KEYS TO SUCCESS with TEAM-BASED LEARNING

If a teacher can learn how to do each of the following 7 tasks well, they can use team-based learning effectively.

A. Beginning of the Course

1. Forming the groups
   - Ideal size: 5-7 members
   - Once formed, groups are permanent for the rest of the course.
   - Form the groups in a public and visible way, e.g., have students stand up and count off.
     - Do this in a way that distributes various subject-relevant knowledge and experiences that students have.
     - Do NOT use students’ grade point average.

2. Getting students comfortable talking to each other and the teacher
   - In the first class session, have some activities that engage students in talking to each other and to the teacher. They need to know from the very beginning that this is the way this course will operate – and to get comfortable doing so.

3. Setting up the course grading system
   - The course grading system should have three components:
     - A set of INDIVIDUALLY graded tasks
     - A set of GROUP graded tasks
     - PEER EVALUATION: Some way for each group to evaluate the performance of each individual in the group, and for this assessment to be factored into the course grade for each student.
   - The relative weight for each of these three components (or their sub-components) can be determined by the teacher or by the class. The “Grade Weight Setting Exercise” is an effective way for the class to do this.
     - Graded group work can vary in its relative weight, but the quality of the group work needs to “matter.” Therefore this portion of the total course grade should be worth at least 20-40% of the total course grade.
B. During the Course

1. Use application exercises that are good for groups.
   - These can be either graded or un-graded exercises. Either way, however, it is essential that the groups learn how good their answers were (or were not).
   - These exercises should be constructed so that:
     1. The tasks are meaningful and related to the ultimate learning goals.
     2. Successful performance by the groups will require them to engage in a high level of INTRA-group dialogue.
     3. Group answers/responses can be displayed easily and quickly.
     4. The principle of the “4 S’s” should be followed here. The application exercises should be:
        - Significant – The task given to the groups should be challenging and perceived by students as authentic and important.
        - Same Question or Problem – All groups should work on the same question or problem. This way they will be ready and willing to challenge the answers of other groups.
        - Specific Choice – The task should call for each team to make a specific choice that requires using ideas concepts and/or tools from the course. This prompts in-depth discussion, both within groups and between groups.
        - Simultaneous Report-Out – All groups report or share their answers at the same time, in a visible way. This makes each group accountable for its own answers.
     5. Having groups write a term paper is NOT a good group assignment. Generally this does not promote a high level of intra-group discussion.

2. Provide feedback that helps the groups and individuals learn.
   - The feedback on the application exercises should be: frequent and immediate.
   - The feedback should come in a form that allows the individuals and students to see what was good about their response and what could have been better. Usually this can be accomplished by allowing them to compare their response with the responses of other groups, as well as occasionally getting an assessment from the teacher.
C. End of the Course

1. Culminating project

- The culminating project for a 2-3 week unit (or for the whole course) should be something that integrates as much of the course content as possible.
- Hence it should be a complex, challenging task yet focused enough that the teams can outline their answer on a sheet of paper that can be posted on the wall and read by other groups.
- This will generally be a graded project. So the teacher needs to know how to distinguish between a “poor”, “mediocre”, and “excellent” response. Sometimes a valuable learning activity is to have the class develop the assessment criteria before they start working on the project.

2. Peer evaluation

- At the end of the course, each student needs to complete an evaluation of the other members of their team. This evaluation needs to be set up in a way that the teacher can put a “peer evaluation score” for each student into that student’s course grade.
- The criteria for the peer evaluation can be provided by the teacher, or generated by the class or by each team.
- The evaluation should have a numerical component accompanied by a brief narrative statement for each student.
- Some teachers find it valuable to do a peer evaluation in the middle of the course. The results are provided back to students but they are not recorded in the grade book.

Note: There are three kinds of resources for learning how to do each of these tasks.


2. **Website:** www.teambasedlearning.org  This has multiple, valuable resources: handouts, videos, information on conferences, etc.

3. **TBL Listserv:** Anyone can sign up for this listserv from the TBL website. It currently has over 200 people, 20% of whom live outside the US. It has a very active dialogue of people posing questions and many others responding.