the group needs?"

"I will come around and help you while you work on your guidelines and action steps. Each group can have its own rules, but I have to approve them for you, so be sure to hand me the completed form when you are done."